

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARY LOU NORTON BUSCH

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

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REDONDO BEACH, CALIFORNIA

AUGUST 17, 2007

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mary Lou Norton Busch on August 17, 2007, in Redondo Beach, California, with Shaun Illingworth ...

Matthew Lawrence: ... Matt Lawrence ...

Jessica Thomson Illingworth: ... Jessica Thomson Illingworth.

SI: This interview is made possible in part by a grant from the Rutgers Alumni Association. Thank you very much for having us here today.

Mary Lou Norton Busch: Okay, I'm glad you're here. It's fun.

SI: To begin, could you tell us when and where you were born?

MB: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on September the 27th, 1923. I'm going to be eighty-four this year and I can't believe it. [laughter]

SI: Congratulations. Can you tell us about your parents, beginning with their names?

MB: My dad was Fell Van Winkle Norton, a name which he hated, because nobody could get it right. He was from Missouri. He had a very interesting life, because his parents divorced when he was very young and he was sort of passed around from pillar-to-post and lived with all kinds of people, to grow up. ... My mother was from Beardstown, Illinois, and her father died when she was nine and left five children to be raised on nothing. ... My folks met in a hotel. ... My mother was a traveling bookkeeper around Southern Illinois and my dad worked for a railroad and they met in a dining room of a hotel, and I said, for being a traveling woman, ... they were married, in 1922, so, before that, [it] was rather unusual. It was also unusual that my dad's parents were divorced. ...

SI: Did he ever have a relationship with his parents?

MB: Well, his dad was a railroad engineer and he died when my dad was fairly young. He married again and my dad had a stepsister and, oh, he lived with his father part of the time, but it was difficult, because the man traveled all the time. ... Right up until his mother died, he was in touch with her all the time. ... I didn't grow up with relatives, because we lived in New Jersey, mostly. We moved there when I was six and ... all my relatives lived in the Midwest and, in [Great] Depression days and before things, you didn't travel. So, I saw my grandmothers maybe three or four times in my whole life, and I had an aunt in Philadelphia, but that was it. So, I grew up without relatives around, without extended family.

SI: Did your mother ever tell you any stories about her life on the road as a traveling bookkeeper?

MB: Some, but not enough. [laughter] That's one reason I wrote my memoirs, because, ... when my mother died, there's nobody to ask. I had a sister and a brother and their life might as well have been in a different family, because I was the oldest and left home early. ... What I

remember, I have a few pieces of paper here and there, I've done a little research on it, but no real genealogy. ... So, I know a few stories, but not enough, and that's why I wrote that, [the memoir]. [laughter]

Jl: Do you know why she started working?

MB: She had to. They had no money. I mean, ... she was the oldest and she was nine [when her father died]. Her brother ... quit school in eighth grade, but Mother finished high school, never a question of further education. Her boss wanted her to become a CPA [certified public accountant], but she didn't. She got married, eventually, when she was twenty-eight, and she was a traditional housewife, homemaker.

SI: Did she work for one company?

MB: She worked for CIPS, Central Illinois Public Service, and she went from office to office, [she was] head of the bookkeepers for the offices. ...

SI: What did your father do for the railroad?

MB: He had something to do with real estate. I don't know what, but he traveled. After they were married, they lived in apartment hotels. We lived in six places until I was about a year-and-a-half old, and then, I don't know whether he went to work for Sinclair Oil [right away]. Well, he retired when they got married, in 1922. They bought an orange grove in Florida and moved to Florida. I'd love to have [known] what that trip was like. They drove from Illinois, or Missouri, to Florida and, in those days, there were practically no roads. There's no motels. I heard a couple of little tales about getting kind of lost, going cross-country on lanes, but I don't know. I'd love to know that story. I don't know it. It's gone.

SI: They were in Florida early in their marriage, before you were born.

MB: ... Yes, until Mother got pregnant with me. They were down there a little over a year, I guess. ... He was in partnership with a friend that he grew up with in St. Louis and I think they found out two families could not be supported by an orange grove. So, he had to get a job, [laughter] and they lived in Tulsa ... from 1924 until 1929. We moved to ... Englewood, New Jersey, in 1929, and they moved because my dad's mother, and his sister and her husband [had] moved in with them and she was not a nice person and she criticized [my mother]. My mother about ended up with a nervous breakdown, and so, my dad got transferred to New York City. ... During the Depression, we moved from house to house to house, constantly, and my dad never lost his job, but he took a big cut in pay. So, we were always poor. Actually, when I went to NJC [New Jersey College for Women, now known as Douglass Residential College], after I got out of high school, I went on full scholarship. ... I was eligible for that, because my dad didn't make enough money to [pay for it]. I never even considered college. My parents, I don't know why, but ... I've often wondered, they had no particular emphasis on education. I've known a lot of other people, particularly black people, who have [that driving force]. Their parents just [emphasized] that was the big thing, to go to college. My husband's father went to eighth grade and his mother quit school before she finished high school. His parents really wanted him to

finish college, to go to college, ... which he did, finally. ... I went because I had a counselor in high school who said, "A brain is too good to waste," and I ... had the highest grade point average in my class and all I was going to do was get married, have kids, didn't know any better, [laughter] until I went to NJC.

SI: Okay. What do you remember about growing up in Englewood? What was your neighborhood like, for example?

MB: It was a middle-class, bedroom community. The town was ... interesting, because there was "the Hill" section, which were all the wealthy people; there was what they called "Colored Town," which was south of Palisade Avenue, where the maids and service people lived, and then, the other side of the tracks, where all the rest of us lived. [laughter] ... I had one black person in my school, elementary school. In junior high and high school, ... oh, in junior high, I think we were forty percent black. ... Mostly, people in my neighborhood were blue-collar or low-paid white-collar. I realized, after I was grown, that my dad was just a clerk. He didn't really have ... much of a job at all, and I had one friend who I felt was wealthy. Her father was either in the banking or insurance business, I don't know what, in Newark, [New Jersey]. ...

SI: How did all the groups get along?

MB: Fine. Well, yes, I mean, they were separated. You didn't [mingle]. ... My book tells all about my growing up. [laughter] The girls on "the Hill" all went to ... private school. There's "the Lower Hill," where the doctors and dentists and professional ... families lived, and their sons, a lot of them, went to public school. ... I happened to go with some of ... those fellows, doctors' and dentists' sons, and they were included in "the Hill" section because they needed boys for their girls to dance with at the cotillion, and so, ... I had the experience of mixing, slightly, with that group of people, but, generally speaking, we were pretty well separated. ... The thing I remember about growing up is, we were constantly looking for a cheaper place to live. We moved regularly, but we kids all wanted to stay in the same school district, so, we'd have a fit when they'd go looking in another town. [laughter] ... Except for fourth grade, I stayed in Englewood, in the same school district, and I still correspond with a couple of the people from my school, ... one woman who lives in Falmouth, Massachusetts, who I went from kindergarten, or first grade, when I went to school, through high school with and have kept in touch with ever since; then, one fellow that lives in Maryland that I write to all the time, and he was not there all the time. ... We met at a reunion and we correspond. ... There's another fellow, who was from Oradell, who went to our high school and was a friend of my husband's, and he's in Colorado Springs and we correspond.

Jl: Did your parents rent or own?

MB: We rented until 1938. They finally bought a house and my mother lived there until she was quite old and went into a retirement home.

SI: What do you remember about your social life as a youngster? Did you have friends in the neighborhood? Did your social life center around the church?

MB: ... No, all around school. They were all from school. ... Oh, we all ran together. The girls chased the boys, and we played tennis and ... ping-pong and all that kind of stuff. ... We went on dates in groups and, yet, if you singled out and went with one fellow in high school, you were going steady and nobody'd ask you out. ... I've thought about it recently; I've always had lots of friends. I always was very, I felt like I was very poor, and very deprived, and not as good as anybody else, ... practically my whole life. That's [over]; I'm not doing that any more. But, I was always on the outside, on the fringes of the in-crowd, ... but I really was involved. We had lots of stuff going on all the time. I mean, I look back and it looks good. At the time, it didn't seem so good, [laughter] and I always had dates for dances. We had dances at school all the time, and that kind of thing, and we had parties. There's a picture of one of the parties in my book, that kind of thing.

SI: Could you read the title of your book, just for the record?

MB: The title, *Reflections On My Life: Where I Came From and How I Became the Person I Am Today*, and there are lots of essays in here about how I became a liberal and ... what I think of corporations and all that kind of [thing], what I think of marriage and all that kind of stuff.

SI: Good.

MB: Let's see, high school. [Editor's Note: Ms. Busch skims through the book.] All right, I'm sure it's here, "Boys and Dates and Growing Up." That's my husband. There, that's a party at my house. ... It was a little kid's party. There is a picture of the Honor Society in our yearbook, but I couldn't copy it. At that Honor Society party, I decided I was going to marry Bill, because I thought I had finally found somebody that I thought was smarter than I was [laughter] and that I couldn't wiggle around my little finger. ... I have a picture upstairs that was [from] high school, informal picture, and he wrote, "'Til '45, and, from then on, I'm yours," and we never intended, ever, to get married until we got out of college. ... The war threw the world upside down, absolutely upside down, and so, we got married after my third year in college and went, moved, well, that's How it happened; tell you about that later.

SI: You met your husband in high school, or earlier.

MB: Yes, we dated from, I broke my date I had for the senior prom, so [that] I could go with him. [laughter]

JJ: How did you meet?

MB: ... Well, we knew each other. We were in the same class. I mean, you know, we knew each other, but I never [dated him]. My best friend and his best friend went together and they later got married, and Bill and I started dating about a month or two before graduation and dated from then [on] and got married ... three years later, during the war. ... He finished school at Purdue and I finished school when I was almost fifty-nine, got my degree.

SI: Could you say your husband's name for the record?

MB: He was George William Busch, George W. Busch, but he went by Bill, [laughter] and I've had a very hard time with that name all my life.

SI: Okay. Going back to your early years, since, later on, your church work would become important in your life ...

MB: Yes. ... Well, I always went to Sunday school.

SI: Okay.

MB: ... My dad didn't go to church. My mother grew up very active in her church, all her years, but, when they were married, she would not leave my dad, on Sunday morning, to go to church. ... He didn't go, so, she didn't go, but we kids had to go to Sunday school, ... unless we were sick, and, if we were sick, we stayed in bed all day. But, when I went to Douglass, I sort of fell away. I mean, I went. I had a Catholic roommate and we used to go to her Mass at six AM, so [that] we could get breakfast, because they locked the ... dining room after seven-thirty, and you didn't get up to go to breakfast. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

MB: Where were we?

SI: We were talking about ...

MB: Oh, church. I did attend, occasionally. Bill did not. ... He joined the church and was baptized ... before we got married, but we didn't go to church until after we had our child. [When] our daughter was about three. ... I started going to church with her. Bill would join, but he didn't [get active], and that's a long story, how he got [active], but he, eventually, got very [active]. He followed his money into the church. He was convinced to pledge and he decided, if he was going to give his money, he needed to know where it was going. So, he became a Christian after he gave his money, which is backwards, [laughter] but we were always involved. I mean, that was the basis of our [social network]. It was where we put our feet when we moved. Bill and I moved frequently. He was in sales with American Cyanamid and, from the time we were married, when we came home from our honeymoon he was transferred from Columbia University to Decatur, Illinois. So, we started right away and moved many places, and we didn't have any family with us, so, we made friends in church, usually.

JJ: What was the name of the church you went to growing up?

MB: Presbyterian. I've been Presbyterian all my life, and still am, not very devoted to that. I'm devoted to my church downtown [in Los Angeles]. I don't think you want to know that. It's a long story. [laughter] I got very discouraged.

JJ: We can wait until we get there.

MB: Yes.

SI: Let us talk a little bit about your early education.

MB: Okay.

SI: Where did you go to school?

MB: Englewood.

SI: Englewood ...

MB: Elementary school, Cleveland School, and junior high, which was one school for the whole town, and Dwight Morrow High School. I graduated from Dwight Morrow in 1941.

SI: What did you think of your high school in general?

MB: Oh, I loved it, yes.

SI: You thought the classes were good.

MB: Oh, yes, great school, great school.

SI: Did you develop a particular interest in one subject or area?

MB: [laughter] Not particularly. When I got to NJC, you had to declare a major. ... You go in the door and they say, "What's your major?" I said, "I don't know," but ... I decided, "Well, let's do chemistry." I had played with a chemistry set with a friend and I loved that. So, I thought, "Well, we'll major in chemistry." So, I did, and there was chemistry and physics and math, and I was going to go get ... honors in chemistry, and my schedule for my senior year was all of the final, big courses in all three, ... besides an honors project. ... As I look back on it, if I'd gone back, after we were married; ... I intended to go back to school. We had an apartment in the Bronx. Bill was stationed at Columbia University, working on the [Manhattan] Project, and I intended to go to school from Monday to Friday [laughter] and be a wife on the weekend. ... I never would have made it. I doubt that I would have. I don't think, probably, the marriage would have lasted if I had. ... The war intervened, and so, got an entirely different route.

SI: Do you think the teachers, and the system in Englewood, were supportive of women's education?

MB: Well, I had an advisor, Mrs. Smith, who [was an] interesting person. She was married to a World War I veteran who had been gassed, and so, he was incapacitated, couldn't work, and ... she worked all her life. She was the first person I met that worked. I mean, none of my friends' mothers worked. They were all traditional families. None of my ... friends' parents were divorced. One fellow, or two fellows, I knew, ... one was divorced or dead, but the other one was divorced, and they were all two-parent families, all [wherein the] mother stayed home and kept house. That's all I was ever exposed to, until I went, but Mrs. Smith was my Latin teacher,

and she just called me in and said, "You've got to go to school," and she made me apply, and I had no intention, ever, because my folks had no money. ... You didn't borrow money to go to school in those days, and so, my scholarship was 675 dollars a year, [laughter] and it seems ridiculous now.

Jl: What did your parents think of your going on to college?

MB: Oh, that was fine, as long as they didn't have to pay. They didn't have any money to send me. I mean, you know, it was never [a consideration]. As I say, education was not, and women working was not, a priority in my family. My best friend ... went to secretarial school, Katherine Gibbs, I guess, in New York, and the rest of them, my other two best friends, went to college, but they went to fancier schools than I did.

SI: Nothing wrong with Rutgers and NJC. [laughter]

MB: ... No, actually, ... I'll have to say, when I first went, I wasn't terribly happy, because I *had* to go there. ... I had no choice, ... but, after I was there a very short time, I just [was glad]. I think Douglass; I'm just very upset at what's been happening to the school, and I'm anxious to see what happens with it, but I think Douglass is just, or NJC is just, super-duper-duper. [Editor's Note: Ms. Busch is referring to the reorganization of the Rutgers-New Brunswick undergraduate colleges, in which Rutgers, Douglass, University and Livingston Colleges were merged into the School of Arts and Sciences in 2007.] I would not [say otherwise], and I think women's colleges are definitely the thing, the way to go. ... My whole life was influenced by college, ... when I went the first time, and then, when I went back, in 1980, I majored in sociology and became a strong feminist, not that I wasn't fairly, although; ... no, I wasn't a feminist before, ... but it has a lot to do with my political leanings, etc., etc.

SI: You listed your parents as "mostly Republican" on this survey.

MB: I think so. ... There was never much political talk in my family. It was not something that we talked about. I don't remember any intellectual talk in my family. My sister barely made it through high school. My brother went to college in West Virginia. ... He's ten years younger than I and, by the time he was grown, it was just understood [that] he'd go to college, and he did. He became an electrical engineer, but my sister worked in an office as a key punch operator ... until she got married, then, never worked anymore.

SI: Did your family ever discuss what they thought of FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] and his New Deal?

MB: No. ... I really couldn't tell you. I know I was for him. ... That was the way we were going to go and I don't know whether it was due to professors at college; I think probably. ... I've always been a Democrat although, I was always a required Republican. I'm still a registered Republican. My husband and I cancelled votes for our whole lives. [laughter]

SI: What about what was going on in the larger world, such as what was happening in Europe? Was that ever discussed?

MB: Well, the war was going on in Europe. ... Particularly, I knew about it because we had neighbors, who my mother met on a Red Cross thing, collecting money, and they became quite close friends. My family was very hospitable to anybody that they met. They had no prejudices as far as that went, and these were Jewish people from Austria, I believe, that had had to leave with nothing, from Europe. ... Mr. Tuschak had been in a detention camp of some kind, but they got out in about 1939, I think, roughly, and we got to know them and their family, all the extended family that came. So, we really knew, somewhat, what was going on in Europe. We saw the newsreels. We read the news. My dad always read the newspaper. We knew what was going on, but it didn't affect us, particularly. I did write a piece on comparing Pearl Harbor [the December 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor] with 9/11 [the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon], and there's no comparison, absolutely no comparison. The situation, we knew that Japan and Germany were out to conquer the world, or that's what we felt; they were. ... [I] have never changed my mind on that, and that we had to stop them. ... The whole world became upside down. ... I mean, you've probably heard these stories, but you couldn't get any [goods]. They stopped manufacturing consumer goods. It all went to the war effort and, I mean, you couldn't even get clothes. You had not the choice of clothes. When Bill and I got married, we couldn't get any stuff for the house, sheets, towels. ... Everybody gave us things from their house when we got married, because there just wasn't any goods. ... There was no gasoline. We were rationed on gas. The fellows all went off to war. At school, there were no boys around to date. ... My roommate and I went and worked at Johnson & Johnson one day a week, in the evening, from three to eleven, sorting bandages or packing bandages, or something, for sterilization, but we took courses. I took auto mechanics and meteorology. Everything was geared toward war, the whole thing, and I would never have thought of getting married before I finished college, ever. It would never have even occurred to us, but you kind of felt like you didn't know what was going to happen in the world. The world might come to an end, as far as you know. [laughter] ... It was very [uncertain], and, now, there's a war going on [in Iraq and Afghanistan], but what does it affect? It's not personally affecting most people at all. I mean, you can buy anything you want and gas is expensive, but you can get it, and there's no draft. I mean, all the fellows knew they were going to be drafted. My husband joined up, because, ... well, he was going to flunk out of school. He'd gone to so many parties, [laughter] just seeing the fellows go off, that he wasn't doing too well, but, anyway, it was a whole different world. Something that I really have to say, I don't know what all of this project is; I read the *History Alive* thing. [Editor's Note: *History Alive* is the Rutgers Living History Society's quarterly newsletter. The RLHS is an honor society comprised largely of the men and women interviewed by the Rutgers Oral History Archives.] It seems to me, from ... all the stuff they're putting on television and everything else, [it] is all about the military and war. There's nothing [else]. ... I was a sociology major, when I finally finished up, and I'm interested in what happened to families and women and everything. Our lives were upset, extremely, and nobody writes about that.

SI: That is part of what this program is trying to do, record people discussing the impact of the war on their lives and putting it, in their own words, online.

MB: Yes, I hope so. Yes, I hope so, because, staying home, right now, what's going on with the Iraq War, the families are suffering terribly, of the military. I have a couple of friends who have grandchildren in the war and I hear what goes on, but, okay; [laughter] I go on and on.

SI: I can explain more about the program after the recording.

MB: Yes, okay.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about coming to NJC for the first time, what your first few weeks were like? This was September of 1941.

MB: ... Came to school and we wore little green beanies and had rules. We couldn't walk on Sacred Path. We had to be in at seven or seven-thirty every night, except on the weekends. If you wanted to go home, you had to have special permission to go home, or go to anybody else's house. They had house party weekends at the fraternities, at Rutgers, at that time. ... The girls went over and stayed at the frat houses and you had to have written permission from your parents to go. ... Everything was really [restricted], no boys, no men, ... boys, listen to me, no men in the dorms. Dining hall, we had to be there at a certain hour. As soon as you went in, they locked the doors and, if you missed it, if you were late, you didn't eat. We sat at tables, with waitresses. ... The waitress had two tables, four to a table. You sat with the same people all the time.

Jl: Were they assigned?

MB: That was their job, to get them through school. That was the way they made their money, one of the ways they made their money. They wore uniforms. We had gym, in the old packing house gym, the packing crate gym. ... In the wintertime, it was very cold [laughter] and you would go in and they had a big heating duct in the floor. You sat and put your feet over that. I was limited in what I could take, because I was a science major, and I had to take my PE courses, which were required, at eight o'clock in the morning, right after breakfast, and it was cold and I got modern dance, of all things. ... It's not for me, but, anyway, and bare feet and we'd go in there. [laughter] ... We had intramural sports, nothing between colleges. Women's sports were nil at that point. Most of my friends were phys. ed. majors, as it turned out.

ML: Did you play sports there?

MB: I did, but I was terrible. I mean, I've never been good, but I went out for basketball, half court, of course, and field hockey, and soccer, and, oh, I was in Nereids. I loved the swimming. I still swim every morning, at five-thirty, but I found a friend here, who's in my quilting group at church, and she was in the Nereids, I just found that out the other day, not the same time I was. She was later in school, but she was in Nereids. We liked "shack." The first thing I got into, when I got there, was going to "shack." You'd get in this college truck and go up to the cabin, above Somerville, [New Jersey], and I became a "shack" guide. I've always liked the out of doors. I was a Girl Scout for years, and so, that fit in very well, but I wasn't at NJC very long until I really loved it. I mean, I wouldn't have gone anywhere else. I really felt it was the best place to be.

SI: Can you describe what Nereids is, for the record?

MB: Nereids was a synchronized swimming group, and we gave a show every spring. ... I wanted to see the special on TV on the synchronized swimming, because that's not like what we did, but we did the formations ... in rhythm and everything. It was fun, like that.

SI: How many women were involved?

MB: Gee, I don't know, fifteen or twenty, maybe, I think.

SI: Did you have a facility at Douglass?

MB: Oh, yes, there's a pool. It was under Jamison Campus, and I don't know whether it's still there or not. I know they have another pool in their phys. ed. place, in their gym, the new gym. The other gym is gone. Our facilities were not the greatest. Our buildings were, well, this was '41 and they were buildings built, the school started in 1918, I believe, and the ... classroom buildings were not the nicest. They were pretty old when I went there. ... You smoked outside, couldn't smoke indoors, and we smoked on the basement steps in the dorms. That's where I learned to smoke. I had a room on the first floor and I'd hear all the gals down there and I wanted to join them, because I was missing something. [laughter] They were having a conversation, and so, I started smoking, which was bad, but that's the way it went. I quit long ago.

SI: Did most of the girls smoke?

MB: I think most of them, yes. They'd give away free cigarettes outside the dining hall. You'd be waiting to go into the dining hall and they'd be passing out the little packs of cigarettes. ... After my husband and I were first married, we'd take the Coke bottles back in order to have enough money to buy a pack of cigarettes. I mean, you know, that was [normal]. [laughter] Of course, he died of lung cancer, but that's the way life goes.

SI: What about the "shack?"

MB: "Shack" was in a house up on the hill, on a dirt road. You went up on Friday night, in the college truck. You took a bedroll. Nobody had sleeping bags. We couldn't afford those, and you took your food and it was a house that was unfinished. It had no running water, I don't believe. We didn't have electricity and the inside was just the studs, bare studs, and it had a big deck outside, that we'd sleep outside on, and run the woods. I had my first snipe hunt at Douglass, [laughter] and then, when the war started and there was no gasoline to take us up there in the truck, we'd take the bus to Somerville. I think we had to take two busses to get to where we began to walk. ... Then, we'd get off and we'd walk up. ... I did take that road, to see if I could find "shack," after, later, but I couldn't. Everything's paved and it's all built-up. But, ... there's a little reservoir and we'd go up to this reservoir, and then, about a mile in ... was "shack" and we'd walk in with our groceries. ... If we could get somebody, one of the pros that had a car, we'd take in some canned goods, once in awhile. So, there was some food up there, but it was camping out. ... If you were a "shack" guide, you took a group of people that signed up to

go up for the weekend, and it's kind of lost, because it's gone. People don't even remember it, it's so long ago. [laughter]

SI: Yes. That is why we want to record these kinds of memories.

MB: Yes. In fact, I've thought of writing. I have my pictures, ... these little, tiny pictures, that's all I could afford, black and whites, ... but we had wonderful times. One time, we went up for spring vacation. We stayed all week, ... got all the guides, they were mostly, as I say, phys. ed. majors, and we had a ball. ... We loved that, and all those gals are gone. ... One of the problems of living to be in your eighties, everybody's dead. All my good friends from college are dying, have died. ... There was something I was thinking of, but I forgot it.

SI: What did you think of the administration at NJC? Did you feel like they were too overprotective? Were they involved in your lives?

MB: Oh, I had some very good friends among the faculty. I don't remember above that, although I think we knew the deans and had interaction with them. I don't remember specifics, but that was the day you were protected. I mean, it was just one of those things. ... Although we would go; you could leave campus and go. I [do not] know how many times we'd go into the theater, in New York. We'd go to standing room productions in New York and, usually, all the gals'd go to my house in Englewood for the night then, because ... you'd go on the train into New York, and then, ... we'd take the bus out to my folks' and spend the night, but we went into see the theater regularly. ... After you're a freshman, you could stay out until eleven o'clock every night, but not that we did that too much. ... There was a murder downtown, at the opera house, and, for awhile, it was pretty [tense]. You were supposed to go with a pal, and that just makes sense. I mean, I still would do that, ... but we knew how to take care of ourselves. I mean, ... we were fairly independent, in spite of the rules and regulations. ... You just expected them. You worked within them.

SI: Did they tell you that there were areas of New Brunswick that you could not go into? Were there off-limits areas?

MB: Not really, no. I mean, ... well, my friend and I went over to Johnson & Johnson, and, of course, you walked. That's the only way you got around. We got good legs, because we walked everywhere. ... I had to go from the Douglass Campus down to the dining hall three times a day. You had to walk and it was about, probably, a half a mile from where we were. ... My luck of the draw in where I lived was always at the one place; I lived there three years. [laughter]

JJ: Which dorm did you live in?

MB: Douglass, the houses, the little houses, yes. Gibbons was the choice campus and Jamison was very choice, but I never made it. I was always in Douglass, but I made a lot of good friends, but, as I say, I got married before I graduated, so, that didn't help in keeping up. I just kept up with the people I really knew well. ...

SI: Did you have to keep getting engaged a secret?

MB: No, no, but, if you were married, you had to have permission to live on campus. I had permission to live on campus my senior year. ... I was supposed to be a house chairman, which is an RA, [resident assistant], I guess, now, but I couldn't do that married. That was not allowed.

JJ: You had to have permission from your husband.

MB: No, no, from the school. Yes, no, ... married women mixing with the unmarried women, we might give them some secrets or something, [laughter] horrible. ...

JJ: Did you have to have a meeting?

MB: ... I just don't remember. I know you had to have permission. You had to talk with someone, tell them what was going on, and the fact that Bill was not overseas made it a little more complicated for me, because he was around. ... There were several gals in my class that got married and graduated. ... I intended to go back, and, when we got home from our honeymoon, the 1st of September. I was married it's tomorrow, sixty-three years ago. Why, after we got back from our honeymoon, he was transferred. ... We thought he'd be at Columbia for the rest of the war, or we really wouldn't have gotten married, I don't think, but he went out to Decatur and he wasn't out there more than a week and he called, "Mary Lou, I can't live without you," and I cried and I cried and I cried, and I got on the train and went out to calm him down and, of course, I stayed. ... I felt badly, really badly, about quitting school, because I felt very obligated, since I was on scholarship, to get my degree, and I had a nice letter; I had a small scholarship from the Women's Club in Englewood and I really felt bad about that. The State Scholarship, yes, you feel bad about, but it's not personal, but this woman, actually, her son had been a steady date in high school for a long time and I knew her quite well and I had to write her a letter and say, "I'm not going back." ... Somewhere, there is a copy of that, but I don't know where it is, that she wrote me, afterwards, and she said, "Graduating was not the important thing; it's what I learned while I was there," and that was the truth.

SI: What did you think of your classes at NJC?

MB: What do you mean?

SI: Did you find them challenging?

MB: Yes; [laughter] well, some.

SI: Was there a particular one that you enjoyed?

MB: Oh, I loved chemistry, I absolutely loved chemistry, and I drove my roommate crazy, because she'd barely [get through]. ... Was she Phi Beta Kappa? I can't remember, but, anyway, she was smart and, in organic chemistry, she barely got through it and I didn't even have to study. ... It's one of those things that just came to me. My mind works that way. I got my husband through organic chemistry, when he went back to school, and I just loved chemistry. I had trouble, a bit of trouble, with English and history. ... Except for a freshman English paper, I

never wrote a paper, until I went back to school and majored in sociology. ... I had to take remedial writing courses, because I'd never had any experience, but I got all good grades. I don't think I got all "A"s. I got a "C" in English. That was my first "C" I ever had in my life, but the profs were all very nice. They helped out. I found some I liked more than others, but that's normal. I thought they all were good. I didn't feel I wasted any time in courses. I always liked school. [laughter]

JJ: Is there any professor that you remember particularly?

MB: I had Dr. Sweet, my first chemistry professor, I remember. ... I remember more from the sociology classes I took when I went back. Dr. Sweet was my favorite. He looked like Charles Boyer, which you probably don't even know Charles Boyer, but ... he had a round, little face, [a French actor]. He was very, very nice. ... I don't remember her name, but the woman I had for English lit my freshman year was so good to me, because I was so stupid. We had to analyze poems and, you know, old English stuff, and I just couldn't. I had the worst time. ... I tried so hard, she gave me a "C," but she helped me. ... Then, we had a freshman English teacher, Mr. Bennett, who was kind of a character. I'm sure he was gay, because we called him "Susie" Bennett. Of course, in those days, I knew nothing about gay people--that was something you just did not talk about. ... Dr. Gerard was head of the department and I had him. He was okay, but I really liked Dr. Sweet.

SI: Was there a lot of lab work and that sort of thing?

MB: Oh, Lord, I had lab three days a week, all from noon on. I mean, ... other than my freshman year, I could not take any elective courses to speak of, because I couldn't schedule them. ... You had classes six days a week and labs three days a week and that was the one problem with being a chemistry major, was that ... I had physics and math classes. ... Three labs, I always had, every week, all afternoon. So, no, I thought I got a good education, but ... I took calculus my junior year in college. Now, you take it in high school. That's why, when I went back, in 1980, I could not continue my major. ... I went to take a day, an alumnae day, that was called "A Woman's Place is in the Classroom," and I went because my daughter's a nurse, but not a degree nurse. She's an RN [registered nurse], and I went to find out about the possibilities of her getting her degree and I got so enthused about going back to school. ... I went to lunch and walked with Marjorie Munson, one of the deans who said, "Well, you can come back. You can major in sociology." She said, "You probably have all that you need to graduate with just [a minimum of new courses]." So, they looked up my records and I got all my grade point averages. ... There was a handwritten transcript, no computerized transcript, and I got all my grades. I had done all the requirements, except the major, so, ... all I took were sociology courses when I went back, and I had an absolute ball. I have never had so much fun in my life as when I went back to school. ... I got along with all the younger [students]. I have a lot of young friends. I mean, Daryl, [my present roommate], and I [laughter] get along real well, too, but Marjorie's the one that told me I could do it, and then, ... I was urged to do an honors project and Judy Balfe was my mentor, when I went back. She's not there anymore. ... They decided, the teachers, the profs, decided that I was Phi Bet material, but, in order to be Phi Beta Kappa, you have to have an advanced language course and I had had French literature. I had had French in high school. I could speak French at that time. I can't anymore. They had to go down

in the basement of College Hall and get an old catalog out, to see what the description of that course was, to see if it qualified. ... The Sociology Department was so happy to have somebody make Phi Beta Kappa, because it was not that people weren't smart enough or didn't have the grades, but they didn't have the language requirement. So, that was fun, and it was fun to graduate and have my grandchildren come and yell "Yay, Gram." My former roommate, Adrie (Adrienne Scotchbrook Anderson) who was on the Board of Trustees of Rutgers was there in her big gown, with her doctoral stuff and everything. ... When I went across the platform, she came up and gave me a great, big hug, as I received my diploma. It was exciting.

SI: That is great.

MB: And I got a job. [laughter]

SI: That is what every graduate wants.

MB: Well, no, I didn't go to get a job, but I got a job, worked outside the home for pay. It was delightful to get a paycheck, first in my life. ...

SI: Going back to the 1940s, when you and the other women would talk about the future, would they say that they wanted to find a husband and settle down or did they want to get jobs? Do you remember that?

MB: I think everybody thought they might get a job for a little while, I mean, you know, but not as a career. No, I don't know anybody that was going in for a career, nobody, although most of the gals that graduated did get jobs. Most of them, ... my friends, did not work all their lives. ... When they got married, they had it, and I never intended to work. I wasn't going to college for a career. I wasn't even going to college to get a man. I already had one. ... I don't really feel that many of the [women there did]. ... NJC was a very middle-to-lower-class college. It was not somewhere that had a lot of wealthy people went there and it would not be first choice for a lot of people, because it was a state school, but it was an excellent school. It was a perfectly wonderful school. ... Now well-known among women's colleges.

SI: How many women were from well-to-do families and how many were working class?

MB: Oh, none, were wealthy that I know of, not that were my friends, because I went to a lot of their homes. We'd go for a weekend, several of us, to somebody's house, and they were all about like I was. ... You did not have to wear fancy clothes. Wardrobes were not a big deal. During the week, from Monday to Friday, or Monday to Saturday noon, you wore jeans, rolled up to the knees, a shirt and an outside flannel shirt hanging out and saddle shoes. ... You didn't do your hair. I had hair long enough, not real long, but long enough, [that] I had pigtails. I used to come out from swimming and they'd freeze. But, you dressed up on the weekend. ... In college, I felt less poor than I did in high school. I don't know why. I never thought about that. That's the first time I ever thought about it, but, when I was in high school, I envied the girls who had "bought" clothes, because mine were all homemade. I made most of them myself, and they had twin sweater sets that matched and they had Spalding saddle shoes. Now, I couldn't afford any of that

and I felt very put out and very not as good as other people, because I didn't have it, but that was about the only thing that made me feel poor. ...

SI: Where were you when you heard the news about Pearl Harbor?

MB: Oh, okay. ... I'll tell you a little bit about working. Bill, and I have to tell you about Bill because that's how I got into it, he was a chemical engineer in college and he went in ... at the end of his sophomore year, went to basic training in Alabama, and then, ... he was pulled out of there, and his whole group went ... on to be infantry. They went to Anzio, [Italy]. Many of them were killed. He was pulled out and went to the University of Alabama, and then, he was there for a short time and he was sent up to Lehigh [University, Pennsylvania], and then, pretty soon, ... we heard [of] people going around town, investigating, asking questions about Bill. They wanted to know about the family, they wanted to know everything about him, and then, he got this job. He got out of uniform, he was to wear civilian clothes, he was to go to work by a different route every day, to Columbia [University], and they were working on the Manhattan Project. ... He couldn't tell anybody why he was in civilian clothes or what was going on. Well, now, it happened that, since I was a chemistry major, I guessed, because we had one teacher who said, "Someday, they're going to split the atom and it's going to have all this energy." I said, "Uh-oh, that's what Bill's doing," and he never told me. ... When we got to Decatur, [Illinois], ... all the GIs were assigned to be supervisors in the labs, and supervisors in production and stuff, and, in that factory, it was Houdaille-Hershey, was the name of the company, ... they made these rods, probably five feet long, about that big around. They were porous and they made those, and people there thought they were making rocket tubes. Now, they don't look like rocket tubes, but they didn't know. ... Actually, only, really, the uppity supervisors in the plant, I mean, their big, in-charge [supervisors], and the GIs knew what they were doing. ... We lived in a two-room apartment and I was bored to death. I didn't have anything to do. So, I applied for a job and I got a job in a little pilot plant that was right near where we lived and they had one line to make [rods]. One thing about the Manhattan Project, making the atomic bomb, they really tried everything, even if it wouldn't work. They tried everything they could. They went in all directions, until they got something that worked, and so, I was there. It was a different process for making the tubes and I sat in this little lab that was probably about the size, yes, of this [room].

SI: Eight-feet-by-eight-feet.

MB: And it was my job to test the diffusion in these tubes, ... but the guys [who ran the lab] had light blue badges, a light blue badge meant somebody who knew what was going on. I was never investigated, nothing. I got the job, it must have been, because I was married to Bill. It's the only thing I can think of, but they'd sit there and talk about what was going on all over, in all the other places, in Oak Ridge, [Tennessee], and in Los Alamos, [New Mexico], and Chicago, all over, and they'd talk about it and tell me how things were. You know, they didn't tell me, but they talked together, and I'm sitting there, knitting away, because I had no work to do. ... So, that was kind of interesting, but, then, they decided this process was working well enough to build a plant. So, they built a plant in Erie, Pennsylvania, and I wasn't going to move, because Bill was stationed in Decatur. So, I got a job out in the plant where he was. ... Actually, it was sort of government stuff. I never really had anything [in] particular to do. I'd do a few analyses,

but, ... most of the time, I sat around, didn't do anything, but we knew it. Now, how we knew what was going on elsewhere, I don't know, but I remember the day that the test bomb was [tested], and Bill came and told me, and all the GIs were just jubilant that the thing worked. ... I just read an interesting book, *Countdown to something*, whether it was *Countdown to Hiroshima* or what, but, anyway, it was a very interesting book, [*Shockwave: Countdown to Hiroshima* by Stephen Walker]. I've read it within the last year. That told about Los Alamos and how all the people there worked, all the hitches that there were in the process, and then, it also had stories of Japanese [people], personal stories, from Japan. I love personal stories about things. ... But, we knew that it had worked and we knew then it was not going to be any time at all until it was actually dropped. I'm ashamed of the letter I wrote. ... I copied it in the papers I gave you, because I said, I talked about the "Japs," not the Japanese, I said they deserved to die. We, both Bill and I, knew, though, and expressed it, that this could be either something great, the technology could be very great, or it could be disastrous, ... but we felt it ended the war. That was our take on it, ... and so, the day that the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Bill was working nights, so, he was home sleeping and I was at work. ... When I came home, I woke him up and told him. ... I guess we called our folks. I wrote to my parents and he wrote to his aunt. I don't know whether he wrote to his folks or not, ... and then, things wound down and people at the plant, ... they just had had no idea what they were doing. ...

JJ: Did they know afterwards?

MB: Yes, oh, yes, sure. Everybody knew afterwards.

JJ: How did they know?

MB: Well, it was common knowledge after the bomb was dropped, or maybe it was after the second one. ... The thing I can't understand is why they dropped two. I really don't understand that, but ... it was no longer a secret. I mean, you know, the secret was out, and then, Bill, ... he had only been in the service for about two-and-a-half years, I guess, and you had to be in three [to be discharged]. So, he was sent to Oak Ridge and he was working down there to be reassigned, and he was supposed to be sent on the MPs [military police] to Japan. ... Luckily, somebody pulled strings and got him sent back to Columbia and he spent the next six months there. They were writing up the summary of what they did. I'd love to get a hold of that, see what they did do there. ... We went back home and lived with his folks, and then, he went back to school. We had a baby.

SI: You said, initially, your husband did not tell you what he was working on.

MB: No, he never told me, never. ...

JJ: Even when you guessed, he did not say, "Yes, you are right."

MB: No, no, no. I said, "I know what you're working on, I think," and that was it.

JJ: He said, "Oh."

MB: "Oh, no," but, having had quite a bit of chemistry, I mean, I was no [novice]. When I got out to Decatur and went to work, there was no doubt what was going on, even if I hadn't heard people talking, to me.

SI: By the time the bomb went off at the Trinity test site, it was common knowledge.

MB: No. It wasn't until afterwards, until after the bomb run. ... I don't remember when the bomb [was made public]. I'm sure the public knew immediately, though, because there was great celebration. In fact, ... we thought the war would be over immediately and it was several weeks before it was ... over. ...

SI: Going back, were you at NJC when the news of Pearl Harbor was announced?

MB: Yes, I was. It was Sunday night. ... Everybody knows what they were doing when we heard about it. I was on my way back to school, [my] folks were driving me to school, and ... we heard it on the radio. ... Oh, it was a tremendous shock. I mean, ... nobody had ever attacked the United States. I mean, it was scary, and I'll tell you something else that was very interesting. ... Later on, on the East Coast, we never knew about the Japanese internment in the West, never knew about it. I never knew about that until much, much longer after the war. That was something that was not well-publicized, and that was horrible. ...

SI: What were the initial reactions when you got back to campus? What were people talking about? Was anybody afraid?

MB: ... Well, yes, I suppose. I don't remember, really, the feelings I had. I remember it was very shocking. It was a big shock that this had happened, and we knew we were going to go to war and, from then on, it was; it feels like it was immediately. The draft came up and everything. I don't know the sequence of what went on, but that was December and that was my freshman year. Now, we went on through the Summer of '42. We were home. ... The fellows hadn't gone yet. They were beginning to go, but they hadn't gone yet, the college guys, and, when we got back to school in the fall is when it began to [pick up]. People just were going all the time, but the ones who graduated in '43 all graduated, I mean, at least all the ones I knew. They didn't go in the service until after they graduated. Bill went in [the] Spring of '43.

SI: Did they accelerate the classes at all at NJC?

MB: No. Food got horrible. We got lots of lamb. It wasn't even lamb. It was mutton.

SI: Did you have to turn in your ration stamps to the University?

MB: Yes, oh, yes. We had to turn in our ration cards or we wouldn't eat. ... It was hard [in terms of food]. If you had a big family, it was okay, because you had all the kids' things, but, like, when after Bill and I were married and lived on our own, for two people to try to get enough butter, canned goods, sugar, meat, were all rationed. ... My cousin gave me a ration book. I've got that in my keepsakes. ... You didn't get much. I mean, it was pretty skimpy. There were things that weren't rationed, like a chicken with the feathers off, but the insides in, yes, was not

rationed, and, one time, I got a chicken, [laughter] no points. I was delighted. Everything had so many points to it. ... Bill and I, inexperienced kids, we were twenty-one, I mean, stupid kids, and I swear, we almost had the chicken on the floor with our feet on it, trying to get it cleaned out, and then, I couldn't eat it, after we got it cleaned. ... I should have known better, because my grandmother raised chickens. ... When I'd visit her, my uncle would wring its neck and throw it at me and it'd flap all around, you know, [laughter] but, no, it was tough. ... Grocery stores, well, there were no supermarkets, there were only little corner groceries, and they didn't have everything all the time. Stuff was scarce and, like I said, with cigarettes, when they were going to get cigarettes in, ... if you traded at this little store, neighborhood store, all the time, they would let you know when they were coming in, and you had to be there when they got there or you didn't get any. ... We had no PX [post exchange], because there were only a few fellows. I mean, I don't know how many there were. There couldn't have been more than twenty, if that, in Decatur, and he got subsistence to live independently, because there was no barracks. I mean, it wasn't an Army installation. It was just [that] we lived there.

JJ: It seems like Bill did not choose to work with that program. Do you know how he was chosen?

MB: I have no idea, no idea. Someone, they must have gone through a list. ... He was in Chemical Warfare in basic training. ... I don't know where the other guys were from and, in fact, I can't remember the names of any of the ones that we knew in Decatur. ... I know what they looked like, but I can't remember any names, and I have no way to find out. There are so many things that are gone.

SI: Were you one of the people interviewed when they were investigating his background?

MB: No, but all the people, ... he lived in a different town than I lived in. I lived in Englewood, he lived in Oradell, and, at that time, Oradell went to Englewood High School, ... Dwight Morrow High School, is how come I knew him. ... His father was police commissioner and ... their friend was the judge in town, and [so] on, you know, so, they got the word when people were going around asking about his character and everything. We all wondered, "What in the heck's going on?" You know, it just didn't seem [right], seemed very strange, but they were quite thorough in investigating the GIs. I mean, it was a very thorough FBI investigation of the fellows that were in, but that's why I can't understand why I never was investigated.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your work at Johnson & Johnson during the war?

MB: Oh, that was such fun. Adrie and I would; you weren't allowed to take any food out of the dining room. So, we were there over dinnertime. We worked the three to eleven shift, and so, we'd take two pieces of bread from the dining room. We'd sneak them out. I mean, that was [risky]; you'd get penalized if you took food, and we'd stop at, there was a grocery store on the main street where we were. We'd go in there, we'd buy two slices of cheese and two slices of meat, put it between our bread and go on over to work. ... We were set working in packing little boxes of bandages and stuff into cartons and sealing up the cartons and, from there, they went to be sterilized, and that's what we did, and then, ... we'd wait until the very last minute. We'd have to leave by about ten-thirty, because we had to be back in the dorm. You had to sign in at eleven

o'clock. If you were late, too bad, and so, we'd run all the way across town, from Johnson & Johnson's to Douglass Campus, which was down the way, and so, that's what we did for a whole year and we loved it. I mean, that was our part in the war effort, and there were a lot of kids, I think, got various and sundry jobs. I don't remember.

SI: Was it usually just the two of you going over?

MB: Yes, the two of us went, yes. We went together. ... Saturday morning, I took a course in auto mechanics, learning how to change tires and do basic stuff to make a car run, because nobody could get a new car. There was no such thing as a new car, and I took a course in meteorology, and what that was for, don't ask me, [laughter] but we were supposed to predict the weather. ... That was my wartime chores, ... although many women worked during [the war]. I mean, Bill's job, in his lab, they were all women working in his lab, and there were men working in the plant, but there were also lots and lots of women. ... The thing that was so sad was that, after the war, everybody was expected to go home and have kids and keep house, and that's a very unsatisfactory job, as far as I'm concerned. You've got a brain, you've learned something and, yet, you can't use it. ... After I finally went back to school and learned that, my whole life, I'd been living sociology, I just [did not know it]. I had a lot of fun writing papers, because I used all my practical volunteering. I became a full-time volunteer. ... I was a professional volunteer, in, name it; I've got a list of four pages of volunteer jobs I've done and I learned a lot on all of them. ... Also, I learned about the social ills of our world, the people. As my husband said, I'm a bleeding-heart liberal, and my son, who's my baby, ... has his own business and doing very, very well, works just as hard as his father worked. ... After my eightieth birthday, my family had a "croning" ceremony. A crone is an older, wise woman. It's not an ugly woman, it's a wise woman, and they had a ceremony, to make me a "crone," and everybody signed a guestbook at the party and he [her son] signed in it, he said that I was a good mother, he gathered, I was a pretty good person, but, he said, I was just too darn liberal. That's when I came home and wrote the, "How I Became a Liberal," in the memoir. [laughter] ... When I looked into it, I discovered my whole life had been [sociology], from the very beginning of living in Englewood, with its social classes and the class system. I began there. When I went to Douglass, or to NJC, I began to learn more, because some of the courses I had, the profs, they were very vocal Democrats. I think colleges are more liberal, and universities, and then, with all my volunteer work everywhere and all the church stuff, ... I've gone to workshops in the church for years and years and years, got a pretty good liberal education from free workshops. ...

SI: We will get more into that a little later, but that reminds me, was there any kind of USO [United Service Organizations] activity in the area?

MB: There was USO, and I never did go. I don't know, ... just never did. I know a lot of people who did, but I had a boyfriend. ... Bill was around. I mean, he was not that far away from me when he was at school, and then, when he was in basic training and down in Alabama, but, from when he got up to Lehigh, I saw him regularly. You know, I didn't need to go to USO to find a man. [laughter] So, I didn't ever do that.

SI: Did a lot of the women at NJC see the USO as a dating place?

MB: I guess. I don't really remember. I mean, that's not something that was a priority and I just don't remember.

SI: Camp Kilmer was right across the river.

MB: Yes.

SI: Did you get the sense that the town became a little more dangerous, that you would have to watch your step?

MB: It was supposed to be dangerous. I mean, we were told, "Be careful." I don't think there was anything to it, frankly. I never knew anybody that had any problems. ... I've never been afraid. I mean, I've worked in New York City. I loved it and I love the city. I ran the City of New York from the time I was ten years old. ... Of course, things weren't as tough then as they are now, but, nonetheless, a city is a city is a city. ... I think we were taught to be alert to things that might happen, to people around. I know I'm always very much alert to what's going on around me, but I avoid situations. ... I think if you look like you know where you're going and that kind of thing, why, you won't have any trouble, in general; I mean, not that you can't. Yes, you can, but, I mean, I take the train to church. I go to church downtown and I take the train. I don't take it at night, because there's nobody on it. It's not like New York. New York City, I went and lived there for a month, a couple years ago. I rented an apartment in New York City and I went and lived there, loved it. I've wanted to go back. I can't stand the weather and I went out at night and rode the subways and the busses at night, by myself. ... It was okay, but I didn't go into Harlem, I didn't go into the South [Bronx], well, I did go into the South Bronx when I was working for the churches there, or into Bed-Sty [Bedford-Stuyvesant]. ... You knew where not to go. ... I know we were warned against the soldiers. I mean, soldiers are supposed to be bad, but they were people, just like they were before they went into the service, I think. I don't know.

SI: Was there any kind of Civil Defense activity at NJC?

MB: Not that I remember.

SI: Did they have blackouts or patrols or anything?

MB: The only blackout I remember was, ... we got married and went for the weekend, ... we had an apartment in the Bronx, and then, we came back from our honeymoon. We were there two or three days, and, while we were there, we did have a blackout. ... The sirens went off and you had to turn all the lights out and sit there and, I remember, when we put the lights back on, the cockroaches were crawling all over the whole place. [laughter] It was horrible, but that's all. We didn't have blackouts, as far as I remember, at school at all, and I don't remember Civil Defense, either at home, in Englewood, or [elsewhere]. It's just something I don't remember.

JJ: You mentioned a couple of times that you got married after your junior year in college.

MB: After my junior year. I got married in August, between my junior and senior year.

Jl: What year was that?

MB: 1944.

Jl: Can you talk about that a little bit?

MB: Well, I think I said in my [memoir], we didn't know what was going to happen. It was just [that] it speeded life up and, frankly, I said, we wanted to get married so [that] we could have sex and play house, and, now, people live together, but they didn't then. It was just unheard of and we were in a hurry and it was stupid, plain stupid, and then, to have a baby, deliberately have a baby, ... when your husband had two years of school to do, which he did, and [I] never considered my going back. I didn't go back until after my baby got out of college, and then, I went back. We moved every time I was ready to go back and get my degree. It wasn't that Bill didn't [want me to], that I couldn't, but we moved so often and, every time I'd get ready to go back to school, we'd move. ... The last move we had was to Long Branch, [New Jersey], from California, in 1970, and that was a good opportunity, because Monmouth College was just down the block. It cost too much. It cost fifty dollars a credit or something. ... First place, I decided I didn't know if I could pass a course. ... I didn't think I could pass, and I wasn't going to spend good money if I couldn't pass, and I didn't see any reason to do it. My husband was supporting me. Why go to work? I learned. [laughter] I was very bored as a housewife. That's why I did so much volunteer work, bored to death. To me, it's a high calling, and I think that the feminist movement has downgraded and put down homemaking, I think, horribly. I think, if you stay home now, you're a second-class citizen and that's not right, because it is a very important job, but I also think that ... working can be very fulfilling. My oldest daughter's a nurse and she loves her work. ... She's worked since her kids were babies and it's not hurt them. They're all good people. My other daughter, that's here in California, ... she went to work because she was bored to death. ... She's always worked, and my son's wife has never worked. She worked as a teacher until they got married. ... She's not interested in going to work now. I don't know what she does all day, but that's her life, not mine. I just can't sit still.

SI: Can we talk a little bit about going out to Decatur?

MB: Yes.

SI: Even traveling was heavily affected by the war. What was that train ride like?

MB: Okay. Well, in the first place, as I said, ... when Bill said, "Come," I just [left]. ... It was a terrible decision for me, ... really, to go and I got on the train. ... During the war, the trains were like commuter trains, with the straight back seats, mostly. I mean, I did have a Pullman [sleeping car], a couple of times, but I don't remember a Pullman going to Decatur, I remember sitting up, and I got to Chicago. ... I was thinking about this the other day. I've traveled all over, everywhere, since my husband's been dead, but I'm a little leery, sometimes, of, ... like, going to Europe. I've never gone to Europe, or gone out of the country, on my own, but I was thinking about it, here I was, I was twenty years old, I wasn't even twenty-one, ... I got on this train and I went to Chicago and I got on another train to go from Chicago to Decatur. ... Going across, I

can remember the feelings as clear [as a bell]. Some things, you remember, and some, you don't. Going down through Illinois, I don't know if you've been to Illinois, but a lot of it is flat as a pancake and going from Chicago to Decatur was very flat. ... I can remember looking out the window and thinking, "What am I doing here? What's going on? How can I be here?" ... The pictures are in the book, of before and after arriving in Decatur. [Editor's Note: Ms. Busch thumbs through her book.] See, I've got a thing [chapter], "Dating Boys from the Hill;" "Mary Lou, Live-in Maid."

SI: These are all headings in your book.

MB: Yes. ... This is Bill before I arrived and this is when I arrived. [laughter] ... My husband could not live without me. ... If I had died before him, ... I told him, I said, "You've got to get married. You've got to find somebody to take care of you. You can't make it." He never could make it. I always thought I was so dependent on him, but he was so terribly dependent on me. But, he was so glad to see me and, once I arrived, I couldn't go home. I couldn't leave him. There was just no way. I had to write a letter to the college, because it was just before [the semester started]. It was in September, just before. College started towards the end of September and that was just in September and I had to write and say, "I'm not coming," which was heartbreaking, but it was part of life. You went where your husband went. My mother told me, "Your husband is the most important thing in your life. You please him," and Judy Balfe said that the idea, back in the traditional days, was to make a haven in the heartless world for your husband. When we had the Industrial Revolution and the men went out to work, every day, to that horrible factory or office or somewhere way off, you had to make the home a happy place. ... Bill traveled all ... our married life, from Monday to Friday; he'd come home Friday night, because he was a salesman, and I was supposed to have the house spotless. Now, it's been a month since my cleaning lady's been here. Now, there's cat hair all over, there's dust everywhere. If you want to run your finger, you'll find dust. ... Bill was an only child and his mother never went outside the house, but, anyway, you were supposed to have the house cleaned, the children were supposed to be very quiet, and you were supposed to be sexy as hell, whether you felt like it or [not], whatever had happened during the week. ... I lived under that assumption for a good part of my life and that is a lousy way to live, I mean, and I didn't think anything of it. I internalized all these things that my generation did. I mean, wives were definitely helpmates. That's what they were, and you had no real value except raising children, and raising children was never, to me, a tremendous job that I liked. It was okay, I did it and I had pretty good kids, but boring. [laughter] ... Did that answer the question? ...

SI: Yes. I was also curious if there were any problems with the actual trip.

MB: No, no problems, ... nothing of consequence. That was the first time I'd ever traveled that far. I used to go to Philadelphia, from New York, on a train to visit my aunt, when I was little, ... by myself, but, no, no problems, just that was a very emotional upset of a trip. ... We went home when Bill had leave, a couple of times, and it was always the same thing. You sat up all night. It took all night to get home and that's the way it was. ... One time, ... when we went from Oak Ridge ... back to New York, after he was transferred back to Columbia, ... we had a lower berth, together. That's not very big. [laughter] ... All night, you rolled from side-to-side. It's better sitting up. Those were the train trips.

SI: What about the living conditions, around the factory?

MB: [laughter] Oh, that's another story. ... We had a one, well, it was a two-room apartment. It was on the second floor. I should have gotten that. It's interesting, to look at the pictures of the house. I went back recently and I took a trip across country and found all the places I [had] ever lived in my life and took pictures.

ML: Wow.

MB: So, I've got a book, ... a little scrapbook, that I put [in] a picture of when I lived there and now, and it was fun. I had to do detective work to find some of the places. The one we left in 1929 isn't there anymore, but I found where it was. Anyway, it was an old frame house [in Decatur], with no insulation whatsoever. Our rooms were on the second floor and our living room was a fairly good-sized bedroom. I remember, it had a bed and I think we might have had a couch, but I'm not sure. ... [There was] not much in there. Then, you went out and across the hall, across the way, to the kitchen, and the kitchen had a sink that hung on the wall, a little sink. It had a refrigerator in a closet. It had a table and two chairs, and a stove, the old-fashioned kind, with legs and the oven up, sitting beside the burners. ... Then, we had a bathroom behind there, that we shared, the tub, bathtub, no shower, with the person in the back apartment. ... We had a deaf man who lived there, part of the time we were there, and he had a toilet and a wash basin in his apartment, but we had nothing but that bathroom. ... He'd get in there and he'd forget, when he'd take a bath, and he'd lock the door and we couldn't get in the bathroom and that was hard. Then, ... in the summer, it was so hot in the place. It's just the heat. ... We worked different shifts. ... He switched shifts, worked the three shifts in rotation, and I worked different shifts. We weren't always on the same one. Sleeping in the daytime was just dreadful and, in the winter, it was so cold, because there was no insulation and heat, and then, for hot water, we had no hot water. ... To get hot water, you had to go out of the house, down the steps, around the house, down; you know those cellars where you have the slanting doors you lift? There are a lot of those in the East. There's not one here in California, and you lift up the door, go down the steps, into the basement, light the water heater, go out, around, up to the bedroom, time it, so many minutes, twenty minutes or half an hour, [Ms. Busch imitates walking down stairs], turn it off. If you forgot it, it'd blow up, because ... it wasn't automatic. Well, in the winter, when there's snow on the ground, and Decatur gets pretty cold, we decided we'd just heat water. So, we used to heat water in pans on the stove and we'd get about this much water in the tub.

SI: Only an inch or two.

MB: And I have to say, you'll think it's funny, [laughter] well, it was funny; Bill bathed first and I bathed second, in the same water, this much in the tub. I look at that and I think, "How stupid could a person be?" [laughter] But, you heated it in pans and, if you only have a few pans, which we didn't have very many, why, that's the way it is. ... Then, our landlady was a person who was frightened all the time and she kept a loaded twenty-two-[caliber] rifle sitting behind the front door, in case somebody came around. So, I mean, I hate guns. I have always been a pacifist and I hate guns. I've seen too many kids shot with an empty gun, killed, and so, anyway, she was a character, but we lived there for a year.

SI: Did you have to find that apartment or had your husband already found it?

MB: I don't know. No, he found it. I don't know how he found it, but he found it, and housing was pretty scarce. When he got out of the service and went back to Purdue [University]; we lived with his parents until he went back to Purdue. It was almost a year between when the war was over and when he could go back to school, because I was pregnant. I had the baby in the summer and he didn't want to leave me. So, he went back to school and there was no housing. It was so scarce and he finally got this one-room apartment. ... It had a bathroom under the stairway. They blocked off the floor. So, you had a bathroom shaped like this. You had to climb in over the end of the tub, with the faucets. You couldn't stand up in the tub, because the roof came down. The washbasin was about this big and it hung over both the toilet and the tub, and the toilet was, as I say, right there, and that was our bathroom. ... Then, we had this one room, and a little back porch that was closed in, and the sink was on the wall and, in the winter, the pipes'd freeze, unless we let the water run all night. There was a table that let down from the wall, ... or came up from the wall. When you had it up, you couldn't walk around the kitchen. It had an old; I don't know what you'd call it. It was a cupboard, a piece of furniture cupboard, and the refrigerator was in the bedroom, in the one room, and we had a little apartment-sized stove and I had a baby that I washed diapers [for]. You didn't have disposable diapers and I washed diapers in a diaper pail and boiled them on the stove. ... Then, I hung them all around our room. Here, Bill had to study with those diapers hung all over the room. We had [fun]. Oh, it was a joy. It's a wonder we stayed married for forty-five years, [laughter] but we did.

SI: Was there a little bit of time between getting set up and getting a job in Decatur?

MB: Oh, not too long, because ... what was I going to do? I mean, you can scrub a floor just so much. I mean, I told the young man from church, when he came to live here for awhile, while he was interning at church, I said to him, I said, "You can have the youth group in for meetings, I don't care, but, if you want the house clean, you have to clean it." I said, ... "I vacuum every two or three months, whether it needs it or not." Well, after he'd been here for awhile, he said, "You meant that, didn't you?" [laughter] But, I finally got a cleaning lady that comes in once a month and I just let it go. If I have company, they have to [deal with it]. I keep it picked up pretty well, but I don't dust. ... But there is plenty of dust. When the sun comes in, in the afternoon, the cat hair and the dust is quite obvious. But, no, I got a job almost right away, because I just was bored, absolutely bored silly. ... There wasn't anything to do at all. I mean, you're stuck. You don't know anybody, and Bill was working all the time. Working and sleeping, that's all he did, ... but we made friends among the GIs, eventually.

SI: Were the other GIs and workers all in the same area?

MB: They're all over town. We were all scattered all over. Decatur's not a huge town, but it's not small either. When I went back to find the house where we lived, my cousin took me [laughter] and ... there's a square, where the busses all go from. ... I said to Mary, my cousin, I said, "You know," I said, "I used to get a bus here and I waited on this side of the square and we went off on an angle to get to where we lived." So, we drove that way and we're going across and I saw a street name and I said, "Oh, that's the street." Once I saw the name, I remembered it

and we drove down it and found the house, and then, drove around and I found where the little plant was. It was something else, of course, by that time. It was an auto shop or something, and I knew we were near a railroad, and so, you know, I could remember some things. ... That was the most fun trip I ever did. I've made five trips across country, since I've been a widow, driving. I've gone almost every road there is across country. I love the back roads and I camp a lot. ... I was happily married. I mean, I say it, it sounds awful, but ... I was happy. I didn't know any better, but, since then, I was never single until Bill died, and, once he died, I figured we were sixty-five, I was sixty-five, and I said, "I'm healthy, I'm going to live a long time, so, I've got to find something to do." So, I have traveled and ... I've had a ball. I got to be me, finally, Mary Lou. It's hard to be your own self. When ... we came here, retired, moved here, I went to the Y [YMCA], before we were even in our house here. We rented a motel and I joined the Y and I got my membership card and it was, "Mrs. George Bush." I took it back to them and I said, ... "I'm sixty-two years old," I said, "and I am Mary Lou Busch. It's taken me a long time to get to be Mary Lou Busch, but I am Mary Lou Busch. I'm not anything else." They made me a card; it said, "Mr. Mary Lou Busch." [laughter] Their computer wouldn't make a card without a husband's name, but I've got that straightened out. ... I've grown a lot, going to be eighty-four in September. My two new knees have got me going like a youngster, no. [laughter]

SI: Your first job was in that pilot plant.

MB: Yes.

SI: You said that they did not really give you much to do.

MB: No, I had nothing to do, except wait for a line to make some material that I could test, and it would break down all the time. ...

JJ: Were there other women in the plant or was it mainly men?

MB: There were some women. There were people out in the plant, but I was in the lab and I never really saw the people in the plant, just these two or three, I think there were two men with blue badges, who sat there and talked with each other all day, tried to figure out what was wrong with their assembly line, you know, how to make it work. ... Then, they'd make a piece of something and bring it in and I'd test it and it wouldn't work, so, they'd go back and do something. ... I really had nothing to do, [laughter] except listen.

SI: It was just sections of the rods that you were testing.

MB: Yes. They'd bring them in and I'd put them in a machine and passed air or gas of some kind through them and you had to [record] the rate that it passed through, or something. I don't even remember. It was a dull job. I worked for the aluminum company down in; I only had summer jobs before I graduated from college, finally, and I had a summer job and that was in 1943. I worked for the aluminum company and I worked the swing shift ... in the lab, testing for copper, [to] see how much copper there was in a sample of aluminum. That was a chemical test. Then, we had a spectrographic test, where you milled the little piece and put it on the

spectrograph and stuff. I loved that job. I had fun there, but this other one was very boring. So, I decided I never wanted to be a chemist. [laughter]

SI: The aluminum factory job was during the summers at NJC.

MB: Yes. It was the Summer of '43, I worked, after my sophomore year, between sophomore and junior year. My first summer job was live-in maid. I was nursemaid for two small children, a two-and-a-half-year-old and a nine-month-old, upstairs maid, which means you retted it up every morning. [Editor's Note: Ret means a pick it up and make things neat.] You made the beds and cleaned the bathrooms, and I was the table waitress when the man of the house was home. I waited and served, and then, you have to do the dishes that are from the table. The cook does the kitchen dishes. I learned all about the hierarchy of help. The second summer, I was a babysitter for a girl with rheumatic fever. I spent twelve hours, six days a week, for twelve dollars, entertaining her, so [that] she didn't get up and run around. ... The third summer, I worked for the aluminum company. I think I made twenty dollars a week, or twenty-some dollars a week. That was heaven, and then, the next job I had; oh, then, ... the summer I was married, 1944, I worked in my dad's office as file clerk. ... When I went in there, my desk was against the wall, because I was the new person on the block, and it was stacked almost to the ceiling with papers to be filed. I filed all the papers, then, I cleaned out all the files, in about the seven weeks or so I worked, boring. ... I did talk to people and they were giving me some of their work, ... but it was below me, my intelligence. ...

SI: The testing facility was shut down. Was it totally shut down?

MB: It was shut down and moved, yes. It was shut down and moved to Erie, Pennsylvania, and I couldn't move. I could have gone with them, but I was not going to leave Bill.

SI: Then, you went into the main plant.

MB: Yes.

SI: What was your job there?

MB: Well, you tell me. I never really got assigned to anything. I would do occasional tests, sort of the same as I was doing in the other plant, because it was tubes, but not on a regular basis. I mean, I don't know. There were other people working. They didn't need me, but they kept me on anyway, and it was, again, boring. ... I like to be busy. I don't like to [be bored]. Well, I'm learning to. I've become a member of the slow club, enjoy life, smell the daisies.

SI: What was the mood in the plant like? Was there a wartime urgency to the work?

MB: Yes, yes, and they knew they were doing something for the war effort, but they didn't know what it was, but that was all right. I mean, they made up their own stories, and the one, as I say, you'd hear them talking about making rocket tubes, which was stupid. They were porous tubes. Oh, it was a huge plant and it had big vats, because ... it was some kind of a plating job they did on it. It was like a mesh that they plated with something or other and made into tubes. ... So, it

was very hot, it was very smelly and not pleasant working conditions, but there weren't too many people working on the floor of the plant, actually. I mean, oh, there were people, but it was not [crowded]. ... They had labs. I presume that the lab my husband was working with was one that tested the liquids that were down in the things. The one I was in, upstairs, was the one that tested the actual tubes when they came through, for quality, and I guess those tubes, some of them, probably separated out the uranium that was used in the first bomb, because that was the process for the first bomb, ... and they only had enough uranium to do one bomb, I mean, the test bomb and that one. That was it. If they hadn't worked; it wasn't a case of that they were making hundreds of bombs, because ... they weren't. ... Then, they had a different, what'd they have, a fusion bomb, the second one? It was a different kind.

SI: Plutonium, where the bullet goes into the core? [Editor's Note: The "Little Boy" bomb, dropped on Hiroshima, used the "gun method" to create a critical mass of uranium 235. The "Fat Man" bomb, dropped on Nagasaki, utilized the "implosion method" to achieve a critical mass of plutonium 239.]

MB: It was different, anyway, and I didn't even know that at the time. We didn't know that. I didn't, knew it later.

SI: Aside from the smell, was there any kind of danger or unsafe conditions in the factory?

MB: Oh, I'm sure there were. I don't know specifically, but I'm sure there were, because, back in that time, safety was not a very important priority. [laughter] I don't remember any particularly. I didn't work on the floor, so, but they had big cranes.

SI: Do you remember any accidents?

MB: No, I don't remember any accidents. They had big cranes that went across the roof of the thing, that moved stuff from one end of the building to [the other]. Why? I don't know. I probably knew then, but I didn't care. If I don't care, I can remember things I cared about, but I can't remember things that I didn't. There are a lot of things I've forgotten.

SI: Would you interact socially with the other people who worked there on the floor?

MB: Yes. Well, for example, the gals in Bill's lab, we became friendly with, ... and the GIs, and there was one civilian boss that we knew, socially. ... Then, one of the gals that worked in the lab there later married and went to Purdue and, when we were at Purdue, we became good friends with the couple. ... In fact, we stayed good friends with them, until he dropped dead at age forty. He was a coach, and he was overseas when we were in Decatur. ... Our social life was pretty slim, because you worked seven days a week. ... You'd get a day off somewhere, but the plant ran [continuously]. ... The only time we were ever off was Christmas. ... We got off Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. ... We had a Christmas tree, about that big. We had ornaments and lights that our parents sent us, because you couldn't buy any. ... It was Saturday and Sunday. Christmas was on Sunday and, Saturday, we were off and we went to the five and ten downtown. ... From somewhere, they had tinsel, and so, we had tinsel on our tree, made it really festive. We sat on the floor and opened our presents the next morning, such as they were,

called our parents. We were partying the night before with friends and drank too much Southern Comfort, and that is no good for you, I'll tell you. [laughter] We were a little hung-over sitting there, but we were with ourselves. That was our first Christmas together.

SI: Did you get a sense of how the workers were being treated, whether they were blue-collar or educated workers?

MB: Oh, they're blue-collar, definitely blue-collar, not educated, no.

SI: Were they treated well or not treated well?

MB: How do I know?

SI: I thought maybe you saw something.

MB: ... As far as I know, they're workers. They did what they were told, and they were nasty jobs and they did them, and I think they got paid, for the times, ... relatively well. I don't think there was any problem with pay. I was paid as well [as ever]. You know, for having just been through the Depression, where nobody had jobs and nobody had any money, I mean, ... I just can't [describe it]. The Depression shaped the lives of my generation, because we didn't have anything. ... A treat, the big treat, was to get a nickel ice cream cone. That was, you know, once a week, or something, go over and get that. There was just not much. I wrote a preface, sort of, ... introduction to the thing [memoirs], on life then and now. ... What started this whole thing, my great-grandson lived with me for three years and, one day, we were sitting in here and he says, "Grandma, what did you watch on TV when you were little?" I said, "TV? We didn't have a TV. It wasn't invented." "Huh?" and I got to thinking about it, and then, an interesting thing, when I showed the article to my grandchildren, who were adults; my oldest granddaughter's a nurse. ... When I was seven, I had scarlet fever. ... I was in the hospital, county hospital, for three-and-a-half months, because you were infectious. Now, scarlet fever, you cure today with a shot of penicillin, but there wasn't any, and I had a draining thing on my neck, and she said, "Who paid for that?" Well, I never even thought about it. I guess the state paid for it. I know my folks had no money and, yet, we had to go to the hospital. There was no health insurance. Yes, I mean, it was a different thing. You're very frugal. [laughter] My husband once told me I had to learn to spend money. I've learned, but I'm still very, very frugal, I mean, on some things. As my good friend tells me, "We're frugal." She was poor, too, growing up, and her mother was an LA policewoman, one of the first women on the force, very interesting. Anyway, we said, "We save our pennies so that we can go do all the neat things we do," ... but that's the way you live. It's an entirely different [mindset], and salaries, ... I know my dad made less than five thousand dollars a year, because that was ... the line for scholarships, State Scholarships, and he didn't make that. I know, when Bill started to work, he made twenty-five hundred dollars a year. Salaries were [low], but our rent was sixty-five dollars a month. So, I mean, ... everything's relative.

SI: One thing I was trying to get at with that question was, World War II was the first time that a massive amount of women were in the workforce and it caused a lot of friction with, particularly,

bosses who had prejudices against women or who mistreated them. Do you remember any of that?

MB: I didn't see any of that, no. ... I was working in a professional end of things, in the lab. That's a different thing. I was still in an acceptable job for a woman, I think. Teachers and nurses and librarians, and I think lab people, probably, were "women" jobs that went along, but ... I never knew anybody that worked in a factory, I mean, as regularly. ... We worked at Johnson & Johnson, but we were strictly part-time stuff and I never saw anything there that would say [that]. I think, frankly, that maybe men had trouble with it. I don't know. I think they had more trouble later on. ... During the war, my feeling was that everybody was working together to get the war over with and to help the servicemen. I mean, you supported the service people. That's what you were there for. There was none of this ambivalence, ... that I know, about the war. I think there were isolationists who didn't want to get into it, but, once Pearl Harbor was attacked, that just changed everybody. Everybody started working together and going for it. ... I never saw any of that. I've seen it, lots, after that, and one of my papers, when I was in school, which was, I graduated in '82, was about clergy spouses, and they were wives, because there were no male clergy spouses in '82. ... None of the women ... were pastors. I mean, ... they were ordained, but they were working in teaching jobs or chaplains or, you know, that kind of stuff. None of them were pastors of a church. I've been through that whole women's movement in the church, and all that friction and all that stuff, seems to me, came much later than the war. I think there was some friction of women who got done out of their jobs. They liked having the money come in. ... There were women who were supporting families and stuff and they had a tough time, because everything went to the veterans. I mean, veterans were treated very well after World War II, not like after the Vietnam War. In fact, Bill wouldn't have finished school if it hadn't been for the GI Bill. We went to school on the government. They paid all his tuition, paid his books and we got ninety dollars a month to live on. Now, we couldn't live on that, but we had enough savings from when I worked during the war that he made it through. We were so broke when we got through at Purdue, we couldn't even go home. My folks had to send us a ticket, [laughter] but we were broke for years, ... getting married young and having a child and a one-[income] family, and jobs were hard to get, because all the GIs came out of ... school at the same time. They all graduated in '48 and everybody's looking. Bill could have had a job right after the war, without a degree, with [Union] Carbide and Carbon, but he wanted to get his degree and, when he got out, they wouldn't hire him. They didn't want him anymore.

SI: Before we get to the postwar period, I want to ask you about that letter that you said that, now, you look back and you are kind of ashamed at what you said. Actually, I was wondering, do you want to read it into the record?

MB: ... You can read into the record, yes. It's there. I'll give you a copy of it. It's in the back. ... [Editor's Note: Ms. Busch reads:] *Dear Family, Some news broke loose yesterday. I guess, now, you can see what we've been doing. I'll enclose a clipping from the local paper about our plant. Of course, all the technical details are still a big secret, and probably will never be generally known. The war should be over pretty quick now. I don't see how the Japs can hold out long. Needless to say everyone in the plant was excited about the whole thing. Probably ninety percent or more of the people had no idea what the material here was used for. It can be*

a good thing or else the end of civilization, and only time will tell which. I imagine you've heard how near Germany came to getting there first. [Ms. Busch comments:] Of course, we know now they didn't, but, just recently, I heard Japan nearly got there. [Ms. Busch continues the letter:] I don't like to think of Hitler with a weapon like that. I hate to think of killing innocent people, but, if it will end the war quickly, it will be worthwhile. If the Japs will commit suicide to kill our men, it won't hurt to help them along a little. Well, this is just a note. I'm at the lab and have to get to work. Love, Mary Lou. I mean, I wouldn't say a thing like that today for anything in the world.

Jl: It was a different time.

MB: But, it's a different time, and I'll tell you, ... a lot of kids from my high school class were killed in the war. A fellow that I used to date, a doctor's son, was a pilot and he was lost over the English Channel somewhere, don't know what happened to him, but he's gone. ... So, I mean, we were glad to see the war over, and, of course, now, I've participated with a kind of mixed feeling in peace demonstrations. ...

SI: For Iraq?

MB: No, ... for Hiroshima. They have the anniversary things, you know. ... You light the candles and everything and you feel badly, and I do feel badly, but, also, I have to go back and think about how we were afraid that if we didn't do it, we were going to [lose]. That's the only time that I ever [supported a war]. I'm completely against a war, the wars, the War in Iraq, because there's no reason ... to be the aggressor. I mean, to me, it's one thing to defend yourself, but it's something else, and, to me, we're not defending, but that's another story, but I'm definitely a peacenik and I see no reason for it. I'm against the death penalty. ... You know, I really see that violence begets violence, and I never could see teaching my son to hit other people. ... There are occasions where you might hit somebody to defend somebody who's helpless or something. That's different, but to just aggressively fight, no way. I believe in running, [laughter] and I'm not afraid of the terrorists. I refuse to be afraid. My mother refused to be afraid. She lived in Atlantic City, which was a pretty rough town in her last days, in a retirement home, and there had been muggings right outside her door. ... She said, "I'm not going to let the threat of something happening to me keep me inside. I'm going out in the world," and I feel the same way. So, I don't mean to be so adamant, but I am adamant. [laughter]

SI: As a general question about that attitude, do you remember if everyone was talking like that, in those terms, about the enemy?

MB: Yes, yes. Everyone hated the Germans and the Japanese. I mean, really, not [in person, but] in their countries. Now, I don't know what it was like out here [on the West Coast], with the Japanese internment, but I don't think everybody felt that that was bad, because I've heard of so many stories of people who were in the camps, but had help from people outside and all. ... It was hard not to hate the Germans when I knew these people from [Europe], the Jewish people, who had been persecuted so badly. ... When we found out about the death camps, I mean, and the people who were tortured in the Japanese camps; Japanese camps were pretty bad. I think that's the truth. I don't think that was propaganda. ... I felt like they were inhuman. Now, when

I read this book recently, the one, the *Countdown* book, and it talked about [the Japanese], there were testimonies in there of people in Japan, and they were human beings. The ordinary people were human beings, but they were doing what they were told to do and they were told to do these things and they would have fought to the last person. I think, at least, this story said so, but I don't know. ... People today are inhuman, too. I mean ... a week ago Saturday, we were on our way to Tahoe, my daughter and my son-in-law, and they both are pretty crippled up. I feel like their child, I get around so much better, but we stopped up in Lancaster, at a shopping center, for them to walk around, after we'd driven that far, and we heard this demonstration going on. So, we went over to see what it was and it was a demonstration against the illegal, or I'm not going to say illegal, undocumented Mexicans, and I have never heard such hate. Well, I've heard it, yes. I've heard demonstrations. ... I've marched in demonstrations for gay people and I've heard the anti-gays, and there's so much hate and there's so much fear. I've talked to young people who think that 9/11, they're scared to death to go out, they're scared to ride in an airplane. I can't understand that. ... It's beyond me. That's why I was trying to compare the difference between 9/11 and [Pearl Harbor]. It was an incident, it was horrible, but it wasn't like what was going on in World War II. Oh, well, I'm not going to solve the problems.

SI: After the bombs were dropped, they started to shut down the plant. How quickly was that initiated?

MB: I don't know when. ... I was there; I stayed a month after the war was over. Bill was immediately sent to Oak Ridge. They must have cut down some on production, but not a lot, because ... they only had one bomb and they were still working, but it was closed down eventually and I left and went to Oak Ridge after a month. I continued working for a month and, when it looked like Bill was going to stay at Oak Ridge for awhile, I went down there, but I don't know.

SI: Did you do anything at Oak Ridge?

MB: No. ... There wasn't anything I could do. In fact, that was pretty miserable. I was skinnier when we went home from Oak Ridge than I've ever been in my life, [laughter] because we had to live in, like, a motel room, because the GIs had housing, but it was single housing. It wasn't married housing, and so, we stayed in a motel like thing and couldn't cook. So, we had to eat in the cafeteria and it was food that they'd put out and it stayed there until it was gone. It might be there three days, ... and there were cockroaches all over the place and it was sickening and I didn't eat for a month and I was skinny when I went home. It was not nice. I was only there a month.

SI: Was your husband an enlisted man or an officer?

MB: Enlisted man. He was a corporal, ... T-5, as far as he ever got.

SI: Could you see a difference between how Army officers and their families lived and how enlisted men lived?

MB: We were never around Army officers. ... There may have been officers there at the plant, but ... I think it was just GIs, just plain, old enlisted men. ... As I say, there was no Army base, so, there was no PX, there was no officers' club, there was no anything. We were all just living on our own, and so, I didn't see any of that. I would never have made it with an Army officer husband, never. [laughter] I'm too uppity.

SI: I was wondering if conditions were poor in general or if it was because officers had this and the enlisted men only had this.

MB: No. That was nothing. I had no experience with that, and, at Oak Ridge, I never saw anybody. I mean, we were there a month and it was pretty yucky. [laughter] We went into a football game ... in Knoxville one Saturday afternoon, for something to do, because Bill wasn't busy either. They had him sweeping up the floors and things. That's what they were doing with him, just to put him to do something, and we stayed and had dinner at a cafeteria. ... Then, we couldn't get on the bus back to Oak Ridge, because there was such a crowd of people that you were crowded out. ... There was no line getting on, ... just you couldn't get on. We didn't think we were going to get back to Oak Ridge. So, we hitchhiked, dumb, [laughter] but we got a ride to somewhere near Oak Ridge. I don't know where it was. Who knows? We got put out in the middle of nowhere, in the dark. I don't remember how we got to Oak Ridge. I just remember being put out in the dark and standing there and waiting. Somebody else must have picked us up, but, I mean, that's the only time I ever hitchhiked. ... I'd almost forgotten about that.

SI: I just have one more question about Decatur. Were there any kind of security procedures that you had to go through? Were there guards? Did they tell you not to do certain things?

MB: You weren't supposed to discuss what went on in the plant. I know that. I mean, even the civilians, who didn't know what they were doing, weren't supposed to discuss it, and I don't know whether they did or didn't. I mean, we never, socially, talked about what we were doing in the plant at all, I mean, even just to say, "I'm doing reports," or, "I'm working in the lab." We didn't talk about it. It was pretty secret, really. That's why I was so surprised when those men would talk in front of me, but it was impressed on everybody. I mean, there were the signs all around, you know, about loose lips and stuff like that. I don't remember guards. I know there were, they had to be, but I don't remember them. It wasn't something that stood out in my life. I remember a lot more; I think, now, it's terrible. I just see no reason for what we're going through. [laughter]

SI: Before we move out of World War II, do you guys have any other questions?

ML: Was it a strain between you and your husband, him not being able to tell you about what was going on or anything like that?

MB: No, no. I tell you, we accepted security and secrecy. I mean, it was something that wasn't forced on us, really. It was just something you knew you had to do. We'd seen enough of what went on in Britain and all, and, you know, Dunkirk and all that stuff and [the] occupation in France. [Editor's Note: Dunkirk refers to the rescue of French and British soldiers from German-occupied France in 1940.] We got news out about stuff. ... That's what I say; our whole life was

different. Everything about your life was different. You just didn't live the same way, just not because it was somebody standing outside, going to do something to you if you goofed, but just because that's the way it was. You wanted to win that war. You felt you had to win that war, that your whole life was at stake if you didn't. I mean, we felt really threatened. Even though there's a whole ocean in-between, we still felt threatened. I won't say I was afraid, but you felt threatened, ... if you [can] understand the difference between that. I mean, I didn't cower and not do things. I lived the same as [always], but you had some restrictions and you accepted the restrictions, because you felt they were necessary. I guess I feel like it's not necessary to tap everybody's telephone right now, [laughter] and, of course, ... back then, I don't know that they did any of that stuff. I don't think, technically, that you could do the things that you can do now. Technology has changed the world, too, completely. ... I thought of, when my mother would talk, how the world had changed from when she was born in 1893 until she died in '82. She died the same year I graduated from college, and I think of the changes in her life, and then, I look at the changes in my life and they're even almost greater, in lots of ways, the differences. The fact that I have two new knees and I'm walking around the way I am, ... with no difficulty, they're like my own, they're better than my own, ... it's amazing. ...

SI: After Oak Ridge, your husband was sent back to Columbia.

MB: Yes, and then, we lived at home, with his parents. [laughter] ... That was a joy. They were wonderful people. They thought it, but they must have bitten their tongues bloody, because they never criticized, even when I [was pregnant]. Bill wouldn't tell his folks that I was pregnant, because they ... wanted him to get his degree so badly and they thought, if I had a baby, he wouldn't get his degree, but, with the GI Bill, it was possible. So, they never said a word, but I know they felt it. [laughter] Yes, they were wonderful.

JJ: How long did you live with them?

MB: A year, and then, we went back after he graduated from college, because he couldn't get a job and we lived with them five months, with a two-year-old. [laughter] If you have two-year-olds, you know what that is. ... I don't know whether my kids are interested in my story, but I had to tell it, because, once I die, they'll never get it, and I'd love to have my mother's story and I know there's no way to get it.

SI: Is there any of your volunteer work that you would like to talk about?

MB: Well, I started out with volunteer work in the church, you know, teaching Sunday school, and then, ... Girl Scouts, because my Girl Scouts, we always had to have projects and we used to go a settlement house in Cincinnati. ... That was an interesting thing, because the girls were all from a middle-class, bedroom suburb and they went into downtown Cincinnati and [worked] with kids, both black and white, and one of the questions that came up is, "Why are the black children dressed so well and the poor [white] children are in rags?" and I said, "Because they're not allowed to live any place where they spend money on rent." ... You know, I mean, it was just a learning experience for the kids. ... When I went to Cleveland, we were only there two years, I started working in a settlement house, over somewhere, but we moved. So, I let that go, and then, when I got to California, it's the first time I ever had all my kids, well, I had two of my

kids, in school all the time, and my oldest was in nursing school. So, I had a free day. I didn't have a kid home for lunch, I didn't have a kid around all day. So, all my volunteer work was what I did between when the kids went to school and when they came home. I never did stuff outside my family's needs, but I started working for a settlement house in San Pedro, [California], and did a nursery school there. In fact, I won a volunteer of the year award for LA, one of seven people in the whole LA area for that. ... We had a completely volunteer-run nursery school, for kids who were not eligible for Head Start. [Editor's Note: Head Start is a government program that focuses on assisting preschool-aged children from low-income families.] Their income was just a little too high for Head Start, and then, we did tutoring. I took a whole bunch of kids from Palos Verdes High, which is a wealthy, wealthy high [school], over to San Pedro, to almost an inner city school, to tutor, which changed [student views], I've found out since. One of the gals I took over there, I'm in a prayer group with now, and she told me what an impression that made on her. ... They had what they called share-a-trip, where a family would take a child from over there; ... this was all run by the welfare department, because, in the '60s, the welfare department had money. ... They would take a child with them to the beach or to the museum or whatever they took their own kids [to], they'd take this child with them, to give them experiences outside. Anyway, I got real active in that kind of stuff here, and I went East and I couldn't find anything to do. So, I read the newspapers and what I got into was [being] a nursing home visitor, and recreation, I ... did a lot of work with, and then, I got into old people and I had old people of my own, my mother and my in-laws and my husband's relatives. ... I got into church work, outside the local church, into Presbytery, and that was also [going] into senior citizen homes and stuff like that. Then, I went back to school and I started working for the church, and that wasn't volunteer, but I had to cut out the volunteer work. Well, when we retired and Bill died, I thought, "Well, okay, what am I going to do?" and my paper, one of my papers, two of my papers, were on social movements and social change. I did one on the gay rights movements, early gay rights movements, and then, I did another one on ... homosexuality and the Presbyterian Church, because, boy, it's been a big fight for years and years and years. ... The reason I got into that was that I was doing a senior honors paper; I know I'm off volunteer work.

SI: No, that is fine.

MB: I'll get there. I always go around. My husband had a fit, because I always went around the block talking, but I was doing this paper on clergy wives and I used a group of churches from my presbytery. ... I interviewed the wife and the pastor and there were three of the pastors that were divorced. So, I went to visit one of them, and he's sitting there and I asked him about how come he was divorced, what expectations the church had had for his wife, did that have anything to do with it? He looks at me and he says, "I'm gay." Okay, [for people of] my age, this is something you don't know anything about, you don't talk about it, don't know about. Well, I liked this man. I'd been on a committee with him and I knew him real well and I thought, "Hmm," and so, he gave me a bunch of books to read. ... So, I wrote this paper on the gay movement and the Presbyterian Church. Well, when we retired, I wanted something to do and, being a church-minded person, I said, "Jesus was good to the lepers," and I said, "Who's [the] lepers in our society today?" and I said, "It's people with AIDS, gay people with AIDS." So, it took me about two years to find a volunteer job, that I could get at. There were jobs. You could volunteer up in Hollywood, but that's too far. So, finally, I got into hospice work, which I enjoyed. I had been

through a lot of death and dying stuff with my family and it was something, being with dying people was comfortable for me, and so, I thought, "Well, this is where I need to go." Well, I finally got assigned to a young man with AIDS in a home over in Long Beach, which was a reasonable distance, and he died not too long after I [met him]. He was from Kenya and he was the sweetest man I've ever met. He was just a doll, and so, then, I got assigned to a woman and she had had a terrible life, terrible life. ... She'd been abused by her husband, or her live-in, I don't know which, and had left him and he went and murdered her sister's children. I mean, ... she was a sad case, and so, I was her friend ... until she died. Well, then, they decided, the hospice group I was working with decided, why didn't I be "Grandma" for the house? So, the best job I have ever had is working with people with AIDS. ... I'd go over for lunch, one day a week, and then, anybody that needed to go to the doctor or go to the store or whatever, or just to go on an outing, to ride around in a car or something, I was "Grandma." ... I'd sit with them and hold their hand while they died. You know, I mean, ... it was sad, sad, sad, and I've never written about it. I should. ... To see some of them who had been alienated from their families for years, and then, see a reconciliation, that was ... heartrending, and then, I had to quit that after six years, because, [in] the first place, [with] the new drugs, they didn't need me anymore. Nobody's dying. I used to go over and there was somebody dead every week, you know, practically, and so, I had to quit and go on to something else. ... I've done a lot of work in the church. I was chair of ... synod council, which is all of Southern California, Southern California down into Orange County, before Orange County. No, it's got Orange County. It has all of Southern California.

JJ: Around what year was your AIDS work, your work in the hospice?

MB: AIDS work? ... I got an award for that, too. I worked for them from, let's see, Bill died in '89, and so, I'd say about '92 or '93 through, for six years, ... '93 or so, and I still do hospice on-call work. I was on call yesterday, didn't get called, but where I go out and sit, to give a caregiver a respite, go and sit with people. ... I did bereavement work for a hospice, which was okay for awhile, but, I don't know, you grow out of a volunteer job. You can only do it for so long and, right now, I work in a food pantry downtown, which I absolutely love. ... A big step in my life was three years ago. I went to a study retreat the Presbyterians have. I just went to that last week here. I've gone ... since '92, I think. I call it my "spiritual fix" for the year. I'm really not very religious. I am a poor person for that, but I do believe in social justice and I was going to a church on the hill, Presbyterian church, and I'd been ... a member there four years in the '60s and eighteen years, no, seventeen years, now, after we retired. ... I can't live that life, with the wealthy. I just can't live the culture. I'm wealthy, I guess, but I can't be comfortable with people who are not worried about the poor people and injustice. ... I was getting to the point where; well, I have to say that, unfortunately, I think, with religion, the more older you get and the more educated you get, the more [of a] problem you have with religion, organized religion. ... So, I knew this church down[town], Immanuel Church, down on Wilshire, right in the middle of Koreatown, and it's half Hispanic, Spanish-speaking, and half English, and it's all one church. It's not two separate churches and they are very involved in the city, extremely involved in the city. ... I started, after this retreat, started on "the Artist's Way." I don't know if you've ever heard of it, but I highly recommend it. It's a woman who's a writer who did it, and practically everybody I know has been through the Artist's Way, but I call it my "twelve-step program to creativity." ... It's an exercise that makes you look at the things, [like] when you say,

"I'm not good enough;" why? You are good enough, and to look at the things that you've not done in your life, that you make lists of, "What I would like to have done, but never did." I changed churches and [now] go downtown. It's just ... I had been sitting there and I knew this one downtown was good and ... doing the things I believed in. So, I went, and I go on the train. It takes me two hours each way [laughter] and I love it. They have a food pantry and I work in the food pantry one day a week. I'm limited. ... I will never be on another committee again, or on another board. I've decided, "I don't like that, I'm old enough, I don't have to do it." So, I was looking for something and I love going to the food pantry and passing out food and seeing the people, and the church has just become a member of the New Sanctuary Movement. [Editor's Note: Churches and other institutions involved in the sanctuary movement offer shelter to undocumented immigrants in the United States.] ... We've taken in a woman, undocumented woman, who's a member of our church, who was going to be deported and she's living in our church now, and we just took her in. ... As soon as I have two minutes, I've been gone, out of town, and going [to be traveling] some more, but the pastor suggested that maybe I might like to work with her on her English. ... I said, "Gee, that sounds fun. I might learn Spanish and she might learn English," but I just love it. I did that. Then, I took that apartment. I rented this furnished apartment in New York City for a month and went and lived in the city and I had an absolute ball. ... I've just done all these little things that I never thought I would ever do and it's been really fun. ... Right now, all I'm doing in volunteering, I'm a member of [the] League of Women Voters and I do some voter education stuff there and I do the food pantry and I'm on a committee; we had this gorgeous cathedral-like church with three hundred members. It used to be a big, all-white, wealthy church. It isn't anymore, and, in order to stay alive and doing something, we've got to get some money. We have a Korean congregation that pays us enough rent to keep the building open, but they're leaving us, and so, I'm on a planning taskforce that's looking to develop our parking lot and stuff, with something that'll bring income in, so [that] we can stay open. So, that's interesting and I hope to maybe work with this woman on Spanish, but I've really cut way back. ... I belong to a public policy group. I have a quilting group that makes baby quilts for a hospital and stuff like that.

Jl: It seems that you have done volunteer work your whole life. Did you get into more of the social justice movement after your husband passed?

MB: Yes. ... I think the fact that I was working at the settlement house, that's where my eyes really began to get opened to poverty, to the problems that we have, and the wealth where I was living at Palos Verdes. ... Then, when we moved back East, I got into nursing home [work] and I got into some of the really skuzzy nursing homes, I mean, really bad, really bad, and looking at why this happens, why some are so bad, people are just warehoused. ... That got into the whole aging thing, but I did all that stuff, and, as I worked in those things, I ... began to see the causes behind [them]. ... Also, as my kids were gone, ... I had worked in the city three-and-a-half years, with all the churches in New York City, Northern New Jersey and Newark, New Jersey. So, I saw what went on in the inner city, I mean, and I went to meetings where we'd see these things happen. ... Oh, I went to Beijing, to the Women's Conference in Beijing, [the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995], and I learned a lot there about worldwide social issues. ... It's all well and good to have a food pantry and feed people, but what do you do about getting them jobs and housing, and so [that] they can feed themselves? you know, that kind of thing. ... I've marched for gays; for the church, I've marched many times. ... In fact, my husband was not

[accepting at first]. When [we had] my graduation party, I invited my gay minister friend and he'd bring a friend and Bill, he said, ... "That's wrong," and I said, "Why?" He said, "It's just wrong," but, after he met some of the people I knew, then, he changed his mind about it, too, and then, he died before he ever got a chance [to act upon it]. He was just getting good when he died, just getting good. I had him educated by that time, but, no, I've done most of my real advocacy stuff since Bill died, not that he wouldn't have let me do it, but it's just the way life went. ... One thing led to another. ... I was free to do things that I really wasn't free to do so much when I had a husband to leave home, but I went to a social justice conference, women, what did they call it? "Women in Economic Justice" in El Paso, for a week. ... Well, and another thing, that Bill and I did together, ... our church built houses in Tijuana and, boy, you go down there in the, what do they call them? the *colonias*, and you see what's going on, and in the *maquiladoras* and all this stuff, and Bill did that. We took a mission trip down there, of church people, to see what the kids were doing. We went and helped with [the project]. I cooked for Easter. That was another very satisfying thing. I cooked for the Easter project for our kids at church for about, I think, six years, but I couldn't do that [anymore]. That's from before dawn until way after dark, and your legs give out. After awhile, you can't do it, [laughter] but, no, he was coming along. He was coming along, but, after he died, I had some insurance money and ... some things, money to invest, and he had taken care of that kind of money. I wasn't smart enough to do it, I guess, but, anyway, I had to do something with it. I couldn't throw it away, and so, I went and I finally found a broker I could trust and I couldn't trust his, because his was in Boston and I lived here. ... I said, "I can't trust anybody I can't look in the eye." So, I got the money and I went in and, in our conversation, of course, they want to know, you know, what your goals are. I said, "I really don't believe in capitalism." [laughter] It isn't that I don't believe, I do believe in capitalism, but not what we've got in this country now and the greediness, and I fight with the guys all the time that want me to invest in big companies. ... I said, "No big companies, just little companies. I want to help the little guy." So, I don't know if that answers the [question], who I am, but that's who I am. [laughter]

SI: Have you been involved in the micro loan movement that has evolved?

MB: I learned about that first when I was in; I was a stewardship consultant, which are mission funding consultants, when I was working for the Presbyterian Church, and I went to an ecumenical, forget what they call it, but, anyway, they have it every year. It's speakers and stuff ... about being a good steward and stuff. ... I went to this one in Florida and we had somebody who was in the micro loan business. It was Women's World Bank, was what he was with, and I thought, "Boy, that's what I believe in. I think it's the way," and then, this conference I went to in El Paso, our main speaker was a woman economist, Hazel; can't think of her name. ... She's the kind that doesn't own a car and has all her clothes out of a second-hand store and all that kind of stuff, and who definitely doesn't believe in these huge corporations. ... She was very influential in how I think about the whole thing, but she talked about all this money, the money funds, that are, ... she says, "Sloshing around the world." They are not making any goods, they're not regulated, but they slosh around and make people wealthy. ... Then, when I went to Beijing, I learned all about the globalization of the economy and stuff going on in the world and began to put things together. That was 1995.

SI: Do you have any other questions?

MB: I probably put much more on here than you want. [laughter]

SI: No, not at all. I like it when we do interviews with people who can tell us about a variety of things, everything from World War II to the gay rights movement.

MB: Well, that's my life, that's my life, and I believe in movements and I'm really sorry that we seem to not be doing anything.

SI: When the Civil Rights movement was coming to full bloom, were you doing anything? What did you think of it?

MB: Well, I ... remember very clearly, ... I have always been sympathetic. ... Yes, everybody's prejudiced. I mean, I don't care who you are, ... you look at the world through the glasses of your experience, but I was in a church in Cleveland. ... I think I was probably doing the dinner that night for the presbytery. This was between '64 and '66, and, I heard them arguing this, ... you know, how the church feels about the Civil Rights movement, and then, our minister got up and he said, "Ministers have no business marching for Civil Rights." That's the first time I think I had ever questioned a minister and would have left a church, because of it ... I believed you put up with whatever ministers believed, but that statement, to me, was heretical. How in the world, if you believe in Jesus Christ, or don't, at least know anything about his teachings, you could possibly say that? ... This thing I just went to this last week, we had a man talking about the church and ... why the church is dying and he said, "You're not supposed to be these big mega things that make everybody happy. Jesus had twelve followers. ... You know, this was a minority. Christians have been a minority group forever, but justice is not a popular thing, and that's what you're here for, is to do justice." So, that's what I believe in and I tried to write what I believe in, and it's very hard. [laughter]

SI: Is that the only book you produced or did you produce others?

MB: No, that's just me. ... I'm very proud of that.

SI: It is very well done.

MB: In fact, something that's very interesting, I only had twenty-five copies printed and it cost about thirty dollars a copy and I figured I could afford that and I gave one to each of my children, my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren. ... I was in the hospital when it came, before Christmas, or I was in rehab with my knees. ... My daughter had a copy of it and she's a nurse and all her nurses wanted to read it and it went the whole rounds of her nurses. While I was in rehab, it went the rounds, several of the nurses and things read it. The book that Judy had is now making the rounds of her husband's factory, the people he works with. It's gone to all kinds of people, [who] are reading it that don't really know me and I don't know. I said, "I wonder why they want to read it," because I'm not a writer. I've had a terrible time with writing my whole life, ... but I enjoyed doing this. This was fun and I'm just amazed. ... Well, I had fifteen copies I gave out. ... I think I had nine copies left. This is the only one I've got right now. They're all out amongst everywhere and I'm fascinated by the fact that somebody wants to

read it, but I did write; I mean, give me a minute. ... I did it in sections. ... The first part is about my ancestors. I mean, that's about all the stories I know about my forebears, which aren't that many. So, I have "Ancestor Tales" as part one. Then, I have, "Stories of My Life," and I started out with this one on life then and now, how things are so different than when I was growing up, and have a lot to do with how the kids are today compared to what [we were like]. We had imaginations. ... Then, my life, which is, more or less, what I did, school years, marriage, but, then, I've stuck in here, "Reflections on World War II," which is what I gave you. Then, I have, "Mary Lou on Wives in the Corporation." I'm, again, [talking about] corporations, and it's changed since I was a corporate wife. I mean, it's completely different. Then, I wrote a section on over the years, like Christmas, ... that kind of stuff, Christmas celebrations. I fell in love with cars. I have a Suburban. I don't need a Suburban, but I love it. I wrote a thing on our pets and vacations and Christmas. Then, one on what I call "my strays." I've collected people over the years. ... I said a "stray," ... that's not a derogatory term. A "stray" is somebody who has needs that nobody is fulfilling and helping them out, and I've had "strays" up to my ears. Another one is, "Nighttime Adventures." Then, I have reflections on my life, "My Faith Journey," "Thoughts on Death and Dying," because I have very definite [ideas]. I've even had articles in the paper about the work I've done with that kind of thing. "Marriage," "How I Became a Liberal," "Some Thoughts on Self-Esteem;" a friend of mine, a friend of Bill's, too, he and his wife were our best friends. His wife died of a brain tumor quite young. He remarried and his daughters are in San Diego. He lived in Dallas and he called me one day and said I had to do something about Carol, "She's your goddaughter. You've got to take care of her. She is forty years old, pregnant, unmarried, guy who didn't want anything to do with the thing." ... So, for a long time, I would go down and see her, every couple weeks. I'd drive down, take her out to lunch, didn't do anything for her, except just hold her hand, and her dad could not understand why she had low self-esteem. ... I had low self-esteem. I still, sometimes, have monsters come at me, but not much anymore, but I wrote that to him, because women in general don't have very good opinions of themselves, or didn't. Now, maybe they're getting better, I don't know, but even the ones now, I'm not too sure about. ... So, I wrote that to him, because, whether it's real or not, the things you imagine get you here. "Thoughts on Moving," because we moved a lot; I moved all my life and I never had family, ... and that's different. I mean, I used to think I was deficient, because I didn't have family. ... Then, I wrote some stories. I wrote one on hawk hunting on Mulholland Drive. When we lived here in the '60s, my son was in junior high and he kept a hawk and trained a hawk to fly to him, and going and getting the hawks was exciting. Then, I have one that I'd like to publish, but I can't seem to get it together, "Grambo's Road Trip." It was a nine-thousand-mile trip around the country, on back roads, camping, and it took forty-two days and I camped over half of the days. The rest of them, I stayed with people or stayed in motels. ... I celebrated my seventy-ninth birthday, by myself, in a campground in Texas, which I put my picture ... in the thing, celebrating with a scotch. ... Everybody thought that was kind of strange, that I did that, at my age, but I travel alone a lot and I like it. [Editor's Note: Ms. Busch points to a picture of herself in her book.] There I am, that's my seventy-ninth birthday, in front of my Suburban in a campground in Texas, drinking to myself, [laughter] and then, I wrote about my stay in New York City. ... When I was in New York, I had about forty people I sent emails to, to tell them what was going on. They were interested in how I managed in New York City. ... So, there's things. There are stories in here as well. ... I conclude, because my granddaughter; I cry every time I read it, but, ... for her college essay, she's a real brain and ... she should be a writer, but she's not, she wrote an essay called the "Crazy Quilt,"

where she talks about me and my unique life and how I am one of a kind and that she hopes she'll be like me. ... That's my granddaughter and that's her quilt and that's what I closed with. "Because," she writes, "as I approach a time in my life when I face decisions as to where I want to go, I could be just one kind of person living in this world with blinders over my eyes, but, looking at my grandmother, I think it would be so much more fun to be all different kinds of people, all at the same time. I can discover a cure for the common cold," she was a biology/English major, of all things, "and, in my spare time, write the great American novel. I just need to remember that being unique is not a curse, but the best way to enjoy life. As I curl up in the quilt my grandmother made for me, I'm blinded by the colors and intricate stitches, but also warmed by the love that flows through it." ... Then, she writes about my life, ... what I did and how I changed over my life, and I said, "Yes, that's pretty neat, pretty neat stuff." You don't need affirmations, but it's very nice to get them. ...

SI: What did you have to say in here about being a corporate wife and that role?

[TAPE PAUSED]

MB: ... [Editor's Note: Ms. Busch reads from her book.] *In writing my memoirs, I've tried to remember the facts, as I see them, of my life. I see pictures and people. There are many stories about these, some of which I have included and others did not seem important enough to detail, but, as I write, I begin to see patterns and influences that have shaped the person I am today. I've been writing about Park Forest, [Illinois], and ended with the 'Organization Man.' That made me realize how much the corporation and its ethic have influenced my life* and I go on, the Depression, and then, Bill, my husband was a salesman and our generation and his parents' generation, no matter what, you were loyal to the person you worked for. In fact, Bill's father worked for National Biscuit, [now Nabisco]. We couldn't eat anything but National Biscuit crackers. ... Bill, he was faithful to [American Cyanamid]. He worked for them his whole working life. He never changed jobs and he worked his tail off. It was the first thing in his life, and it got me a little ticked off. ... I told him, at one point, I'd rather have him than the money. *Women, generally, did not work outside the home for pay. Although it was acceptable to work in one of the pink-collar positions, teaching, nursing or secretarial work, their real job was to support their husbands and put ... themselves second* and I had a course with Rose Beth Cantor in "Men and Women of the Corporation," which was very [good], but Bill, as I said, Bill's job and his well-being was always the most important thing. *As a corporate wife, I was expected to pull up stakes and cheerfully move across the country whenever the corporation said, 'Move,' and Bill got mad once because one of his salesmen, when he was manager, would not move, because his wife wouldn't move, and he thought that was terrible* all right, and I was checked out. When we lived here in California, in order for Bill to get a job ... as manager in New York City, which was a promotion, his boss and his wife came out and they took me and Bill on a trip, a business trip, and I was scrutinized. It was my test. I had to behave myself or else, and we were vetted. ... I was told, we went to an ink convention, who to cultivate. His boss would tell you, "You've got to go see this, this and this person," not who you wanted to. Other people said, "Have fun; that's what this is for," but no, no, no. ... In fact, one of the salesmen's wives was told to wear gloves and how to act and everything else, and I said, "Men had to conform to the corporate image," I mean, for example, the dress code in the office. They were not allowed to leave their desk without a jacket. Things are different now, ... and then, one event, one

definitive event, when I stopped being a corporate wife and began to go my own way. We were at *carnevale*. *We were invited to carnevale, a fancy, pre-Lenten festival dinner, by one of Bill's best customers. This was a midweek affair on a day I had a major paper and a midterm exam scheduled. There was no question; I had to go. I had to make my arrangements. I stayed up all night typing the paper and I was allowed to take the exam early in the morning, instead of at regular class time. I got in my car to go meet Bill and discovered I had a very low tire. Well, I had to get that taken care of. Then, we parked the car at a motel up on the end of the Turnpike, where we weren't staying. We were going to Westchester and left my car. I hoped it would still be there when I got back. ... I was stressed before we arrived. I was exhausted and made a decision not to have a drink. Alcohol loosens my tongue and I was afraid I'd say something unacceptable. I was greeted by our host's wife, who inquired what was new with me. I replied I had gone back to college to finish my education. Her reply was a disparaging, 'Why would you ever want to do a thing like that?' Well, the whole night went from bad to worse and the boss asked me to dance and it was a Latin American tune. ... There's no message between my head and my feet that tells me what to do. [laughter] I said, "I can't dance to that." He says, "I'll teach you." So, he stood me up, beside the table, and I could not make my feet do what he said. I was exhausted, miserable, and I started to cry. Well, you don't cry at business functions. Howard sat me down and put his arm around my shoulders and said, "Don't worry, it's all right. We're all family here." I would like to have said, "I'm not your family," but I sat there. He didn't know how to handle the situation, so, he left me alone. Well, then, on our way to our hotel room, about two AM, I said to Bill, "I'm so tired. I shouldn't be here." He replied, "But, it's your duty." I can't remember what I said, but I blew my stack." I just absolutely exploded, and, from then on, he asked me if I wanted to go to things and it's just women were just so put down in the corporate world that I just couldn't stand it. I've often analyzed how multinational corporations rule the world and influence both governments and lives of individuals in many, ... usually not such good ways, but I never before looked at how it affected me personally. ... That's an example of the kind of [thing that went on], and it wasn't anybody's fault. This is the way things were. I mean, this was the social norm and some people never [overcame it]. I mean, a lot of my friends said they'd never do what I did. Well, they were different. They were brought up differently and different and I just was brought up the way I was, and I internalized all of the stuff and did it to myself. I can't blame Bill. I mean, that's ridiculous. I did, at some times, but that's not fair. ... I'm just, against big companies that treat people like dirt, and that's what they do. People are let go. I mean, everybody in my family has had bad experiences with jobs, of being let go and one thing or another, no good. ... Okay, anything else?*

SI: We could probably sit here all day and ask you questions, but you have given us a great interview. We have covered a lot of ground and you were very thoughtful in your answers.

MB: ... Well, thank you.

SI: Most people do not dig below the surface like you have.

MB: Well, ... I've always been, my whole life, somebody who asked questions, "Why?" and I think that's why I was a science major, because I want to know why things work, and then, when I got interested in things other than science, but more of the social [sciences], humanities, I just loved sociology. Sociology was just [great]. I can't say how much I enjoyed going back to

school, and I got along with the kids. ... Well, I was in my late fifties, ... but I got along with the kids just like I was a kid, and the one thing that I have to say [is], I've never learned to play. I found that out at one of these conferences [I] went to. ... I don't know how to play, but I'm learning. [laughter] I'm only eighty-four, yes, got a ways to go. ... My life has been good, I have to say, the whole thing. It's had its hard times, but, then, life has hard times. That's just you take the good and the bad. You can't ignore it.

SI: Thank you very much.

MB: You're welcome. Thank you; this has been fun.

SI: Good, I am glad.

MB: Oh, yes, any time I can talk about myself, I'm [glad]. People don't listen to you, sometimes.

SI: For now, this will conclude our interview with Mary Lou Norton Busch.

MB: Okay, and you may have these if they're any help to you. ... I figured we were going to stick more to World War II, so, I crossed out the part ... that's about Bill. ... As I say, most of the women I know, ... I am unique, I am different than anybody else. ... I don't find very many people that are like me, that worry about the things I worry about. They go on and live life and just don't worry, and I worry about them all.

JJ: I feel like a lot of interviews I have read or participated in, when they are with women, they tend to focus on what their husbands did or what people they knew did. I enjoyed today's interview.

MB: ... I'll tell you, being a widow for eighteen years, Bill died in '89, eighteen years, I've learned a lot, I mean, being on my own. See, I never had a chance. The thing that I say in, "Marriage," is, to me, an ideal marriage would be where people have a chance before they get married to know who they are, and I never knew who I was. I was always somebody's wife, somebody's kid, somebody's mother, something, never me, and, once I went back to school, ... Bill said I got uppity, [laughter] but I was exposed to all those women sociology teachers, loved them. ... Then, this [writing a memoir] has made me look. ... It's a very good exercise. I went to an Elderhostel on writing memoirs and that started me thinking and it took awhile to get a format, even to get a title, but to see my own book, with gold lettering on it, my name on it, oh. I read a lot, mostly junk. ...

JJ: It is quite a feat.

SI: Yes. Very few people have written their memoirs.

JJ: Or a lot of people start them, but never finish them.

MB: ... I've told my son-in-law, my oldest daughter's husband; he's a tremendous storyteller. He tells the most wonderful stories about his family, growing up and everything. I said, "David, ... you don't have to write it, but record it." So, I bought him a recorder and, sometimes, ... I don't know how often he uses it, but, whenever I'm around, we plug in the recorder and put them down, so that the kids have something. I would love to know stories about my dad's life, and he wouldn't talk about it. He was so embarrassed that he had, really, been abandoned that he would not. There was a family that he [spoke of]. I always heard about ... the McCormicks and I knew they were farmers and I thought, "Who were they?" I never knew who they were. They were people he lived with. ... One time, I asked my mother, after he had died, and she said, "Oh, he just went up to them, he liked them, and asked them could he live with them?" I mean, you know, a kid. ... His father was an orphan train child. I forgot that. ... His parents came over from Ireland and why, there are many stories about [them]. They were married on the ship on their way over here. Well, evidently, they had a bunch of kids and no money, and so, this man in New York City thought he was doing real good, took the poor kids of New York City and sent them to farmers and families in the West. ... It turned out, I read quite a bit about him and they kept no records on where the kids went. Well, my dad's father was one of those kids, and so, my dad never knew his grandparents. He never knew whether his father's name was really Norton or something else, maybe people he was adopted by or something, you know. ... It was kind of like foster care, ... and they sent these kids out and ... some of them were just cheap labor for people. It was really nasty and, yet, some of it was good. It got them out of the really horrible conditions of New York City. So, Dad would never talk. When I had to do a family tree in school, you know, in grade school, you have to make a family tree, "What the goddamn hell do they want to know that for?" ... Oh, he'd get mad, I can see him yet, and my dad is not one that got mad easy, but he would just ... be furious. So, now, my son's oldest, who is twenty-five, read it. I was out East in June and we sat in a corner. ... My son's kids I don't know very well, and he said, "Grandma, I read your book." I said, "You like it?" "Well, some of it, but some of it, I don't know, wasn't so good," and he wondered why I didn't talk about things that I didn't talk about. He said he didn't feel I talked about my family, my kids and everything. Well, this isn't their story, this is my story, and the whole purpose, of where I came from and how I became the person I am today, he missed that, but, anyway, it was interesting. He read it and ... we had a real good conversation, but I wonder what my great-grandchildren, they're all [young], well, the oldest great-grand is twelve, thirteen, and whether he'll read it, I don't know. He's at a bad age, but the little ones, who knows if they'll ever want it? but I did it anyway.

JJ: This is a beautiful home.

MB: Thank you.

SI: Yes, very nice.

MB: Well, my bedroom is right up here, over the living room, and I could lie in my bed and look at the ocean and the mountains across the bay. ... I said, "I'd like to die in my bed, looking out." My husband died right here in the dining room, ... with the family all around. ... It's too big. God, I've got three bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths. ... I never use this [the dining room table]. We ate at the table Sunday night, for the first time in months and months and months, in a year, maybe. ... My friends have all gotten; since I changed churches, I don't see them, but I

found out that my friends, I love them dearly and we love to see each other, but they don't care about the same things I do. So, they think I'm a little nuts, but that's all right. I'm unique. I keep telling myself that. [laughter]

SI: Yes, you are.

MB: I keep telling myself that, and that it's okay. I always thought, if you were different, there was something wrong with you, but that's not it. I'm so pleased with what Douglass [College] is doing, has been doing, and I hope they can continue it. ... They're in my will and I'm going to take them out if they don't.

JJ: Tell them that.

MB: I have. I've written to the President [of Rutgers University] and he, very condescendingly, wrote me a letter. I didn't like his letter at all, and other people that have written to him and he's written back to didn't like his letter. I know he's got a lot of responsibilities and I know there's a lot of finance problems, but, I'll tell you, there's nothing going to take the place of Douglass. You're not ever going to get it into Rutgers and have it [be the same]. I'm not from Rutgers; I'm from Douglass. ... What they do for women is really, absolutely, amazing to me, now, the opportunities that people have that go there, their leadership stuff and everything. I just love it. ... They're starting on the plan this fall, I found out. I was going to go to the reunion just to hear about what was going on, but we got a good communication from the Dean and it doesn't start until this fall, and until they start it; now, I thought it was awful when, right after I graduated, in '82, they put the faculties together, and that worked out okay, as far as I could tell, but whether this will, ... whether the lip service will come into real [effect], what they do, I don't know, but there are a lot of us that are adamant that it continue. ... I don't care what you say about minorities, whether they're women, blacks, Hispanics, whatever they are, they need a little extra boost, because it's a man's world. ... When I wrote, began to think about things, I said, "Whoever's got the money is the important one in our society. If you look at what success is, it's achievements, usually money, how much money you have ... and we strive for what we can't do." I know it was nice getting a paycheck, when I got a paycheck, and I got a pretty good one, for an old lady. ...

SI: Again, thank you very much.

MB: Oh, I'm glad to do it. I had fun.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Alexander Lehrer 2/27/08
Reviewed by Jessica H. Smith 2/27/09
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/3/09
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 3/6/09
Reviewed by Mary Lou Norton Busch 4/27/09