

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIE GRIFFIN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Kathleen Plunkett: This begins an interview on March 16, 1996 with Marie Griffin, taken in her home in Vermont by Kathleen Plunkett. I guess we can just start by you telling me about your parents.

Marie Griffin: My parents were Martha Picker and Walter Picker. My father was born in Hamburg, Germany. He came to this country at about age thirty-seven. He used to tell stories about Germany after World War I. Residents of Hamburg had to have a wheelbarrow full of money to buy a loaf of bread. We didn't learn 'till much later that my dad never knew his father. Hamburg is a port city with lots of sailors. There's a Sau Pauli district where there are a lot of night clubs, particularly, I understand, before World War II. His mother was Elisabeth Picker. My mother's parents also came from Germany. My grandfather Becker came from Hamburg, also. Because my father knew my grandfather's brother in Hamburg, ... he came to visit the Becker family. And that's how he met my mother. My grandmother Becker came from Bavaria, in southern Germany. My grandparents were married in New York City on January 23, 1894. Later they moved to Union Hill, New Jersey, where they had a hall in which they served meals, sort of catered parties. My grandmother was a fabulous cook. My mother grew up there in Union Hill. The Union Hill business failed, so the family moved to New York City. My mother and one of her sisters had attended business school after graduating from grade school. My mother was very proficient in shorthand and an excellent typist so she was able to get a job. Her sister found a job in accounting. Her older sister and my grandmother lived with a family as household servants. The youngest sister was still in school at that time. When my father and mother were married on March 31, 1918, they lived in New York City in a small apartment. I was born in New York City on February 3, 1919 ... across the street from NYU, which was uptown at that time. My grandfather used to take me to the Bronx Zoo. According to my parents, I don't remember any of this, I could read. My grandpa bought me little cards that said rhinoceros, tiger, and elephant, etc. and I could read all those cards, [laughter] before the age of two. That's the story that was told to me, and I don't know whether it's true or not. [laughter] ... When I was about a year-and-a-half, my sister was about six months, we moved to Hillsdale, New Jersey. My father and mother bought a house there, and my father commuted into New York City. He worked for Noe's as a lamp salesman. I grew up in Hillsdale; it was a real suburban town, about 2,000 people. We had a relatively small piece of property, fifty by 150, I believe. It was a quiet street, a dead end street. We had good friends on the street. The neighbor girl next door, Florence, and the girl at the end of the street, Norine, and two children up on the hill. At the end of the street was a big hill. It was wonderful to play on because it didn't go anywhere. Now it does, of course. It's been built up. Also, there were woods beyond there and a stream. I used to love to go in the woods and play things like Indians, and build camps, clearing out a place in the woods. There was a family of older girls that lived around the corner, and they used to, you know, be helping us. We liked that very much. Then I went to school. ... School was about a mile away, and we came home for lunch. We got out ten minutes early at lunch

time, so we'd have time to walk home and walk back. I think when I got into kindergarten, I could already read. They put me in first grade. I loved school, and I loved to read, and I went to the library. Then in sixth grade, I was reading about labor disputes and we had a teacher named Miss Walker. She was very strict on discipline, and she used to say if the boys or the girls behave better, the better behaved could have more time at recess, or something like that. I felt she was unfair to the girls because when we won, which was often, she'd forget the reward. However, when the boys won, she gave them an extra recess. So I organized a strike. [laughter] That month I got my report card and I had As in everything except deportment, where I had a D. The school decided that I was too big for my britches. They put me in the seventh grade. We got promoted in the middle of the year, so that made me graduate in January instead of in June. Among other things, I like to draw and paint. By some lucky chance, I was not really that good, but I won an honorable mention or a third place award or something for a poster I did. So the art teacher thought I should go to a different school than the high school that was ordinarily used. So I went to Westwood High School, instead of Park Ridge High School, where everybody else went. And I went in the middle of the year. It was a big adjustment. I liked school and I loved to read, so the academics weren't a problem. But, I didn't make friends as quickly as I thought I might. I joined a Girl Scout troop, and I had very good close friends, and I loved being a Girl Scout. I loved going to Girl Scout camp. One summer I went to Camp Andre with girls from all parts of the USA. I also worked on the school paper, sang in the glee club and appeared in plays. I liked drama. When I was a senior, I was in a contest to decide who would be the editor of the school paper. Three contestants each put out an issue, and I was chosen to be the editor. The name of the paper was *The Phoenix*. The mythical phoenix, as you know, rose again from the ashes. Towards the end of the senior year, we went to the Columbia Journalism Conference, and our paper won first in the category for schools like Westwood. So that was pretty special, and the fellow who was assistant editor, who was a good friend, went with me. It was my first big date, we went to see the movie *42nd Street* that night. It was very special. *Lullaby of Broadway* always could bring Hal Fry to mind. What else did I do? I was on the debating team. We never knew until right before the debate whether we would be addressing the stated question positively or negatively. (One year the question was whether radio should be government sponsored.) We used the same facts either way, just emphasized them differently. The depression affected many people. The debate coach supplemented his teacher's salary by ushering at the movies. I didn't go to the junior prom. I was asked by one boy, but he wasn't one of the big wheels, which I seemed to feel wasn't whom I wanted to go with, so I declined. Then when I was asked by somebody else, I felt I couldn't go. But I did go to the senior dance, I think with Halleck. That was fun. I graduated second in the class. We had numerical grades at Westwood High. Mine was ninety-six point three and Elsie Blank's was ninety-six point five, so she was the valedictorian, and I was the salutatorian. I gave the opening address at the graduation. I don't remember much about it, except that it was the 300th anniversary of the Boston Latin School, and I started it off with something about the smell of onion soup pervading the air. [laughter] I don't know why I ever used it, but I've always been eager to use graphic descriptions when I write, and that's what I remember about the speech. I also won the Math prize. Those were the Depression years. In my early years in high school, my father was doing very well, that was when the stock market was booming. He was making, I don't know what exactly, but I had

horseback riding lessons and piano lessons, first with my aunt, then another teacher. We had a car, things were going well. But then ... the company that my father was with went out of business. People don't buy lamps when they can't buy food. Lamps are not something essential. Then he went into business with somebody else, and that business collapsed, too. So my father was unemployed, my sister was diagnosed with osteomyelitis, and there was no health insurance. People who have grown up with some kind of health insurance don't realize what a devastating blow that was because my family didn't have money. My mother borrowed from her sisters. My sister was gravely ill; ... they used maggots on the bone that was affected. That was the new technique to eat away the diseased portion of the bone, and fortunately, she recovered although she still has a scar on her leg. It was no longer easy for us to finance things so ... I looked at Rutgers. It was then New Jersey College for Women. I don't know whether they would have offered me a scholarship, but it didn't seem that we had enough money to do it. Then I got a scholarship of fifty dollars at Bergen Junior College. I went one year. ... The first half of the semester, I thought it was just a great picnic. My grades weren't so good. I worked in the library and I was taking typing and shorthand, as well as academic subjects, because it opened the possibility of a job that women could get, a secretarial job. During my high school years, I was a correspondent for the Westwood, New Jersey newspaper covering school news; I got paid a nickel an inch. In the summer before I went to junior college, I worked at this newspaper. Most of the time I did social news. I did some police work. I did some going to town meetings. I was quite naïve. I went to a meeting one time, and they were discussing garbage. It seemed very stupid to me, and I didn't report it adequately enough. So our story was lacking the most important element of that meeting. I have since learned that garbage is a very important subject. [laughter] Here in Vermont I've been serving on the Household Hazardous Waste task force. Anyway, I ended up the year at the top of my class. I took Spanish. I was on the swim team. I swam, mostly breast stroke in competitions, but I didn't compete too much because I had to go to work. So I worked for the newspaper doing social news, and I worked in the Five and Ten. I think we figured out I got fifty cents an hour. When my sister was ill, I gave her a transfusion and went back to the Five and Ten to work and collapsed on the floor. That was my first and last donation of blood. At the end of the year, our family finances were very bad, and I had to decide what to do. I went into New York to meet with my aunt and ask her if she could loan me money. And she said, "Why don't you go to work instead, and help your parents?" At the time it was quite a blow. Anyway, I went to an employment agency that afternoon. I had an interview for a job as secretary to the advertising manager of a trade journal for the paper industry. And I walked into that interview, and here's this man with all these freckles on his bald head, which struck me funny, so I think I smiled. Anyway, I got this job for fifteen dollars a week. I gave my mother eight dollars. I had to pay transportation from Hillsdale to New York City. At that time, you could have lunch for fifteen cents at Chock Full O' Nuts. You could have orange juice and cream cheese on whole-wheat raisin bread and a cup of coffee, all for fifteen cents. So things were a little cheaper. I worked there, and I decided to go to school at night. I think I also had thought about living with my grandmother, but I decided against that. I was quite young. I was sixteen when I graduated high school, so I was just seventeen [at that time]. I continued my studies at Bergen Junior College by taking courses at night. I only attended night school one year. I had extra bus-fare to get to school after work and back home after school. Also, I had to

eat lunch and supper in New York City. I was also giving my parents eight dollars a week, and my fifteen dollars a week salary just did not stretch. I recall one cold night when I traded a pack of cigarettes for a scarf. It was cold, and I had a walk of about a mile from the bus station to my home.

KP: How did your parents feel about your decision to work, to help out?

MG: Well, they needed the money and children helping out was part of their upbringing. My father was working in the WPA. Finally, he got a job in a restaurant, washing dishes and cleaning up. When my sister recovered, she went back to school; she had lost a year of school. My mother decided she would go to work. She worked in New York City at the branch office of a North Carolina hosiery firm. And then I gave eight dollars at home. My sister finished school, and also went to work and we began to do pretty well. I worked at ... the trade paper, *The Pulp and Paper News*. The editor of the paper used to go to Artists and Writers on 40th Street. We were on 40th Street & Broadway, right catty-corner across from the Met. And Artists and Writers was on 40th Street. That was a pub. The editor drank, and I sometimes had to go to the Artists and Writers and bring him back, or at least remind him that he ought to come back. In the meanwhile, my boss was stealing the business from him. So the situation was not what I thought it should be. The other thing that bothered me was that he wrote columns for the paper. He would give me the *Wall Street Journal* and other magazines, and then I would write these articles for him. So I decided to look for another job. I got a job in Associated Aviation Underwriters. I was using an electric typewriter, and I typed policies. I was a policy writer and no typing mistake on policies were permitted because they were legal documents. It was better paying, and it was downtown on John Street. After a while, I did pretty well. Then there was another girl in the department, and we went out a lot. My work suffered a little; one day the employment manager said to me, "You know you're a bright girl, too many late evenings are not necessary." I decided to restrict my evenings out and, as a result, received commendations for my work. I went on blind dates with her. It was a date to skate on a small pond, even when the ice was cracking. It would be sort of wavy. Later Hillsdale built a big pond, and I would skate a lot. I also went roller-skating in rinks. I loved to skate. I also liked to dance. To return to my date, we were going to go skating, and this gal arrived with her date and my blind date. She had so many clothes on that she could hardly stand up. She was a short girl. When we got to Lake Sebago, my blind date was a good skater, so we went out and skated way across the lake. But this gal stayed in the house there and kept warm. She couldn't move because she had so many sweaters and jackets on. Then there was the war.

I forgot to tell you that when I was a senior there was an essay contest sponsored by the American Legion. I wrote about World War I and those who profited from the war--the arms manufacturers, the armament companies. I concluded my paper with Robert W. Service's poem, "When our children's children shall talk of war as a madness that cannot be; when we thank our God for the grief that is past and blazon from sea to sea. In the name of the dead, the banner of peace, that will be victory." I won the medal for my essay. I've always been sort of anti-war since and all the young men were being drafted including junior underwriters. I was twenty-one. They decided that I could be a junior underwriter. That was quite an experience for me. I

studied insurance law and aircraft designs, so that I could perform my job effectively. I was privileged to smoke at my desk. That was one the perks. [laughter] Now I don't smoke, but everyone smoked at that point. You know, we weren't aware of the dangers of smoking. And one of the things that the GIs gave to the French, as they helped to free them, and progress across France, was cigarettes. So I had the job. Part of my job was to meet with the insurance brokers. My boss, who was the senior underwriter, said, "Now you're young, and you're going to go to cocktail parties which these brokers attend. Just remember you're working for Associated. You have to be on your toes. So take a drink and put it down. Look like you're drinking, put it down, and when they give you another one, take another one, smile. Just don't drink them." [laughter] That was good advice; I've followed it frequently. That's where I was working when I met Wes. I was the first woman underwriter on John Street, a street where numerous large insurance companies had their headquarters. When I became an underwriter, it was decided I should sign my name "M. E. Picker," instead of "Marie E. Picker." This worked okay until I began receiving phone calls. Irate brokers had to be convinced that I was the underwriter and not Mr. M. E. Picker's secretary. After several such episodes, it was decided I should sign my name, "Marie E. Picker." When I got married in 1944, Associated decided I should continue to use my maiden name so I would not have to explain another name change to the brokers we worked with. To do so was unusual then, although it's fairly common now.

KP: Now being that your parents or grandparents are from Germany, had you heard of Hitler through the '30s, and do you remember talking about events in Germany at the time?

MG: No, as I told you, my father said that conditions in Germany after World War I were terrible. People didn't have enough to eat. When people are hungry, and they can't seem to get out of their present condition, no matter how hard they work, they are more willing to listen to a leader who blamed somebody else for their problems. Most of the Germans didn't know, I think, at least in the beginning, of the horrors that were going on. Many of them had Jewish friends. ... We visited my grandfather's sister's children, who were the same age as my parents, more or less, and their children in Hamburg after World War II.

KP: Really?

MG: We visited them. Annie, Heinz, Frieda and I often talked about the war. One, a cousin of my mother's, Henry Brammann, was the captain of a Standard Oil ship. He was in America during World War I because the government kept his ship here. We also visited his son, and another cousin was also on the ship. Hamburg was a port city, as you know, and many people are connected with the sea. ... Heinz was a pilot on the Elbe River. Frieda's husband, Willy, was also on a ship, so they all had sea experience. Henry Brammann was here during World War I. Also my father's mother was still in Hamburg in World War II. I remember she died, but I don't remember exactly when. ... My father wanted to learn English when he came here. We didn't speak German at home. He wanted to be an American, and, particularly with a salesman's job, he wanted to speak English. So we spoke English at home, and I studied Latin and Spanish. I took some German in school, too. The only thing I didn't take was chemistry because I went only

three-and-a-half years to high school, and I never could figure out enough time, since I was taking six major subjects, to get chemistry in. There wasn't a great deal of talk about Hitler. I mean, my parents were certainly not impressed with Hitler. The struggle was, in those years, to make ends meet. Later my sister had a job and things were beginning to get better for us. My father then got a job in the Hotel Taft in New York. He was in charge of the linens. Indeed, he worked there until he was eighty. And he had people under him. It turned out to be all right. My mother had a not very well paying job. As a junior underwriter, I was making seventy-five dollars a week. ... I even taught a young man, who had been medically discharged, who was hired at Associated. That was Charles, and we were good friends. He married a girl who worked at Associated. I still hear from her. He has died. ...

KP: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

MG: Yeah, that was my sister's twenty-first birthday. We were having a birthday dinner, when the news came over the radio. I had a date with a boy I met at junior college. We went out, I think to a bar to dance. Everybody was just talking about Pearl Harbor. And he signed up right away.

KP: Did he?

MG: He went into the Air Force. He went to Rome. My goodness, I forget his name. It will come to me. I haven't thought about him for a long time, more than fifty years. Morris was a student at Junior College. Bergen Junior College is now Fairleigh Dickinson University. And that's how I knew him, and that's when we dated. We had a date on New Year's Eve. We went into New York City. That was December 31, 1941, and it was such a wild night. I'd never been to Times Square before, and there were so many people. We had reservations at some hotel. All of a sudden, there were so many people, and the soldiers and sailors were lifting girls so they could see. We had reservations, and I can't believe we knew where we were going. Eventually, we got there, but it was just unbelievable the number of people, and, of course, so many of them were servicemen in that New Year's crowd. It was just sort of unbelievable. And that was a long, long night. I think it was about two o'clock when we got back to New Jersey. He joined the Air Force and was sent to Rome, N.Y., for basic training. And then he went off shortly after that. And as I said, I expected that I would marry him, but somehow. He was fun to date. So that was that.

KP: So, dating basically, you went on blind dates? You went to dances and ice skating and those things you talked about before. Was that pretty typical of what a lot of the girls were doing?

MG: I think so. I didn't usually go on blind dates. The one I described was the only one I remember. I had other dates. Let's see. After my first year of junior college, when I was seventeen, Norene Meyer, who used to live at the end of our street, she and her parents had moved to New York. So I often visited her, and that's when we went roller-skating. At her home

in Hillsdale, which was really her grandmother's house, she had a date. And he brought a friend, and I was at the house. There was Jimmy Gogarty, and I really fell in love with him. He wanted to get married, and I didn't, and wanted to have sex and I didn't. At the time, I didn't know that my father didn't know who his father was. But my mother was very insistent that one waited until marriage for sex. So we did a lot of parking and smooching and necking and petting, and stuff like that. Anyway, finally, we broke up, and he did get married after a while. I sometimes visited my best friend at junior college, Arlene Wilders. She went on to graduate, but I only went one year at night. Also I had met Jimmy, and that was on my mind. Plus, it was pretty difficult on fifteen dollars a week to go to school, eat your supper, and get home at night on public transportation. I used to sell cigarettes for a scarf. So I didn't continue my education, but I did keep very friendly with this gal. I still am a friend with her, and she lives now in Florida. And she was going on a date, and her brother was going to be my date. Then Jimmy called me, and so they came to the house, and I decided to go with Jimmy. And I always felt terrible about Robert Wilder, but I'm sure he recovered. [laughter] And I did too.

KP: When did you meet Carl?

MG: Carl lived around the corner, and we used to bicycle. My sister and I bicycled, and he bicycled. Well, because of gas rationing, we couldn't use the car very often. We used to even go down to the grocery store, and I think he worked down in that store for a while. There was a small supermarket, instead of just a small grocery store. When we were little, real little, we used to go to the grocery store and get five cents worth of soup greens. We'd get a bag so big, ... it was all you could do to carry it. Of course we were young then. Carl used to bicycle a lot. His family lived around the corner, and so he asked me to go out. We did a lot of double dating and triple dating. There were two or three other couples, his brother and a girl and his good friend and a girl. Also we used to bicycle, go off and bicycle all day long and stop somewhere and have lunch or sandwiches or something. Or, we would go up to a lake and swim. I loved to swim. ... We'd picnic. As I said before, his brother got married, this other couple got married. We went to the wedding. And then, we still continued to bicycle. I don't think the other couples bicycled as much as we did. We really liked to bike ride. And so one October day, we became engaged. There was an engagement party. I got a brown velveteen suit in honor of the occasion. And I was taking some kind of photography course. I was also in a local community drama group. Anyway, we started to do other kinds of dating. For some reason it just didn't seem right. I just didn't feel that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him, so I gave him back the ring. And I decided that I wouldn't get married during the war. Everybody was getting married, and I thought I'd decided to marry him just because he was going away to war. It wasn't really the thing to do to get married because somebody was going off to the war. At the time, I was a volunteer as a Red Cross aide. I used to train after work. I think it was a six week course, two evenings a week and all day on Saturdays. I worked in the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center hospital two nights and one weekend day, in addition to my job. So that was time consuming. It was also interesting. I learned to do a lot of nursing routines. As Red Cross Nurses's Aides, we did all nursing chores, but were not permitted to dispense medicines. ...

MG: ... Later I worked in psychiatrics.

KP: Were a lot of the patients people returning from the war, or was it mostly civilians at the time?

MG: The patients were mostly civilians. I didn't work in obstetrics, but I worked in gynecology, and on the medical and surgical wards. Sometimes there was only one registered nurse and me to take care of a twenty bed ward. Later I worked in the psychiatric wing of the hospital for a while, and that sort of got to me. I had not learned how not to take the patient's problems home. I got to worrying about the people who were patients. A young girl, who had multiple sclerosis, was just about my age. Also [there was a] man who would try and take a knife to himself. You had to be very careful not to leave any sharp instruments near him. There was a gal that was a compulsive eater of parsley. She kept saying, "Could you bring me some parsley?" That was strange. Anyway, I got a little upset, so then I was transferred. I worked in the Red Cross blood bank. That was somewhat easier. We'd test people's blood to make sure that the hemoglobin count was up. (The nurses did the actual taking of the blood.) Then you had to watch the donors afterwards. Even big men sometimes need a little help, a little refreshments and occasionally rest. At the time I was quite thin, and I never could manage to give blood. Either I was under 110 pounds or my blood count wasn't up, so I never gave blood after that blood transfusion that I gave to my sister. [laughter]

KP: So then, the fateful weekend that you meet Wes?

MG: Right.

KP: So how long were you dating before you became engaged?

MG: Well, we met on June 6, 1943. I was working for Associated Aviation Underwriters on John Street in downtown New York City. One lunchtime, as I was walking on the street, I met Grace Hughes, whom I'd known in high school. We stopped to chat. She told me she was married to Bud Westervelt and that he was in the Army. Because she was lonely without him, she invited me to spend the weekend with her in Cresskill, New Jersey. We settled on the first weekend in June 1943. There was gas rationing during the war so I went to Cresskill, New Jersey, from New York City by train. For the first and last time in my life, I didn't pack any rain gear for the weekend visit. Imagine our surprise when Bud came home unexpectedly on Sunday morning. A third person in a one-bedroom apartment was hardly appropriate. To go home to Hillsdale, I would have had to take a train back to New York City and another train or bus back to Hillsdale, New Jersey. So, Bud's mother suggested that I spend Sunday night there. She invited relatives who lived down the street. (Wes' mother and Bud's father were sister and brother.) Wes came also and spent much of the evening talking to me. It was June 6, 1943. The following morning, it was pouring. As I contemplated walking in the rain, Wes arrived in his

Model-T and drove me to the station. I was wearing a yellow dress made of synthetic fiber. When I arrived at Penn Station in New York City, it was pouring and there were no taxis. So, I walked across town in the rain, leaving my luggage in a locker. By the time I arrived at Associated Aviation Underwriters, my short yellow dress had become a blouse. I had to send the office boy back to the station to get my suitcase for a change of clothes. A year later Wes recalled our first meeting. His letter from Camp Wheeler, Georgia, describes how we fell in love. (See Letters 16 & 19)

KP: That was after you graduated then?

MG: Right, after Wes graduated. I didn't graduate from Rutgers until 1967. I didn't know Wes when he was at Rutgers. He dated other girls, some of whom I even met later. One thing he always remembered was that at his junior prom at Rutgers, Sammy Kaye played. He liked to dance. I often remember our first date. After that rainy day, when I went to work, he said he'd call. He didn't know that my dress was shrinking, until much later. He said he'd call from Cresskill and he did indeed. ... He had a job as Assistant County Agent in Passaic County, as an extension agent. He was a poultry major as an undergraduate. (See Letters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, & 12) I think I met him in Paterson. And he took me to a restaurant where they made wonderful pea soup. I don't remember what else we had, but we did have pea soup. Sometimes we went to the movies. Wes came to our house, and I went to his house and met his folks. The Westervelt family originally owned a tract from the Hudson to the Hackensack. When Wes was born, they lived in the family house, a farm house on County Road. Through the years, a lot of property had been sold, but it was still quite a big piece of property. Later, they moved to the house on Hillside Avenue. I guess it was built in the 1920s. They had a grandfather's clock and all sorts of other clocks. I remember the first time I spent the night; I slept in a bedroom, and all night long these clocks were chiming. I couldn't believe so many clocks, all chiming the hours. And they didn't all chime at once. At Christmas, Wes got his induction notice. We sort of decided we would not get engaged. We would wait until after the war. That was part of my decision; I was going to wait. I had a job, and I had my nurse's aide commitment. He went off to basic training at Camp Wheeler. I sent him things while he was down there. He loved lemon meringue pie. I remember, I sent a lemon meringue pie, and he said it arrived in good condition. I never heard him say that it didn't, even many years later, so I don't know. But everybody thought it was absolutely unbelievable that a lemon pie could get all the way to Georgia in one piece. ... We wrote letters all the time, and then we decided that we would get married when he had his leave. That was the end of my commitment. We talked about it, and decided we didn't want to have a child until after the war. You never can be one hundred percent sure about pregnancy, but we decided to get married. I think we had about six weeks to plan because we set the date for when his leave would occur, when basic training was over. The wedding date was set for June 17, 1944, because that was when he was going to be home. (See Letter 17) I think we had a few days at home before that, during which we bought an engagement ring and a wedding ring for him, which I now can't find. This is not the original wedding ring, I lost the diamond in the swimming pool. Wes bought me another one, I lost that diamond in another swimming pool. Now I don't wear it in the swimming pool. [laughter] Anyhow, he had

something like two weeks, so we didn't have a long time. For a honeymoon we went into New York City, where my aunt worked at the Dorset Hotel. Wes' cousin Bud came home on leave. So Bud and Grace met us in New York City one afternoon. We saw the movie *Going My Way*, which had just opened. We rode on a carriage in Central Park, walked and listened to a concert in Central Park. I like New York. Of late years we went often to the opera and to jazz things. In 1944 we had three or four days in New York City. Then a day with his folks and a day with my folks, before he went back. (See Letter 20) Presumably, he was going overseas. ... About a week later, I think it was the Fourth of July, Cresskill, New Jersey, where Wes and his family lived, was having a celebration of the 300th anniversary of the town. Wes' mother had her mother's wedding dress, and it was decided that since I was slim, I could wear this wedding dress because it had an eighteen inch waist. Wes' sister Margie, took the corset and pushed me into it. I put my hair up, and I went into town for this celebration, and all of a sudden, who comes walking down the street but Wes. I ran up the street in the corset thing with this long skirt. [laughter] It probably was funny. It happened that he was put on a troop ship which, apparently, the ship was rammed by something, and so they were sent back to Camp Kilmer, where Livingston College is now. (See Letter 24) Because they were going to be there for, (they didn't know how long,) until another ship could be readied or repairs were made. During the war, you didn't ever know really what was happening ... because they were not to tell you. The soldiers all went AWOL each evening as long as they got back by morning, which was all right because they weren't really doing anything. They were just waiting. So he came up on the Fourth of July, and I think he came up three or four times after that. ... Then all of a sudden he didn't come; obviously he was on his way to Europe on the boat. (See Letters 25 & 26) We corresponded. He had an APO number. Wes was a reserve. In other words, ... their unit replaced some of those that had gone to France on D-Day. June the 6th was D-Day. With the landing on the beaches of Normandy, Patton's army was going across France. Wes went, as most of the reserves did, first to England. (See Letters 27 & 28) We heard from him, and he got my letters. And then he went across the Channel and joined Patton's army, the Third Army. ... They weren't allowed (the letters that were censored) to say exactly where they were. I know he had a leave in Paris. I don't think he wrote about it. Anyway, he went out with some buddies, and they went into a bistro or something, and he drank creme de mint. He got a little sick. [laughter] He also met a very nice man, a Frenchman, and he had studied French, so he could communicate pretty well. Anyway, the French soldier gave him the French Medal of Honor. He tried to tell me where he was. He would write that was following the trail of *The Three Musketeers* and ask me to remember *Giles of the Star*, giving me references so we could trace his progress with the news reports, which were somewhat indicative of where Patton's army was. (See Letters 29, 30 & 31) In October I didn't get any letters, and I got a telegram that Wes was "Missing In Action." Then the letters that I wrote started coming back with military stamps on them. Some of them said "Missing In Action," some of them said, "Killed In Action." I don't think there was any intention to deceive; I think the wrong stamp got on them. We didn't know where he was, and, obviously, I couldn't write any more letters, since there was no place to write to and the letters that I had written were coming back. So what had happened to Wes? ... We didn't learn until later, that he was sent on a scouting party on October 9, 1944, and they went out to the fortresses that were outside of Nancy, France. They were in what they thought were evacuated fortresses. All of a sudden, they

were surrounded by the Germans. So they were captured. There was not much point in trying to shoot all the Germans. They would have just been shot themselves. It was a platoon, a small group of ten or less. They were taken by the Germans and put ... in a temporary camp, which was not pleasant, guarded by storm troopers. Then they went on a train up to Stettin to a prisoner of war camp. While they were on the train, it was strafed by planes. This camp was on a farm, a German farm, where they grew potatoes. ... I guess they didn't grow much else at that time. Anyway, they allowed enlisted men who were the prisoners to work, if they wanted to. Since Wes was a private, not an officer, he worked, preferable to sitting back all day. The food wasn't much. I guess they had mostly potato soup and brown bread. They had a guard who was formerly in the army, but now at home. Maybe he had been injured. He and his wife were managing the farm and the prisoner of war camp. They may have had other guards. Anyway, it was Christmas there, and the guard had a son, who was a prisoner of war in the United States. On Christmas, he came into the prisoners' barracks with a *stollen*, a German Christmas cake that we always had at our home and that Wes, of course, had had the previous Christmas at our house. My grandmother made it as long as she lived. It's a rich yeast dough. You roll it out and put all the goodies like raisins, cinnamon and citron in the middle. Then you fold it up like swaddling clothes, bake it, it's called German *stollen*. That's the way our family makes it, and that's the way this woman made the cake. So they had cake, and the guard played the harmonica, and they sang the *Star-Spangled Banner*, and Christmas songs and the German anthem. So for a little while, Christmas was celebrated. They all wished for the war to be over. ... In the spring, the Russians were moving from the East, and the Americans were moving from the West, and it became clear to the Germans that they were not going to win the war. Basically, they didn't have any supplies. They didn't have enough food, they didn't have gasoline and other supplies. So they evacuated the camp, and the prisoners and the German people, started moving to the West, because the Russians were coming from the East. The Germans felt they would rather surrender to the Americans than to the Russians. The Germans lost a lot of men on the Russian front. This cousin, whom I told you about, the granddaughter of my grandfather's sister, lost her husband on the Russian front, which I didn't know at that time. They walked across Germany, many Germans and prisoners of war. They slept in barns when they could and ate what they could. When they got to the Elbe River, they were repatriated by the American soldiers. (See Letter 35) And all of a sudden, those prisoners were free, and most of the Germans were civilians at this point. They were registered by Army personnel. The only time Wes was monitored by German army personnel (storm troopers) was when he was first captured. As I said, that was a very unpleasant situation, close to the front lines. The prisoners of war were repatriated. (See Letter 34) They were put on an Army jeep, taken to an American base camp. The Army wasn't wise about feeding ex-POWs. They, after all, had been without an adequate diet for at least six to eight months, some of them for longer periods. And they gave them mashed potatoes and ice cream, and all sorts of rich foods. ... When Wes came back from the Army, he was the heaviest he ever was, before or since. [laughter] But he could hardly walk up the street. And when we went to the rehabilitation center in August, every one of those prisoners of war was ill. They had stomach disorders.

So now I'll go back. We didn't hear anything from Wes after October. ... At Christmas I got a bonus from Associated, so I went up town, and I bought a St. Mary's blanket, a beautiful,

long, white, wool blanket, and I don't remember what else, presents from Wes to me. And something from me to him. At home in Hillside, we decorated the tree and celebrated; I was sure that he had to be alive. All of a sudden, early in February, the postman called my mother at work and said, "There is a letter from Wes," and you can't imagine what the letter said. (See Letter 33) The letter said that the lady in this house brought us a Christmas *stollen*. [laughter] ... It was from a prisoner of war camp. It didn't say where, obviously, or anything. Later I learned that he was receiving Red Cross packages. Among the things he received in the Red Cross packages was a picture *Home To Thanksgiving*. When we were in Arkansas later, I ordered that picture. But I'm getting ahead of the story. [laughter] ... So then I knew he was alive, a prisoner of war. I think I even notified the War Department. And then after a while, they sent me another telegram notifying me that he was a prisoner of war. I got a few letters from him through the Red Cross, including earlier postcards. (See Letter 32) [laughter] He was cutting wood in the forest and working with the potato crop and things like that.

V-E Day in New York City was just unbelievable. Everybody went out on the street, and we danced on the street. I remember being lifted up by the sailors and jumping around and hugging everybody: everybody was happy. [laughter] It was just a really big celebration. And then Wes came home a few days before our first wedding anniversary. We heard him first on the radio. (See Letter 36) He was given leave for the summer and was told to report in late August to Asheville, North Carolina, to a rehabilitation center to be reassigned. At Associated Aviation Underwriters I had a job that I enjoyed and a salary that was pretty good. However I wanted to have a leave of absence. So I went to my boss and he said, "Oh, yes," but the higher up man in the company said, "No." They had too many people who took leaves of absences and didn't come back. The secretary of the head of the department, who didn't take a leave, was divorced. So I decided I would quit. And then I was told that if I wanted to, I should go and see them. Maybe I could get my job back. They just wouldn't give me an indefinite leave. They would have given me a one month, or a two month, but not indefinitely. Well, anyway, that was my decision. So we were both home. We had the whole summer. And Wes improved, as I told you. At first, he couldn't walk up the street. ... And he had these nightmares. He would scream at night. It was a mixed joy, but we worked together. Life was a little more normal. We had friends and relatives to visit. Wes' brother didn't go to the war at all. He had small children, so he was home. Bud got home, as well as other friends. We picnicked and swam and did all the things you do in the summer. Wes improved. One day we were visiting a friend of mine, just a few houses down, with several other couples. We were having some drinks and some food and whatever. That was the day the US dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima. That was very scary. We all had really mixed emotions. Everybody wanted the war to be over, but to kill so many people, innocent civilians. Actually at that time we didn't know much about the number killed. It just seemed unbelievable. Later there was V-J Day. That was a big celebration. Then the government lifted the restrictions on gasoline purchases, (gas was rationed during World War II), so we decided we could drive to Asheville. If Wes was sent overseas, I would come home, or if he was stationed in this country, I could go with him, and we'd have the car to go wherever he was going. So we went to Asheville, North Carolina, a beautiful resort which the Army had commandeered for rehabilitation with a whole lot of other prisoners of war, including a man with whom I worked at Associated, who had gone off to war and had also been a prisoner. I met

Martin, who I had dallied with a little bit before I met Wes. He was married, and we used to walk together from Associated, which is by the East River, to the Hudson, where we would take either the ferry or the trains to New Jersey. Sometimes we'd stop for a drink. That was not so good, particularly since he had a wife and children, which I pointed out to him, and we gave that up. He was very nice, and we were very compatible. Fortunately, we stopped the relationship before it got too far. He and his wife was there. She was very nice. I had met her at that point. Every time we went to a meal, ... we'd all come and sit down at the table, and you'd see the men walking out. They'd all be getting sick to their stomach, so that by the end of the meal, there were mostly women. It was a really big problem, probably caused by the fact that they were given too much food at first, plus the physical, emotional and mental stress of being a POW. The doctor that we saw, the specialist at Burlington, when Wes was diagnosed for Alzheimer's, said that it is possible that this kind of stress, (physical, emotional, and mental,) might contribute to the onset of Alzheimer's Disease. When Wes went to apply for the veterans benefits, the doctors there said many, certainly not all, but particularly Vietnam War veterans suffered similar dementia problems.

KP: Wow.

MG: ... As a result of that kind of stress, they may be diagnosed with Alzheimer's, later though. There's not enough data to prove it.

KP: There's a correlation?

MG: There seems to be some correlation. Anyway, Wes was quite sick at every meal, and so he went to the doctor on the post in Asheville. I don't know what I was doing. The Army had activities for the wives, so I was probably on one of those bus tours. I came back for lunch, and he came in and he was high. I thought he had been drinking. I didn't know what to do. We went to lunch, and this girl comes into the dining room with a bikini on, and in a loud voice Wes says, "Don't let me ever see you walk into the dining room dressed in a bikini." [laughter] I would have cheerfully rolled right under the table. He was talking loudly, but he ate all his lunch. We went back to the room, he laid down on the bed, and he was thrashing. Finally he went to sleep, and he was still thrashing. I remembered my nursing training and tied him in the bed because I was afraid he'd fall off. Then I went to see the doctor. So I went to the doctor. I said to the doctor, "I don't know what is wrong with my husband. He went to see you this morning and now he's acting as though he'd been drinking heavily." ... Well, it turned out they had given him morphine, and he had had a very unusual reaction. Then the doctor said to me, "It's partly physical that your husband is suffering all these upset stomachs. It's also partly mental and emotional." He said, "You could help him if you keep saying, 'You're all right, we're going to eat breakfast and then we're going to do this,' and don't watch him. If he starts to feel sick, say, 'Why don't we go out and take a walk?' Do something to help him, if you can, to get over this." So, I tried to take the doctor's advice, and it worked with varying degrees of success; Wes seemed to get better. Wes was re-classified. He was sent to Camp Joseph Robinson in Little Rock, Arkansas. I think we had two weeks at Asheville. It was very nice. We had trips around

North Carolina and we went to the Vanderbilt mansion. There were parties and special programs to make you feel better about life. Then we started off for Arkansas in our car, which we were glad we had. Oh, and the other thing is, the Army didn't pay Wes. You know his name is Westervelt, Griffin. Westervelt is his family name. Well, it seems in the accounting department, the Army could never figure out which it was, Westervelt Griffin or Griffin Westervelt. As a consequence, they would red line his name, so he was not getting paid. Wes had hoped to get money when he came home from being a prisoner of war. We traveled West. I remember, we got to Memphis, Tennessee, and then we crossed the Mississippi. It was a gorgeous evening. And the cotton fields just stretched out flat, and it looked like the stars were right on the horizon. If you walked far enough, you could pick one up in your hands. It was very beautiful. The cotton looked so pretty. And we got to Little Rock, and Wes went to camp. We had to find a place to live. I couldn't live in the barracks with Wes, so we went to the Army's housing assistance office. We were sent to a great family. They offered us a room plus breakfast and dinner for fifteen dollars a week. So we had a bedroom. The Grant family included a mother and father and their daughter had a baby, so the daughter was there with the baby. The baby's father had left. Mrs. Grant had a piano, and it was so dusty. It was just thick with dust, so I asked her one day if I could play the piano. And she said, "Oh, sure, if you want to clean it off. I don't clean it off because nobody plays it." That was a very funny thing. Whenever I get behind in dusting, I think of her. Why dust it if nobody is going to use it? [laughter] So I dusted it off. She was quite an unusual housekeeper. When she cleared the table, she would take a dinner dish right from the table and put it on the back stoop, so the cat could have the leftovers. At the next meal, out would go another plate, until there were several, and then the dishes had to come in and get washed. Also, she would open up things like the cornmeal and the flour and not put the covers back on, so cockroaches often appeared. It's a warm climate. The meals were good, but they were real Southern. Sometimes I didn't care for having mashed potatoes and pork and beans, with sweet potatoes as a vegetable and corn bread on the side. One day I said, "I'd like some spinach." Mrs. Grant agreed, saying it would be great to have some greens. Our next dinner included mustard greens, which I did not like at all. But I ate some. I appreciated her cooking "greens" especially for me.

-----END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE-----

KP: Let's continue the interview on March 16th with Mrs. Marie Griffin.

MG: At Camp Joseph Robinson in Little Rock, Wes was assigned to personnel work, to evaluate the records of other soldiers to determine where they could best be assigned. He found this work enjoyable. When we arrived, we paid the fifteen dollars rent, and we had very little money left. Of course, things weren't quite as expensive as now, but nonetheless, you can't drive a car without gas, you can't eat lunch without some money, and he wasn't getting paid. So I called my mother, and she sent us fifty dollars. Then I decided that I should get a job to support this project. I had worked in aviation insurance, so I thought I'd go downtown and visit the insurance companies. I think I called a broker that I had had some contact with, and he said that the insurance people in Little Rock were having a luncheon and why didn't I come and then I'd meet

lots of people and I thought that would be fine. So I went to the lunch. I think I was the only woman. And this broker friend introduced me and said I had been working in aviation insurance and asked me to talk about it. Aviation insurance was new when I was working in it. We covered all small planes, private planes, and we covered trip tickets, which was what you purchased when you traveled on an airline at this time. You could buy trip tickets in addition to your regular insurance because most policies did not cover air travel. Associated reinsured with Lloyds of London, with Chubb and Son, and numerous other companies, which I don't remember all of them right now. In the war, the government took a lot of private planes to use for training purposes, and we had a contract with the government that covered these planes. We also covered the training flights. One of the bad things about this contract was that there were some planes that we deemed unsafe. We wouldn't insure them under normal conditions, but under the contract, we had to insure them. One day, we received a report showing that a high school friend of mine was training in one of those planes and was killed. We didn't cover the personnel, the government covered the personnel. But that was very sad news for me. We also covered the testing of models in, first, the wind tunnel and, then, the flight. The way we did it was, you'd look at all the specs, and you'd look at the wind tunnel tests of the model, and then determined the price at so much a minute for how long it would stay up in the air. The price would go down after every minute; we had to figure by how much. As Mr. Raines, my boss used to say, it's kind of like a gamble. When you bet that the plane is going to stay up for fifteen minutes, does that mean it's going to stay up longer? Or should you bet only ten minutes? It was an interesting job. I was the first woman underwriter on John Street and I think the youngest. That was quite a few years ago; I was twenty-two. Anyway, I went to this Little Rock luncheon and talked about aviation insurance, and how it was going to now grow because after the war, people could have their private planes again, and there would be gasoline. Afterwards, Mr. Raines came up to me and asked if I would come to his office for an interview. He said they had a job if I would be interested. I tried not to be too eager, but I said I was interested, and I'd come the next morning. So I came the next morning, and they didn't really need somebody for aviation because they didn't have that much aviation work. But they could use somebody for automobiles and other property involving typing and some writing of insurance. So he said, "When would you like to start? You have to have the time to look around Little Rock." I think it was a Thursday or Friday. And he said, "Would a couple of weeks be good?" And I said, "I think I could probably manage to come by Monday," thinking, "How are we going to eat?" [laughter] It was lucky that our fifteen dollars a week got us a breakfast and a dinner. So I got the job, and I worked with very nice people, especially Madge Twiss. Every morning we had a coffee break. We used to go to a little diner. And it just amazed me that all those people, for their coffee break, would have chili and Coke.

KP: Wow.

MG: I never got around to having chili and Coke for my coffee break. But, we did enjoy living in Little Rock: we lived there from September to December. We met also another nice couple. The daughter had a little girl. She took us to visit some friends, Helen and Dallas Dolan; Dallas was part Cherokee. They were just wonderful people. They also had a daughter. ... We used to

visit them, and I would play the piano, and we would sing for hours on end. They were very compatible, lovely friends. We also had Army friends. ... Wes still didn't get paid.

KP: Still?

MG: But I was making a salary that kept us afloat. ... We decided that living in one room with the Grants and her peculiar housekeeping. ... (For example, she would get ready to go to church on Sunday. We'd have breakfast, and if there was anything left, it would go in the china cabinet.) It was kind of a peculiar life, and I always worried about the food going bad or bugs. In a warm climate, there are more bugs. We decided to see if we could find an apartment and we did. This small apartment had a gas stove. At that time, the houses weren't air conditioned, and they didn't have central heating. I've never been so cold as it was when it snowed in Little Rock. Because the house was cold, and you had only this little heater. The bedroom was freezing. Anyhow, we decided that we'd invite a few couples, Army friends, for a Thanksgiving dinner. We didn't have very much silver, I mean, you know, we had silver at home, wedding gifts, but in Little Rock, we had a small apartment that was furnished, sparsely, to say the least. But when you're young like that, such things don't bother you, you go ahead and invite people anyway. [laughter] Madge, and this woman that I worked with, loaned me some pots and things to help me out. She and her husband also became good friends of ours, and they had a little boy. Upstairs in the apartment house, there was a lady who lived alone. She came downstairs and said she didn't feel good. I looked at her, and she had a terrible fever. So I went up and helped her. I called the doctor for her and took her temperature and gave her aspirin and got her medication. She paid for it, but we got it for her and took care of her. By the day before Thanksgiving, she was feeling better, so we were talking. She said, "How about it? I'll let you have my dishes and silver so you can set the table and have it nice." So she loaned us her dishes and we set a table for Thanksgiving. We didn't have too many pots. Wes made a dishpan full of dressing. I never saw so much dressing. We cooked the turkey and the dinner, and it turned out well. We had a wonderful time. We returned her dishes, and we didn't even break any. But we had so much dressing that when we decided to go home, (all of a sudden in early December the government decided that all prisoners of war could be discharged, so we were going to go home,) we still had dressing. [laughter]

KP: How many times did he cook Thanksgiving dinner after that?

MG: [laughter] Oh, he helped all the time. He used to offer to help make the dressing and stuff the turkey, but we didn't usually make that much. We didn't have a recipe book in Little Rock, I think I called my mother and got some pointers. ... Wes was always talking about the *Home To Thanksgiving* picture that was in the Red Cross package. So I had sent to New York to order this picture, and of course, it arrived two days before we were set to go home. So it was shipped all the way to Little Rock, and then we had to pack it back in its box to go back home. We had a small car, and in addition to the two of us and all our baggage, we had acquired things. Even though we didn't have much money, we seemed to acquire a lot of stuff. We were bringing another fellow home to Baltimore on our way, so obviously there were three of us and three people's bags, but we managed. We rode all the way and over the Appalachian Mountains and

into Baltimore. We had a good time at his home, and then we came home to New Jersey. I think we went to Wes' folks first, and it was shortly before Christmas, and for some reason, I got a terrible cold. My grandmother was ill, but it didn't seem wise for me to go to see my grandmother when I was so sick. So, I didn't. My grandmother died right before Christmas. I didn't get to see her before she died. It was very sad. But we went to the funeral. Wes was a wonderful help. I have a picture of my grandmother upstairs. When we came back to Cresskill, Wes had to think about a job. He was thinking about a job, rather than I; that was part of the culture. He could have gone back to Paterson and continued being an assistant county agent. They told him to call. However, he went down to see Professor Helyar. He told him about the work he had been doing at Robinson with personnel. Professor Helyar offered him a job, as assistant to the dean, to help him in his work as director of resident instructing. So Wes had two possibilities. We decided to take the Rutgers offer. At the time, I think he was making 3,600 dollars, which is what I was making at Associated when I quit. Salaries for professors and administrators were very low at that time at Rutgers. With the GI Bill, there were many more students. The other problem was that during the war, there was no new construction so there was not much housing available. Wes was slated to start in New Brunswick the 1st of January, actually, started work on the 2nd. We had a room in a house on Townsend Street, near the College of Agriculture, with no cooking privileges. I forget how much it cost; it was more than the Arkansas house. But it was comparable, even though we had no meals at the house and no cooking privileges. So we had to eat all our meals out, but we had a place to sleep. We went down on the 1st of January, in the evening, and Wes started working the following day. We would go in the morning, a place to have breakfast. Anyway, I decided I had to get a job because there was nothing much you could do in one room that was very constructive. I mean, I could read, and I could walk around town, and there were social events. But ... it seemed wise to get a job, so that we'd have a little more money. I went down to the employment agency, and they sent me out to Squibb for a job as a secretary to all these chemists. (I told you, I didn't study chemistry.) So I went to see this man, Mr. Lott. He dictated this section with chemical formulas to me, I typed it up and I thought, "Well, that ends that." Then he said to me, "I've never seen anybody do it as well." I absolutely thought I would fall through the floor. [laughter] Then he said to me, "Your husband and you are just out of the Army, right?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Are you pregnant?" I said, "Oh, no." You can't be pregnant when you only have one room to live in. I'm absolutely not pregnant. He very definitely didn't want to hire anybody who was pregnant. Fortunately, you can't say that now. But, at that time, it was perfectly possible. I had replied in all honesty. The job was secretary to all the chemists who were working on streptomycin, which was discovered by Dr. Waksman at Rutgers. Squibb was trying to make it commercially available. They had already done that with penicillin. The building where we worked was right next to where they were making penicillin. We had one car. Wes would drop me off at Squibb and go on to the college. Squibb was right there near Route 1. I'd walk in and the smell of penicillin was pretty potent. I'd come in and every Bunsen burner had coffee. I always managed to have a cup of coffee and a donut, or something with somebody or another. The chemists were not used to having a secretary. So Wes got his chemistry books, and I did a cram course on chemistry so I would be familiar with the terminology and when they started talking, I would not be a complete nincompoop. It turned out that was wise because in the beginning, since they

weren't used to having a secretary, they would write their own memos. What they principally had me do was, when they'd have a weekly seminar to discuss their various investigations, and how their experiments turned out, I had to record their comments and write the minutes of this meeting. As I got to know something of chemistry, I understood more about their theories, which made it much easier to write up reasonable minutes. About a week later, I'd come in, and I'd be sick to my stomach. So I didn't know whether it was the fact that we ate in that greasy spoon for breakfast, because we were still in this room, or whether it was the penicillin cooking that bothered me. Penicillin has a very potent smell. A little later in the day, I was fine. Everybody was very sympathetic. They wouldn't even bother me until the afternoon, "because the poor girl, she was sick to her stomach." I didn't even think too much about it, but the next time when we went home, I said, "Maybe we ought to check with the doctor." So I went to the doctor, and he said to me, "There's nothing wrong with you that nine months is not going to cure."

KP: Your boss must have loved that.

MG: So there I was. That was January. The baby was due in September. Anyway, I went and told my boss. We were really pleased, after all, except that we thought we had better find another place to live. So, I told him, and he said, "Well, why don't you work as long as you can?" I mean, what else could he do? The chemists were all really pleased; they didn't care. Also, they were getting ready to write papers, and what they needed was somebody to type these papers, and that was my job then. Basically, to find another person at that point wasn't feasible. I had been truthful with Mr. Lott. I really didn't think I was pregnant. We found another apartment where we cooked on a toaster oven, and that wasn't too satisfactory. Then there was somebody who worked with Wes, who knew this family on Baldwin Street, and they had an upstairs apartment. So we moved there, and that's where we lived until after Joan was born. There was a bedroom and a kitchen and a bath and a backyard, so that was kind of nice. I think I worked until May, and the baby was due in September. Do you want to go on with my life?

KP: I just want to talk about the both of you going back to school, returning to school. So now you started your family at this point. Right now, we're at 1946, and at that time Wes went back to school. Now how did that work for the two of you, did he go to school at night?

MG: Yes. He didn't go right away. Let's see, we were in this apartment on Baldwin Street, and wait a minute, it wasn't Baldwin, the name of the people were Baldwin. And Joan was born soon after we moved there. I took Joan to the public health clinic. That's a funny story, but, anyway, my mother had always said you should nurse your baby. At the time, nursing your baby was not a popular thing to do. It wasn't like it is now. It was my first baby, and New Brunswick was full of young couples just like myself. Most of them were having babies. It was the beginning of the baby boom but nobody called it that then. Lots of young women were having babies, and there weren't many obstetricians, so my doctor at home in Hillsdale recommended me to an obstetrician, Dr. Walker. I guess every other doctor from every other place recommended him, too. When you went for your pre-natal checkup, there would be ten, twelve women in the office and he'd say, "Okay, ladies, pick up your charts, get weighed, write it down on the chart." He

would see you individually about five minutes at the most. Of course, the fee for a baby was about 100 dollars then, not as much as it is now, but nonetheless it seemed too brief. I remember one time I had some complaint, my legs had swollen or something. The doctor said, "Stay off your feet and cut down on salt." And I said, "Is this a serious problem?" "Oh, no. It's not anything serious." [And I said], "Well, you know, it's my first, even if you've delivered thousands." After Joan was born, while I was still in Middlesex Hospital, I wanted to nurse the baby. But, Joan didn't nurse easily, and of course at that time, I didn't have any experience nursing. So at night, they would not bring the baby in, but I had plenty of milk. All of a sudden, I was having a fever and all these lumps in my breast because the milk was collecting in the breast and not being expressed. Dr. Walker came into the hospital, and you could hear him from one end of the hall to the other. "This woman wants to nurse her baby, it's the best thing, and you don't give her any time. Now I want a nurse in there every time she nurses." After that I had a nurse with me, and I nursed the baby, and they brought her in during the night. From then on, I nursed all my children. When I went for my postnatal checkup, I said, "What about a pediatrician?" And he said, "No problem. If you're nursing your baby, there's not a problem." So I didn't go to a pediatrician right off. Dr. Walker weighed the baby and checked her over. Also I took her to the public health clinic, and that worked fine until Joan fell out of her high chair. Then I had to call a pediatrician, and we had a pediatrician from then on. Dr. Walker was quite a character. He delivered four of our children. We'll not go into all the pregnancies. What I was leading up to was that as a baby starts to walk and creep around, you need more space. So in November, Professor Helyar took us out to the Phelps House in which students had lived before World War II, which was on the campus. Students could live there for free, like Wes lived in the Poultry Building when he was an undergraduate. These students worked on the campus to pay for the room. ... They could work in the dairy barns or they could work in an office. They worked somewhere to pay for their room, and they cooked together so they saved money. Dr. Helyar said he was thinking of renovating the Phelps House to house needy students. He suggested we could have the main floor, and Wes would then be responsible for all the students on the campus who were in that category of living on the Agriculture campus and working to pay for their rooms. The college renovated this house, not a major renovation, but making it livable once more. ... There was a furnace in the basement, coal fired. And a hot water heater, also connected to this coal fired furnace, and no bathroom on the first floor. The college built a bathroom out of the wood shed. It was impossible to get tubs or many plumbing things, so our neighbor in Hillsdale had a bathtub out in the backyard that he was thinking of sinking into the ground to make a fishpond. He gave that to us, and the college sent a truck up and picked up this tub. It was an enormous tub. I could put the three children in it at once. So we got a tub and a sink and a commode, and had a bathroom. For the students, the college built a shower in the basement. There was a great big kitchen, and stairs came down the one side, and the students had to walk around and go to the basement on the other side, so the students had to walk through the kitchen to go to the shower. We couldn't get a refrigerator because they weren't being made yet. So we found an ice box, and we used ice. It was quite an interesting place. There were sixteen students upstairs, and two of them were GIs. There was a little question, at first, whether I was too young to live in a house with all those boys. Anyway, that was ironed out very quickly. It was decided that I was mature enough. We shared a common front hall. We had

one bedroom and a sitting room and a little tiny room next to the kitchen, which became a nursery, and then a kitchen and a bathroom out in the back. We had some funny experiences there. There was a phone in the front hall, and it was shared by the students and us. But mostly in the daytime I was the one who was home. One time, for some reason, the Phelps House number was the prime number for Rutgers for long distance. This was in the early '50s, when Robert was an infant. I would answer the phone, and they'd want the president of Rutgers, or the provost, or the treasurer, or some other official. They'd call and ask, "Is this Rutgers?" And I'd say, "This is the Phelps House on the Rutgers campus." [They would say], "Well, I'd like to speak to the president." And I couldn't switch them anywhere. And one time, I remember, the phone rang and I ran to it while I had the baby in the bathtub. I said, "Please call back in fifteen minutes." That finally triggered a response. I called the campus; we figured out why I was getting all these calls. Somehow the wrong number was listed in Rutgers' long distance directory in the long distance place. We had sixteen students upstairs. Every now and then, we'd invite them down to have supper. I would cook dinner for them. And they could eat like nothing I had ever seen before. I didn't have any brothers, although I have always had a good appetite. One time, I made coleslaw in a great big pan. And it went all around the table, and the fellow that was sitting next to me hastily put a little coleslaw back in the dish, so there would be some for me. I couldn't believe it. And another time I had a centerpiece of fruit, and they all sat down, we had tomato juice or some first course, and by the time I came in with the main meal, the centerpiece had vanished. One of those students, George Wright, who came from South Jersey, used to say, "I bet you I could eat five pounds of hamburger in one sitting," and I said, "George, I believe you. I'm not going to cook five pounds of hamburger to prove it."

KP: He was probably doing that to trick you.

MG: Anyway, we had fun. What else happened there? ... There were cornfields down from the house to Route 1. And sometimes we had tramps. One time this fellow came, asked if I could give him something to eat. I was smart enough to know I had to keep strangers outside. I said, "Sit down on the porch, and I'll bring you a sandwich." Later on, we heard on the radio there was an escapee from the prison, matching his description.

KP: Oh, no. [laughter]

MG: But he was perfectly nice and thanked me for the lunch and went on his merry way. I don't know where he went. I assume they found him after a while. ... There was one room that wasn't fixed up. It was filled with old furniture. By this time we had three children, and were pushing out the walls there. Luckily in the Phelps House we didn't have to pay anything. The college fixed up the front room, which was a very pretty room. Then we could make the children's room out of what had been our living room and use this room as our living room. One evening I was ironing in that room, (Wes had gone to the campus for a meeting), and the boys were coming in and out the front door. All of a sudden, this man comes in, walks in and sits down in the living room. I said, "What do you want?" He just looked around and talked and you know, I got a little uneasy. I kept thinking, "I have this iron in my hand." ... He said something about "the girls,"

and I said, "No, all these students are Rutgers men," because ... we had Rutgers men. He looked at me. I didn't know what he wanted, and I was wishing one of the students would come into our living room, but those that came in went right up the stairs. ... Anyway, finally, he said, "Well, where are the women?" And then I figured it out. He thought the Phelps House was "a house of ill-repute."

KP: Oh. [laughter]

MG: He saw all the men walking in. [laughter] I was so relieved to have him get out, standing there with the iron. You know, everything he said sounded so strange. I thought, "Is he going to rob us? I'm not going to let him hurt the children." That was funny. You asked about our education, I haven't forgotten the question. Wes was a poultry major in the College of Agriculture as an undergraduate. Since he was now doing personnel work, so he needed to pursue an advanced degree. He enrolled at Rutgers to get his Master in Education degree, majoring in guidance. Wes was teaching a course in career possibilities. He also organized short courses together with Professor Helyar. Then Professor Helyar got sick and he had to take over a lot of the director of resident instruction for Professor Helyar. We lived right on campus. Wes could schedule his courses within his work day or in the early evening. ... Wes was on call in the sense that we lived on campus, and students lived in the same house. Wes was responsible for the students. I think I have a picture here. Here's a picture of the Helyar House.

-----END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO-----

KP: So this was the deck, right?

MG: No, the porch in front of the house. This was taken before we lived there, when it was just students. And that's Professor Helyar in the picture. Anyway, it was an interesting book. Alpha Phalpa was the home of the alumni association. Now there is the Helyar House on the Cook campus which houses such students. ... The Phelps House was a Revolutionary War house, an Eighteenth Century house. It had Dutch tiles in the fireplace. The fireplace didn't work, but it was very beautiful and the other fireplace had marble around it. They were back to back. There was a big staircase going up to the second floor. There was a piano that the mice had taken residence in, in the hall. When our oldest son was about two, he'd get up the stairs and climb down the other side and get on the piano. He was always climbing like a monkey. Next-door was a barn where steers were kept, from which we managed to get a lot of little kittens. One time, Walter went out, he was just a little, tiny thing, he went through the fence among all these great big animals and said, "Hi, cows." [laughter] I went out and dragged him out of there. He was perfectly happy. The cows didn't seem to bother him, but I was afraid he might be hurt. Wes went back to school. And I thought about going back to school, but it was a little too much with the children. First, there was Joan, and nineteen months later, there was Walter, and then two-and-a-half years later was Robert, so then I had three small children. Lots of people had more, but it was enough for me. And there were things for the faculty wives. There was this newcomers group, and I remembered Wes came home and stayed with Joan so I could go to the

first tea and meet other newcomers. That was really an exciting thing for all of us, because we were mostly all new faculty wives or faculty members. We made these friends; friendships that have lasted all our lives. We enjoyed Rutgers, and we enjoyed our lives there. The Newcomers was part of the Rutgers Women's League. (You probably have heard of that.) Our friends, Frank and Pluma Becks lived in an old farm house. We met them and our friends Sam and Lucille Lear there. We played bridge, went to dances on campus. We'd go out to dinner occasionally. It was a time when with ten dollars you could get a night out, plus a sitter. We did have babysitters right upstairs. Our babysitters were usually boys, and one evening, we went to the Rutgers Christmas Musical, and we had friends for dinner before the performance. It got late, so we decided to come back home for dessert later. A student, Max, came down. He was a pretty good babysitter because he had younger brothers and sisters at home. And I said, "If you want a piece of pie, the pie is there." Later we came back to have pie ...

KP: Oh, no ... [laughter]

MG: There was one piece left. Max's piece was pretty big. Then we had another fellow babysitting, and he didn't have any other children in his family. We came home and I said, "How was Joan?" He said, "Oh, she's fine. I just used three diapers." I said, "Where are they? Did you put them in the diaper pail?" "Oh, I put them on the baby; the bed's dry," he replied. [laughter] But she survived, and so did we. We had a lot of funny experiences.

KP: So what made you decide to go back, and when was right?

MG: After Wes got his Master's, he decided to get his Doctorate. First, he was promoted to assistant dean, and then he got a raise. At that time, it was decided that Wes would no longer be in charge of the Phelps House or the students who lived on campus; he had additional responsibilities. So we went looking for a house. We bought a house in Piscataway. We saw one house which we liked, and we had one built similar to that. But we did have our own plans. We watched it go up. We owned a third of an acre, in Piscataway. At that time Joan was about to be eight, and Susie was on the way. She was born in April 1954. We moved into the new house in September, 1954. It was built on former farmland. The farmer had drains underneath the ground to drain his field. Obviously, when they put the foundation in, they cut those drains. Before we had closed, we had a veterans' mortgage, a four percent GI mortgage. The Veteran's Administration inspector was due to inspect before we closed on the house. We moved in a few days before we closed because we wanted Joan and Walter to start school in Piscataway and not go back to school in New Brunswick for one week. We had a hurricane in New Jersey, and the basement flooded. I had carefully collected all the children's puzzles and put them back in boxes so that the right puzzle pieces were with the right puzzle. Also all the children's books were stacked down there. Everything got wet. The next day, in our brand new house, everybody is walking in with wet, muddy shoes. The VA inspector arrives then, too, and he wouldn't permit the closing until they put a sump pump in and drains around the house to take care of the water. So we were really very fortunate because we hadn't closed, and the contractor was responsible.

KP: Yeah, you really lucked out.

MG: Except that we lost our children's books and puzzles. ... Luckily the furnace was not damaged, so it turned out all right. I was nursing Susie and all [the] plumbers, contractors, and inspectors were running in and out of the house. But we survived that. The children went to Piscataway schools. We were very active in the schools. Wes served on the Board of Education. Piscataway was always building new schools, because developers kept turning farms into houses. ... Most of our children went to four or five different schools in Piscataway. The town built a high school in Piscataway. We supported the building projects.

Wes decided that it would be advantageous to get his Doctorate outside of Rutgers. So he went to NYU. He took the train to New York City, and he usually had night classes. He started when we were in the Phelps House, and he got his degree in 1960. In his last year at NYU, Wes was elected to the honorary educational society Phi Delta Kappa. Wes' doctoral thesis was entitled The Development of an Orientation Course Designed to Assist Agricultural College Freshman in Achieving a Mature Mental Adjustment to the College Environment. The inspiration for his dissertation dated from his own experience before coming to Rutgers as a student, as well as his experience counseling veterans attending college under the GI Bill. Many of these young men had insufficient preparation for college-level courses, so they needed guidance and help beyond the usual freshman orientation. Wes' doctorate thesis was much in demand in the late '60s, when many young people were admitted to college, some with insufficient academic backgrounds, in affirmative action programs. Our fifth child, Martha, was born on October 7, 1961. When I went back to school, Susie was in kindergarten, and our next door neighbor, with whom we are still friends, was working in microbiology on the agriculture campus. Norm and Wilma Dondero were friends more than neighbors. Each had one car. There was no public transportation in Piscataway, just the campus bus, which didn't come up to Lake Nelson. So Wes and Norm would take the one car, and then Wilma and I would have the other car, except when Wes or Norm had to go to some location other than the College of Agriculture campus. So Wilma and I would go grocery shopping together, and if we had to do an errand, we had one car between us. We weren't isolated. Other friends on Lake Park Drive were also faculty in the Spanish Department. Helen Dauster got a job working in the library part time, and told Wilma and me they needed more people to file catalogue cards in the card catalogue. This job doesn't have to be done now, the catalogue is on the computer. Helen suggested that we could work in the library mornings. ... Her youngest son, Nicky, and Sue were in the same kindergarten class, and they were very good friends. So when the children went off to kindergarten, we'd go down to the Rutgers library and work a couple of hours in the morning. We got seventy-five cents an hour, which wasn't much, was it? Wes and I were giving the children piano lessons and trumpet lessons and dance lessons. We had a lot of expenses. Wes' salary was going up; it was eight thousand dollars a year when we moved to Piscataway. Everything else was going up also when we went out there. And it was going up, but so was everything else going up then. So it was extra money. And then when Susie went to first grade, I decided that I could go back to school. ... I enrolled in University College. I didn't want to tell them that Wes was on the faculty. I wanted to get admitted on my own credentials. I had to get my transcript from junior college, where I had my freshman year and two courses at night school.

One of the subjects I had taken was Spanish I. Rutgers wouldn't give me credit for Spanish I until I passed Spanish II. It had been a long time, more than twenty years. I could have taken Spanish I over, but then I would lose those credits. So I decided to take Spanish II. I didn't take it right away. I really struggled with Spanish II because I found I didn't remember as much as I thought I did. It was quite a heavy course, a lot of reading. When I was in the Spanish II class, Wes was running for the Board of Ed. The night before the election, I went to school. While I was out, our youngest son came home. Robert was an avid reader. He had had rheumatic fever when he was eight, and the doctor treated him with cortisone, which was new at the time. He recovered, fully, but for a long while, his physical activities were limited. Also, the cortisone made him moon-faced and heavier. ... Walter was active in sports, but Robert was restricted. At this time, Robert was in junior high, and just that day he had made the wrestling team. He was going on his bike, riding to the library to get some books and he was hit by a car. I was at Rutgers attending class. ... The ambulance took him to the hospital. My neighbor, Wilma Dondero, met me at school and said, "You better go right to the hospital." Robert wavered between life and death there.

KP: Oh, my God.

MG: But he recovered. ... There was a spike on the car that had gone into his buttocks within a half inch of the colon. And his leg was broken. Dr. Zawodsky, have you heard of him?

KP: I've heard of him.

MG: He's an orthopedic surgeon. He was new at the time, quite young. Rob was one of his earlier patients. Dr. Zawodsky had him in traction for six months, so the growth of the bone would equal the recovery of the bone. At home he was in a cast from his chest to his feet ... and I had to take care of him. We had teachers coming to the house so he didn't lose the year of school, but he was out of school for about six months. Robert then went to rehabilitation. ... He recovered, 100 percent. His legs were even, so it was quite a miracle. Wes was elected to the Board of Education that same evening, and about two days later, I went back to Spanish class. ... I went back to Spanish class, and I hadn't read the assignment. And we had a quiz, and I never failed anything so miserably.

KP: Oh, no. [laughter]

MG: But I managed to pass the course with a B. All my other courses I did all right in.

KP: That was a close call. [laughter]

MG: I had to work on Spanish. Let's see, what else happened while I was in school? It was fun, I enjoyed it. I took political science.

KP: So that was in the '60s, the 1960s, and what was the political climate, especially with the teachers, on campus?

MG: I think it tended to be liberal. Well, it's probably biased, but I think anybody who really thinks about things has to be more liberal than conservative. I don't see how an educated person can conceive of a society that is supposed to be democratic if we don't really try to have opportunities for every child, we don't want to insure healthcare for all our citizens. When you think that we started out with such high ideals, that we would have education for every child. ... The immigrants that came here ... managed to become what we call "Americans" because of public education and the libraries. It seems that to deny education and health to anybody is the opposite of our democratic ideals. I also took philosophy, logic, ethics, physics. I loved physics. That was another subject I couldn't take in high school, and another subject I had a hard time with, because I didn't have much background, although I had read quite a bit. We had an adjunct professor, they had a lot of adjunct professors in University College, he got sick or something, then and we had a physicist from Princeton teaching the course, and he was just fabulous. We did these problems of putting a satellite up in the sky. I just thought it was great. My eldest daughter, Joan, didn't take physics in high school, because she was in advanced math and advanced English and languages, so she couldn't fit physics in her schedule. And I was so enthusiastic about it. She was in Oberlin College, at that time, and she took physics. She had a tough time. I always felt sorry that I had urged her to take physics just because I enjoyed it so much.

KP: Were students at Rutgers into the protesting?

MG: University College is different than Rutgers.

KP: Older students?

MG: Right, and most students were working or were, like myself, homemakers. I was working, too, in the library, part-time then, and later on, when I did my Masters in Library Science. These students came from work, and had little time for protests. Later, when I was working in the library, there were protests. I started when Susie went to kindergarten in '59. ... I also took education courses because I thought I could teach and that would be something I could do while I had children. In 1961, Martha was on the way, and I was still working part-time in the library. There wasn't a lot of protests towards the end of the '50s. Martha was born October 7, 1961, and I think, I told you that I was working part-time in the library. In May, before Martha was born, I was offered a full-time job, not as a professional, but as a staff person. However I hadn't had a menstrual period for quite a while, and I said I'd have to think it over. Dr. Walker, who delivered my other children, had died. (He had resumed his obstetrics practice after the war because there weren't any other obstetricians.) So I had to think about a doctor, and there was the son of a chemistry professor, so I called him, but he was busy, and he had recommended this other doctor. This doctor confirmed what I had sort of suspected, except that I hadn't been sick or gained much weight. I was pregnant. So I didn't take the job. ... I didn't go to school in the summer

either because the children were home. That year I was taking history and philosophy and government. I went to class in October, and I had a paper due. The doctor had said since I had had four children, the baby might come very quickly. So one evening I was having pains, and I called him and he said, "Well, why don't you go to the hospital?" Wes and I got to the hospital, and I had no more pains. So I called him up again, and he said, "Well, you're there and you're registered, why don't you spend the night, and if nothing happens, I'll come to the hospital in the morning and send you home." So there I was, in the hospital, and Wes went home. Joan was in the band; she had to be at the high school for a football game in the morning, and Walter was on the JV football team, so he also had to be there. Wes had to do the driving chores that Saturday morning or arrange for somebody else to transport them to the high school. The doctor would come, and Wes would pick me up. Okay, that was all settled. And I slept, and when I woke up in the morning and rang for the nurse and I said, "Can I have some breakfast?" "Oh, no," she said, "You can't have any breakfast because you are in the labor room. Why don't I get you a cup of coffee?" I had a book to read and a cup of coffee. I was sitting there, drinking the coffee, wondering whether I should call Wes, or the doctor. All of a sudden, I had this pain. I put the coffee down, and then I called the nurse. I had the baby.

KP: Wow.

MG: So then I did call the doctor.

KP: Oh, wow. [laughter]

MG: And he had to go to a football game, too. "So," I said, "There's not much you can do now. You might as well go to the football game." [laughter] That was really funny. The nurse and I had to cut Martha's fingernails. I've never seen a baby with such long nails. I was in the hospital for a day or two, and so I missed some classes. I sent in a paper that was due, which I think I completed in the hospital, with a little note that I had my baby and that I would be at class at the next session. The professor read that note and asked the class, "Did any of you know she was having a baby?" That was hearsay, I wasn't there. [laughter] ... I graduated in '67, with highest honors.

KP: Congratulations.

MG: In 1992, I went to my twenty-fifth reunion. After I graduated, I taught school. I did my practice teaching when Martha was in nursery school. The next year she was in a private kindergarten, because Piscataway changed the date to start school from November 1 to October 1. Martha was born on the 7th of October. So she couldn't go to kindergarten in Piscataway, unless I made a big fuss. Wes was on the Board of Education at that point, and I didn't like to make a big fuss to have her admitted, because people might say, "Yeah, she's admitted because..." So we sent her to a private kindergarten, with another little boy went, whose mother picked them up, and she stayed with Chris Montouri until I came home from practice teaching. I was six weeks practice teaching, in Dunellen, New Jersey. It was fun. The supervising teacher

got sick, so I had full responsibility for the class, for the two weeks. The principal and the vice principal from Plainfield came and watched me practice teach, and they offered me a job in Plainfield, teaching English in the Junior High School. I taught seventh grade English at Maxson Junior High from September 1967 until June 1969. It was a tumultuous time. There were riots in Plainfield, and the New Jersey National Guard was called to Plainfield the summer of 1968. We had riots in Plainfield High School. On one occasion, National Guardsmen were stationed outside of Maxson Junior High School. Library instruction was part of the English curriculum. When I planned these sessions, I realized that the library had virtually no books by Black authors and very little on African people, although the school was racially mixed at that time. The school was eligible for Title II funds to purchase library materials. The librarian and I worked together to develop a list of books which we then ordered. My students were introduced to a broad range of literature including African folk tales and the writers of the Harlem renaissance.

In the fall of 1968, New Jersey Guardsmen were stationed at checkpoints on the roads leading into Plainfield. Every morning my car was stopped. I was asked if I had any weapons and waved on. One morning I picked up Mary Brown, a colleague whose car was in the shop for repairs. When we came to the checkpoint, the Guardsmen made us get out, inspected the car and opened the trunk. Mary and I wondered why. It seemed to us that no white person would bring weapons into Plainfield when they had a Black passenger in the car.

The tensions in the community were reflected in the compositions my students wrote. Some reported that Guardsmen had searched their homes ostensibly looking for weapons or suspects. A group of Black parents tried to set up an alternative school to ensure their children's safety. Some teachers, including me, sent books and assignments to those students while they were absent from regular classes. At the initial meeting of the teachers willing to participate by providing materials to the alternative school, I was the only white teacher. The experience taught me something about how it feels to be a minority. One teacher, who was sensitive to my uneasy feelings, reassured me by saying "It's all right, Marie, you're brown."

In December of 1968, an epidemic of Hong Kong flu hit Plainfield. So many teachers and students were absent that those of us who came to work had to supervise several classes in the cafeteria. At the beginning of an extended Christmas break, I came down with the flu. My recovery was exceedingly slow. Some days I could hardly climb the stairs to my third-floor classroom. Because there was so much tension, the school nurse and doctor thought I suffered from stress. I decided not to sign up for another year. When my family doctor returned from Florida in early May, he diagnosed my condition as a kidney infection. With medication and rest I finally recovered early in June 1969.

Martha was in the first grade at this time. She stayed after school with Joan and Sam. Martha's good friend, Jennifer Baily, was the same age, and in the same grade. Martha went into the first grade at Piscataway with her friends. Martha had a lot of little friends that were the same age. The Bailys went to South America the next year. I arranged for her to stay with a different family, but it didn't work out. In early September, I took Martha to visit the library. I wanted to show her off. She was such a beautiful child. Indeed, they all were. Dr. Roy Kidman was the University Librarian at the time, and Katherine Merritt was the head of the catalogue department where I had worked part-time. When we were there, she said, "Could you come in and have an interview? Maybe you could work full time cataloging." I had already resigned from Plainfield

because of my health problems. I had thought it was just as good to stay home for a little while, but it sounded interesting. I wasn't sure I'd get the job. Anyway, I did have an interview, discovered that Roy Kidman liked Langston Hughes, and we had a wonderful conversation. I was hired as a professional librarian, although I didn't have a library degree. Though the hours were longer than teaching, it didn't involve work at home. Teaching English is a very time consuming job. If you teach English with any sense of responsibility, the job requires not only preparation, but a lot of reading and grading of compositions, plus meetings and parent conferences, etc. Another advantage was that since the children were all, except for Joan, still home, in an emergency you can't leave a class full of children and say, "My daughter or son is sick; bye-bye now, just take care." Whereas the library was closer to Piscataway. Also, if there was an emergency, the books would wait on the shelf in cataloguing. It is different if you're on reference. You have to respond to the public. In cataloguing you could leave, make up the time later. ... I agreed to study Russian on my own, so it sounded okay. I worked for seventeen years, the last eight as librarian in the Institute of Jazz Studies. Shortly after I started at the library, it was unclear whether the University had a contract with the American Association of University Professors, which included librarians. It was finally decided librarians were faculty. As a faculty, we had a lot of administrative responsibilities including to set up tenure qualifications. So I decided that I had better get my Masters degree, otherwise ... I would not advance. I went right to Rutgers Library School. That wasn't too bad because ... it was close, and I could manage the time to get to class. Because I worked in the library, I could use the library facilities and sometimes maneuver my courses into my work, or at least supplement the course with what I was actually doing. It was an exciting time to be in the library. Everybody was thinking about computers, and with some co-workers, I took a course on library computing at City University New York, in the graduate school. ... We were using computers in the library, and I read and studied a lot and went to American Library Association workshops. There were protests. We had bomb threats in the library. They got to be quite disruptive. We'd have them fairly frequently, and campus police would get everybody out of the library, and sometimes, they closed the library for a few hours. When Nixon bombed Cambodia, we didn't all, but some of us were protesting. We also had faculty sessions on the Vietnam War and questioned the bombing. The ROTC building was right next to the library. It was a very turbulent time. There were also the questions of gay bashing, blacks and whites, civil rights and affirmative action. In Piscataway, my good friend, Wilma, and I, another faculty wife, and another woman from Piscataway who later worked for Rutgers, Katherine McCormick, Richard McCormick, her husband, is on the Oral History Advisory Board, we started a League of Women Voters (LWV) in Piscataway. We were trying to get planned and controlled growth in Piscataway, instead of haphazard growth. The state was planning to put a highway, Route 287, through Piscataway. The town wanted to bring industry to the town. We LWVers would go to town meetings. I was quite active in the league. We built up our membership; there were twenty-five of us. Those women are still good friends of mine. It was an exciting time. There were also questions about the Board of Education. I didn't teach in Piscataway, although I substituted in Piscataway for a while. We didn't think it was right to have a board member's wife working in the schools. Some of us encouraged people to run for the Board of Education, including Wes and another friend of mine, Peg Haskin. We met with teachers, and we tried to pass school budgets and all sorts of

things like that. So it was an exciting time; or at least it was busy. How did that impact on my education? When I actually was going to school, I didn't do as much. You can't do everything. We had an American Field Service (AFS) student. When Joan was in high school, Wes and I helped to start an AFS chapter in Piscataway. I told you, we were also interested in the International Club at Rutgers. We had students come to our house for holidays, and just ordinary days, to get to know them and to give these foreign students a glimpse of American homes as well as schools. We were very much involved in starting this AFS chapter. We had a student, Liselotte Suter, from Switzerland in 1970; in fact, this student is coming in April to visit us. Later on, when Martha was in high school, we had a ... Swedish student, Marianne Hayer. In between, ... I was president of the AFS chapter for a while. The chapter had a student who didn't work out; the family had problems that were unanticipated, and it wasn't working out. So we had this boy from Brazil. This was when Martha was a sophomore. When you apply for AFS, you indicate, for example, that you want a student who doesn't smoke, or at least at that time you did. Now it's always no smoking. Unfortunately, people smoke much more in Europe, though I guess young people smoke quite a lot here, too. So ... when we applied, we would ask for somebody with a similar background, you know, they would try to fit you with a student who's had an academic background. He didn't come from an academic background; his father was a taxi driver.

-----END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO-----

MG: Fabio was a boy and Martha was a young girl. I was working, and Wes was working, and the other children were not at home anymore. ... So it was not the ideal situation. It turned out that, except for the smoking, Fabio was very cooperative, but I worried that Fabio would smoke before bed and burn the house down. ... Fabio and Martha were like brother and sister; they had such fun together. It really worked out well. We had other students for short terms. Most of them were good visitors. ... It is a wonderful program. You probably have more questions about the war.

KP: Well, no. It's definitely a life course interview, not only about the war. We want to know about your life before the war and the effects of the war on your life after the war. I wanted to ask, did Wes have, at this point, after you both went to school and your family was almost grown, did Wes' prisoner of war experiences still haunt him?

MG: When he first returned from overseas, Wes had nightmares; he would wake me up at night screaming. But after so many years had passed, ... I don't know honestly. ... We very much so lived in the present, as happens when you're active, going to school and studying. ... Wes had to finish his thesis; that was a big job. ... He was writing his thesis when our third child, Robert, was little. Robert was born in October, and shortly after that, Joan got sick, first from chicken pox, then measles, and it wasn't diagnosed right away. Robert was an infant, so the doctor had me keep him separate from Joan. The doctor said that Joan would be okay because she had the shots, but Robert hadn't had the shots. ... So we moved Robert into our bedroom, and I would just nurse him in the day and take care of Joan. ... So the baby would sleep in the day and be

awake at night. So for a long while, he had day and night reversed. Robert would be up and wide awake in the evening; ... Wes was trying to write. So if I went out someplace in the evening, Wes would put Robert on a blanket and write. Did I tell you about Wes' childhood?

KP: No, you didn't.

MG: Do you think we should do that?

KP: Sure. You can tell me about anything you remember.

MG: Well, his family, (This is the coat of arms. (These were given to Kathy Plunkett) Here are some family pictures.), came from Meppel, Holland, in 1662 on the ship (*Hope?*). They were farmers over there in a place called Vest Walde (West Wood). The Westervelt name is derived from this. When they came over here, they settled in downtown New York, which was then Dutch. It was called New Amsterdam at the time. Lubbert Lubbertse van Westervelt settled in Flatbush, Long Island, on the 15th of December, '62. Later they moved to Hackensack, New Jersey. Many of the family are buried in the cemetery there in Bergenfield. We have seen the graves of these people. Lubbert's son, Roelof, is the branch of the family from which Wes is descended. He sold his land in Long Island, and he purchased a tract of land in New Jersey. ... I think they were very prosperous. Roelof's son, Johannes, fathered Petrus, whose son, Benjamin P., whose son, Jan B., fathered Wes' great-great grandfather, Benjamin J. In the Revolutionary War, some of them fought for the colonists and some were Tories. Benjamin P. Westervelt was a prisoner of war. We get down to 1851, and this is Wes' grandfather, Edwin B. Westervelt. And this one daughter married William Griffin, and Edwin, this is his great grandfather, the one that's in that picture. This is his grandfather. His grandfather had three children, including Wes' mother, Aunt Molly and Uncle Ben, father of Bud. Wes' grandfather's sister married William Griffin. They had children, including Wes' father. His father and mother were cousins. The family lived in a farm house on County Road in Cresskill. The house is still there. It's an old farmhouse. Later on, Wes' Uncle Ben and his wife lived in this house. (This is a picture of Eleanor.) Eleanor is Bud's sister. Anyway, they moved from this farm house where Wes was born. Actually, he was born in Englewood Hospital, but he lived in this farm house until he was about four or five. Then the family moved to a house on Hillside Avenue. Wes' grandfather had given the land for the Congregational Church. When he died, he gave his daughter, Ella, Wes' mother, the mortgage on the church. Aunt Molly got the house on Hillside Avenue. During the Depression, Wes' father was without a job. He worked for some time in the post office. Also, they farmed. Among other chores, Wes delivered eggs. They had chickens. They kept some chickens for eggs. Also they would have some young chickens, which they would kill off for broilers. ... The family was very active in the church. Wes sang in the choir and went to Sunday School, and it was an important ingredient in his life. The family had a camp up in the Alpine area, overlooking the Hudson. They would go there and cut wood and camp out. ... Wes liked to tinker with cars. He and Bud fixed up a Model T, and they drove down to Florida to visit a cousin. They had a wonderful time from what I've heard, in that little, old car. He and his brother also worked on cars. The family were really subsistence farmers there for a while. They

... grew vegetables and stored them for winter in a cold cellar. Aunt Molly worked in New York for an advertising agency. It was a prominent advertising agency at that time. I really don't recall the name, right now; I'm not into Madison Avenue. Wes' mother did not work. She was home with her children. That's always the wrong thing to say, because when you have children and stay at home, you usually work pretty hard. But she didn't get outside pay for her work. Aunt Molly loved to cook. And Wes' mother, who was called "Gigi" because when Betty Ann,, the first grandchild, was born, she couldn't say "grandma," and she called Grandma Griffin, "Gigi." So Wes' grandmother was "Gigi" the rest of her life, and Wes' father was "Pop-Pop" for the rest of his life. Wes went to Cresskill Elementary School, and then he went to Tenafly High School. He was not an outstanding student there. He took French and failed it, but he graduated. Then he went to work in New York. He worked for Dixon Pencils as an office boy. Later he worked crating eggs and handling eggs in one of the markets in downtown New York. ... Wes talked to the man with whom he worked, who lived in Cresskill, who was also active in the church. I think also in the DeMolay, which is the junior order of Masons, and Wes joined that for a while. I don't know much about his activity there because he never spoke a lot of it.

KP: At the time, was he working with the idea that he would go to college, or was he strictly working to help the family out through the Depression?

MG: He was working to help his family. They needed to have money. Anyway, this fellow encouraged him to go to college, so he went down to Rutgers and talked with Professor Helyar. Obviously, agriculture was the thing that he thought he wanted to do because his family had been farmers for generations, dating from Holland. ... It was a family tradition. We had other pictures that I have now taken up to Wes' room in the nursing home, of the farm and some of the activities there. Professor Helyar encouraged him, but he needed to take a post-graduate course to pull up his grades before he could be admitted to Rutgers and take college courses on a level with other students. Wes went back to school, and he aced his French. He had the same teacher he'd had in high school, and from the stories that Wes tells, she was really astounded. But it shows, you can do, if you really want to. So many students in high school think they're pleasing the teacher by studying, instead of realizing that they themselves are supposed to be pleased by their studying. It wasn't a problem for me because I enjoyed learning things, but for lots of students it's a problem. Wes also took math and other things. Then the next year, 1939, he was admitted to Rutgers. He lived in New Brunswick in a room; I don't know if there were sufficient dorms. For the first year he lived in a room in New Brunswick, on Easton Avenue, or right off Easton Avenue. The next year, he moved to the poultry building under the program that I described to you, like the Phelps House. He did very well in college. He was elected into the honorary agricultural society, Alpha Zeta, in his junior year and was elected chancellor of that society in his senior year. But he did not get into ROTC, which he wanted.

KP: Oh, really?

MG: I don't know why. I don't think it was necessarily academic, but for whatever reason. Perhaps the opportunities that were offered. Also Wes enjoyed Ag Field Day; you've heard of that?

KP: Oh, we still have that.

MG: Well, Ag Field Day was very important to Wes. Wes received awards for chickens that he raised. ... He was a poultry major. He liked Professor Thompson. The poultry building on the Ag campus is named for Professor Thompson. He used to send his laundry home because he was really in a tough financial situation. Wes managed. He worked in the summers, and he graduated in '43, shortly before he met me. He got a job in Passaic County as Assistant County Agent. Also he was helping at home a little bit. Since he had not gotten in ROTC, he didn't volunteer to go into the war. But when he was drafted, he went. There were conscientious objectors in World War II. The girl who lived next door to us in Hillsdale dated a fellow who was a conscientious objector. I sympathized to an extent, it wasn't that one didn't think that Hitler was a dictator whose actions one loathed. ... I just have felt, ever since I did research for my high school essay, that somehow, really, was it worth it to kill so many young men? For example, this came to my mind when this high school friend was killed in a training plane, we wouldn't have insured if it hadn't been the government's, and other friends had been killed. I never did find out what happened to Carl, and I hoped that he would come back in one piece. It was probably heresy, but I even remember when Franklin Roosevelt died, thinking that, "Well, he was just one more casualty in this war," and combat had nothing to do with his death. Later I was strongly opposed to the Vietnam War. I guess if there was ever a stormy period in our marriage, it was then, since Wes was much more oriented to supporting the Army. ... There was a friend of a boy who graduated with Joan, my oldest daughter. He went over to Vietnam, and he was killed. We had lots of discussions. Most of our friends, at first, at least, were in favor of the war. The Rutgers community was divided. The Ag College tended to be conservative, politically, and a lot of our friends were agricultural faculty and their wives. Also we had this Iranian student. Our friends, the Becks, ... went to Iran in a US AID program. They had four children, about the same ages as ours. The oldest boy went to the library. He was studying Farsi, and he met this young Iranian, Abolghassem Eskamani, who was a very bright boy. He was studying English, so the two became friends. Abolghassem had won a scholarship to the U.S., and Frank Beck told him when he got to Rutgers, that he should look up Wes Griffin if he had any problems, and Wes would take care of him. So Abolghassem came over here with what was a lot of money in Iran, but the exchange rate was very bad for him. Admissions was going to ship him back because he wouldn't have enough money for books and to live here. Abolghassem said, "Well, I'm supposed to see Dr. Griffin." So Wes said, "Well, he could live with us." He actually didn't live with us, because we thought it would be better if he lived in the dorm. It turned out he got a job in the library, which Wes arranged. Wes also arranged for him to have his exams orally until he could learn to write English. He wrote and spoke English, but not fluently. It was difficult for him, and he was living with us in the sense that holidays, he'd be in our house. Actually, whenever he felt like it, he would be at our house. And what was I talking about when I brought him up?

KP: Vietnam.

MG: Yeah, well, he was supportive of my efforts. And he used to say, "I'm going to run you for president." Gradually Wes came around to that idea, too. As indeed did many people in this country. But in the early stages, ... there were lots of arguments.

KP: Wes didn't join any veterans groups. Was that a conscious decision or was he just busy?

MG: I don't think it was a conscious decision. We were having children; the job was time consuming. Wes was taking courses. We developed a group of friends, who were faculty. There was a feeling of getting the war behind you, not dwelling on the past. I told you, in the beginning, he had these nightmares that lasted for quite a while; well, they started to go away. So there was no urging on my part that he should go to the veterans. Would it trigger those thoughts again? ... Our lives were full. ... I recall one time when Wes wasn't feeling good, (he had some stomach problem), we applied to the Veterans Administration for medical benefits. Benefits were denied, at that time, on the basis that there was no proof that his current problems were related to his problems as a prisoner of war. When he was diagnosed with probable Alzheimer's Disease, I went to the support group for the first time, and I was rather upset that night. I was learning about the disease, and Wes was often upset with himself because he couldn't remember things. And, as I said, he couldn't always find things. It's easy to say, "It's the disease and he can't help it," but nonetheless, you get upset sometimes. I would try not to say anything to Wes; still, that builds up inside of you. I met this woman, who said that her husband had died, but that he had gone for respite down to the Veterans Hospital in White River Junction. You can see the hospital right from the highway, I-89. So I don't remember whether I wrote, I think I made a few calls. They sent me endless forms, and I thought about filling them out, but I don't think I really did. It didn't seem to me, at that point, that I wanted Wes to go down there. But then, about a year or two later, it was clear that if I was going to keep Wes home, I had to have some time to myself, because the demands of the disease were increasing. So I had Wes go to Project Independence, which is an adult day care. When I filled out the forms, they said that he could get veterans' benefits. As I told you before, part of the rationale in the diagnosis was that quite a lot of prisoners of war suffer from the problems of dementia, which are associated with Alzheimer's. Again, there is no proof, but there is some correlation, they say. Anyway, the Veteran's Administration accepted his application at that point, probably due to the fact that many Vietnam veterans came home with stress related dementia problems. The thinking had changed in the Veterans Administration, I think. Also I applied for respite, and indeed, if that had worked, I might have him home. Not all Alzheimer's patients act the same, quite a lot of them wander, but they don't all wander to the same extent. Almost all of them are eventually incontinent. The disease is not exactly the same from case to case. Wes did go down to the Vet Hospital, and ... he just wandered all over the place and went into other people's rooms. So we went down on Monday, I took him down, and I guess Tuesday morning, they called up for me to take him home. ... The hospital doesn't have the facilities for dementia patients who wander. To have Wes in a situation where the only way they can manage the person is to drug them excessively or

use restraints was not acceptable. I don't know if he'll ever go to the Veterans Hospital again. But he is eligible now. Had things been different, he may have been active in the veterans associations, but he never was. He was active in Boy Scouts. When we moved to Piscataway, it was a growing community because they were turning all the farms into housing developments. I guess, we were hardly there a month when somebody called and said they wanted to start a Brownie troop and would I help? I had Brownies and then Girl Scouts. The next year, they were going to start a Cub Scout pack. (Walter was eight years old.) First, Wes was the pack leader and a neighbor was the den mother. Then Wes went on with the Cubs and he was the scout leader for many years, until Robert was well into high school. They hiked, and they camped. ... I was in the Girl Scouts; he was in the Boy Scouts. The Girl Scout camp used to have family day, when we'd go up and fix the Girl Scout camp up and help with setting up things. The whole family would go. We camped; we also took a trip out West for six weeks. Wes had a conference at Fort Collins, Colorado, where my daughter, Joan, lives now, at Colorado State University, on the importance of college professors being able to teach as opposed to just being able to do research and how that could be encouraged. That was the focus of the workshop. We camped on the Poudre River, while Wes went to the meetings. The conference had a party the last night, and we all got dressed up and came into town and went to the barbecue. When we lived in the Phelps House, Wes would sometimes have to be away at a meeting. Wes normally took care of the furnace, and the pot stove, for the heat and hot water. When Wes went away, the students upstairs were supposed to do this. They were pretty responsible, except they weren't always there and they sometimes forget. So all of a sudden, there wouldn't be hot water and the house would be getting cold. And then they would go down with their books and sit by the fire. Finally all the radiators were going "psst, ... psst." Oh, it was cute. We had all sorts of experiences there. [laughter] So any other questions?

KP: I can't think of any. Can you think of any that I might have forgotten? I think we covered a lot of topics.

MG: Right, I mean, we could go on about all the children.

KP: What about the dances? Did you ever go to USO dances during the war? What were they like?

MG: Well, they were different than other dances. I went in New York City; when you went, you had to agree that you weren't going to date anybody that you met there and that you were not looking for a night out. You had to be compatible with the servicemen's wishes. The servicemen would come; you would either dance, or you could sit and talk, or you could look at pictures of their family, or their wives and children, or mothers and fathers and write letters with them. I didn't do it too much because ... I worked in the hospital at nights, and so I didn't have too many free evenings. But I had one unique experience. You weren't supposed to date these servicemen, and the servicemen knew it, and we dancers knew it. I was talking to this young man. He told me his wife, she was expecting a baby. I don't know how we got to the subject, but he said what he'd like to do in New York was to go to Schrafts and have hot chocolate. Schrafts was a

chocolate confectionery; they had many restaurants in New York City. I don't know whether they have them any more. There are coffee and chocolate shops in Vienna, but I don't know whether they have many in New York anymore. I don't think Schrafts is in New York anymore. Anyway, he said, "Could you go with me?" I said, "I can't go with you because of the rules." I said, "Why don't you go to the Schrafts?" ... "And I'll go there, too, and we'll have a hot chocolate." So we did that, and we figured that wasn't exactly breaking the rules. Then I went home, and he went back to wherever he was stationed. At the USO, there was music, and in New York, particularly, almost everybody that came there was going overseas any day, so frequently they wanted to talk about their families to somebody else. You weren't usually pressured for dates. It was a little sad, because you knew you'd never see those people again, and you sort of hoped there would be somebody to talk with your husband or father in the same way. Sometimes there was somebody who loved to dance and that was fun. So I did some of that. I had a different kind of experience. I used to roller skate before I met Wes. I met a sailor at the rink, and it got very late, and that one evening he said he had some friends, and they had an extra room in a hotel, why didn't I spend the night instead of going home to New Jersey? I said, "Oh, well, I guess I could." I was really naïve. I went in the room and locked the door and said, "Good night." Then they banged on the door. And I said, "For goodness sakes, I'm going to sleep. I have to go to work in the morning," and that was the end of that. I spent the night, I didn't pay for the room, and I never knew where they slept. I think it wasn't exactly what they had planned. [laughter] I didn't really think of what they had planned on until much later.

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

Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy 10/10/01

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 10/15/01

Corrections reviewed by Jamie Wang 12/3/02

Appendix

Letters

Letter 1.

[Cresskill, N.J.--from the envelope]

June 11, 1943

Dear Marie,

I told you so much of this and that over the phone last night, I have to stop and think (I can do it once in a while), about what I said, so I don't repeat myself.

It was good to hear your voice again, even if it had to be over the phone, but I'm hoping maybe I'll be able to see you again soon!

The work I'm doing is gradually beginning to make sense, and take on more and more clarity, as the days go by. It's natural, I guess for the first few weeks to be more or less of a muddle, and rather mixed up. Each day one more step is explained, and another phase of the work becomes my baby.

To date, the County Agent's Office is a clearing house for advice and information for the farmers, incorporating everything from planting schedules to disease control, and labor supply and management.

In addition, the victory gardeners and backyard poultry flock owners phone, write, and visit seeking information relative to management, feeding, spraying, housing, and every other conceivable problem that confronts them.

At present my time is spent half in the office, and half in the field, covering twenty to thirty miles a day, helping the farmers in Passaic county in every way I possibly can.

This may make you think I'm an egotist, because it is "I'd" so much, but one has to be truly an artist to talk about his work and not make it a tale in the first person. Result, I'm not an "artist."

Betsy (the car), you know the one with the black body and red wheels, is back safe and sound, with no damage done, for which yours truly is very grateful. I think I told you this over the phone, but no harm done in repeating it, (I hope)!

If you feel like writing a fellow Bergen County-ite, I would like to hear from you. Lots of luck in your nurse's aid course.

Very sincerely

Wes.

Letter 2.

Paterson, NJ
July 16, 1943

Dear Marie,

This letter is long overdue, and I guess the author is in the dog house for not calling you on Monday as I promised. There is an explanation.

Monday afternoon I left for New Brunswick and didn't get back until Wednesday night about 10 p.m. Since then I have been working until ten and eleven Thursday and tonight the same trying to catch up on work that came in while I was gone.

Monday, I had planned to come home by way of Hillsdale, and surprise you but 3 pm a call came from the Experiment, and I was on the road for New Brunswick in fifteen minutes.

The phone here in the office keeps ringing and interrupts the line of thought, thus the jumpy words, and mark overs.

Very sincerely
Wes.

Letter 3.

Cresskill, NJ
June 27, 1943

Dear Marie,

This month has fairly flown by, and for the life of me I can't figure where it has gone. Each day has found the work more and more interesting and varied. Some days have been very busy, which made the clock spin so fast, quitting time came and nothing much seemed to have been accomplished, but thank goodness it was only an illusion.

The night work comes in spurts. This past week I had no meetings of any kind, which this week I'm out Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Not to speak of Friday, which I am looking forward to. It will be very nice to see you again.

Beginning Thursday, July 1st I live in Paterson, and come home Weekends. I'd rather live home, but when the purse strings man talks about Passaic County residence, yours truly has to fall in line.

Today has been a busy one. Since 8 this morning, we've been out working about the place, weeding the garden, spraying, and finally relaxing under the trees listening to the radio just before supper. After eating we all cleaned up and took life easy until bedtime.

This isn't much of a letter, nor does it say very much, but I will be seeing you soon, so maybe you'll forgive a tired lad.

Very sincerely
Wes.

Letter 4.

Paterson, NJ
July 28, 1943

Dear Marie,

I didn't mean to wait this long to write you, but the time just seems to develop wings and fly away. I'm sitting at the office desk writing before I go out for supper. Now I get home weekends only, from Saturday noon to Monday morning, the rest of the week is spent in good old Passaic County. I've come across some very pretty spots I never knew existed. Rolling hills, winding roads with lots of trees and woods, farms with well kept barns and houses, some with white fences, others without.

The room I have is in a house on the side of Garrett Mountain, and looks out over the valley. At night it is really pretty to sit by the window reading in a lounge chair or to lie in bed and see the lights blinking on and off in the valley below, while overhead the stars are almost close enough to touch.

Here's the dope on the garden [in Hillsdale] as far as I can give it to you. The pH may be all greek to you but the figures in pounds of ground limestone will be something tangible.

the Right Hand section has a pH of 5.2. This section needs 50 lbs. of ground limestone per 1000 sq. ft.

The center section has a pH of 6.2. This section needs 10 lbs. of ground limestone per 1000 sq. ft.

The left hand section has a pH of 5.1. This section needs 55 lbs. of ground limestone per 1000 sq. ft.

The center section, the wet one, has a high nitrogen content as I suspected. There is no way that this condition can be corrected, however it can be used to good advantage. There are some vegetables that could use this excess nitrogen to promote leafy growth. A few of these are, Swiss chard, New Zealand Spinach, everbearing spinach etc. These plants in the center section should give large succulent leafy growth.

In the other sections any vegetable or flower can be grown.

Most likely the brussel sprouts were broccoli in the first place. The soil would not cause this transformation.

Usually on Sunday nights, I'm just about ready for a long night's sleep, so I don't listen to it very often. The few nights I have heard it, I did enjoy it very much.

We gave Grace a party last Wednesday night. I knew she was leaving for South Carolina, Saturday.

The writing paper is very nice, and quite attractive.

I have a surprise to show you one of these days when I can get up to the house. At present my gasoline supply is very limited, so I have to use the car with caution. I will see you soon, so just have patience. I hope yours is better than mine.

I do get a bit of relaxation now and then, so I guess the all work and no play--will be staved off.

Hope to see you soon.

Sincerely

Wes.

P.S. If you write again address--

Room 100 County Adm. Bld'g.

Paterson, N.J.

Otherwise the letter will lay on the table home all week.

Letter 5.

Paterson, N.J.
August 11, 1943

Dear Marie,

Just a short note, with not much in it. I just can't wait for Saturday to roll around; most likely because I'm looking forward to such a grand time when the week is over.

The work has slacked off quite a bit, and we are not as busy now as previously. I'm going to go mail this on my way to supper, so if there isn't very much in the letter, blame it on an empty stomach.

See you Saturday.

Sincerely
Wes.

Letter 6.

[Clifton, N.J.--from the envelope]

August 16, 1943

Dear Marie,

I didn't get around to calling you yesterday; somehow the morning was gone and here I was on my way to Little Falls before I knew it.

You left your jacket in the car Saturday night, and dopey me didn't see it, until I was in Little Falls. I'll get it over to you this week sometime. If you feel like pushing a pen address all missles [missives?] to

Mr. Wes. Griffin. 599 Valley Rd., Clifton, N.J.

All of the gang liked you very much and "I sort of kinda do too!"

I'm leaving for New Brunswick again tomorrow, and will be back sometime Wednesday.

If you would like to see a fellow Bergen Countyite Sunday night, he'll stop off on the way to Paterson about 7:30 pm Sunday.

Let me know by mail if you want to.

Sincerely

Wes.

Letter 7.

Paterson, N.J.
September 2, 1943

Dear Marie,

This week has practically flew, and still you haven't had a letter from me. Every day has been so very busy, this is the first time I've a few moments to myself. There really isn't very much to say, but nevertheless even a short note is better than none at all.

The cold is gone and the cough with it; result I'm nearly normal.

The work at the house in Cresskill has been piling up rather badly, and does need attention. Dad would like to get the drain under the driveway built and that is an all-day job. The gas situation is getting terrific; and in some places over half of the stations are closed. I'm very much afraid that we'll have to skip this weekend and take up the next one. I hope you don't mind too much, but I think you'll understand. I'll give you a ring on the phone over the weekend.

Sincerely
Wes.

Letter 8.

Paterson, N.J.
September 29, 1943

Dear Marie,

Today is Wednesday already and still I haven't written you.

The cold is gradually localizing in the chest, and causing quite a bit of coughing, but not too seriously.

On the whole I feel good! Bedtime has been early except for Monday night. I don't know about the weekend yet--Saturday night is out, but I don't know about Sunday. The family is having company for the weekend, but I won't be home until Sunday noon, or thereabouts. I'm afraid mother and the family will want me to stay home Sunday night; but I can tell you better, come Sunday.

What have you been up to this week?

All day Monday and Tuesday, people have been bringing in chickens, bugs, soil fertilizer, yes even apples to find what they were--or what was wrong with them and what caused it--or what it was made up of.

Today has been a trifle slow, so I'm taking office time to write you. "Nice work if you can get it," and even nicer when you get away with it!

See you soon--I hope--

Wes.

Letter 9.

Paterson, NJ
October 14, 1943

Dear Marie,

I'm about twenty-four hours late writing, but as the saying goes "better late than never." Still have two more "nights out" to go, plus Saturday afternoon work., and then one day off. Having a holiday Tuesday [Columbus Day] has made the week seem short, and here it is Thursday pm already.

There isn't enough time to get all the things done, I want to, but I guess the same holds with everyone else.

Right now I'm rushing along to get this done before supper, and another meeting. So if there are slurred words and mark overs, please ignore them and puzzle through as best you can.

This desk of mine just seems to go higher and higher. Monday and Tuesday I'll be in New Brunswick again for a 4-H workshop conference and must be back in Paterson Tuesday night for a beekeepers meeting at 7 p.m. Do you think I can make the trip and eat supper in two hours. If you make a bet negative, I warn you you'll lose!

That[']s all for now.

Wes.

Letter 10.

Paterson, NJ
October 26, 1943

Dear Marie,

Here it is Tuesday night already, and the week is well on its way toward the halfway mark.

I didn't get back to Paterson from Stockton until 1 AM Monday, that is Sunday just past midnight. This sleepy head was late for work, since he rolled over to get those forty winks again. Result--about thirty minutes late--not too serious!

Your letter was waiting for me, and so of course I had to read it before I turned in. Such a nice note it was too!

It seems as though every time I sit down to write you, I have to rush in order to get it done. Tonight is till in the groove! We have an executive meeting at eight o'clock. It is now 5:15 pm. and here is what has to be done before the meeting.

1. Eat supper--yep. I can use some vitils [vittles]
2. Make up my expense account. I didn't get it done today.
3. Write a report on the 4-H work done since June 1st.
4. Work out arguments for 4-H sub-committee of County Board.

Result--letter written in a rush again as usual. Will call you on phone Wed. pm between 6:30 and 7 p.m.

Sincerely
Wes.

Letter 11.

Williams Inn
Williamstown, Massachusetts [hotel stationery]

November 6, 1943

Dear Marie,

Here we be! Walt Klammer and I have a room with an easterly exposure and look out to the mountains when the sun has just risen.

It is a bit hazy, but the sun is gradually burning it away.

We came over these mountains last night about 9:30 pm. It was dark and not a light on the road. The cities and towns seemed to be miles below in the valley as we went over the top of them.

This is a genuine colonial New England setting. Mountains all around you, and even very large old trees. How I would love to be in this setting Thanksgiving or may[be] Christmas.

Sincerely
Wes

Letter 12.

Paterson, N.J.

Nov. 22 '43

Darling,

I'm writing tonight instead of tomorrow, so you have a letter to read before you go to bed Tuesday.

Last night it poured all the way to Clifton, and was a first class "rotten" night.

Today I have been running soil sample tests all day, practically, except for a few interruptions. If I can make it, I want to try to get some of my Christmas shopping after work before the stores close. What I'll get, I have no idea. A doll for Betty Ann, and cigarettes for Dad. Except for that, I've not decided.

We have quite a steady snow squall this morning, with a nasty cold wind behind it, but no signs of it after lunch. Guess it will be much colder tonight. Good thing the Pontiac has anti-freeze in it! yes?!

I'll call Tuesday most likely before you get home, but I wish it would [be] your voice on the other end! A happy Thanksgiving to you!

Love

Wes.

According to the Separation Qualification Record issued with his Honorable Discharge from the U.S. Army, Wes was inducted into the Army on January 25, 1944.

The following letter, in Marie's hand, ostensibly comes from Marie's infant godchild, John Leslie.

Letter 13.

[Hillsdale, NJ]
Wed. April 26 [1944]

Dear Uncle Wes,

Mommy and Auntie Mitzi think I'm fast asleep, but I wanted to tell you I've got them both fooled.

Right after my 6 o'clock bottle I cried and cried, and, of course, when Auntie Mitzi came she brought me downstairs to play for a little while. I laughed & smiled, even looked at myself in the mirror over Auntie Mitzi's shoulder. Mommy feeds me so well--I eat cereal every day; she gets mad 'cause I spit it over her hair & her face. She looks so funny then that I have to laugh & more cereal sputters out.

I weigh 15 lbs. now and am getting two teeth. I'll be a great big boy when you come home to see me.

I'm even learning how to dance--Auntie did a few steps while holding me close to her shoulder. Aren't you jealous?

They're busy downstairs--talking--talking--Just like all women--they think I'm fast asleep. When they come upstairs to give me the 10 o'clock bottle I'll pretend I was sleeping. I'll yawn & yawn & pretend I'm not even interested in the milk, just sleepy. But I'll drink my milk anyway. It's a long time till breakfast.

Oops--here they come--I have to make believe I've been sleeping right along instead of writing to you. Auntie says you're the nicest soldier in the world, Uncle Wes, so please come home just as soon as you can--you'll be able to pick me up, even if I gain 5 more lbs. between now & June.

Your loving nephew,
John Leslie

Letter 14.

Camp Wheeler, Georgia
Saturday the 29th [of April 1944]

Dear John Leslie,

For a little fellow, you certainly do write very well, and I can see you're learning things fast. Confidentially, though, it's easy to fool the women, at least that is what we men say, but sometimes I wonder! They seem to catch on to male tricks, and yet they don't show any outward signs of that knowledge. You had better be a bit conservative, and not overplay your hand.

So you're quite a dancer too! Am I jealous? You should see my green eyes! But as long as Auntie Mitzie dances with you why that will be all right.

I think your Uncle Wes is a very lucky fellow to have a girl like Auntie Mitzie waiting for me. Sometimes we men have to go away to do a job we don't like, so everyone can live a happy, peaceful life later on. Those who can't leave do other work home, so we can carry on here. Someday you'll understand all this, and realize that the freedom we enjoy in our way of life is worth fighting for, and even dying for, if the ones we love will be assured of the life they want.

Your Dad and Mommy are fine people John Leslie, and they are so happy that you have come into their home.

One of these days we'll all be together again, and until then--

Your uncle
Wes.

Letter 15.

Camp Wheeler, Georgia

Saturday, May 20th [1944]

[The letter written a week ahead of the event described, so as to reach Marie on time]

My Darling,

Word reached me via the Fair Lawn grapevine that you were having a surprise shower tonight (Friday, May 26th), and so just a few lines from a Yankee in Georgia greet you.

Writing this letter in the barracks is a far cry from [t]he shower you are enjoying. The men are preparing for the march to the bivouac tomorrow and are tolling field packs, getting supplies ie cigarettes, razor blades, soap, etc. All in all a cyclone hit the place. Lockers are all messed up, barracks bags on the floor with blankets, clothes and men's shoes bulging the sides ready to [be] carried by truck to the bivouac area.

Darling, tonight is a night you will long remember. Not only because this is your shower and your friends are with you, but it is another step toward the happiest day of our lives. I wish I could be with you to watch your face as you open each present with eagerness and anticipation you cannot hide. I wish I could be with you because I love you, and want to be near you always.

In a way I am with you, because when you are happy, I am happy too. Nature has a way of bridging distance, by her stars, the moon, and the earth itself.

Goodnight dear, and peaceful dreams, though I'm far away, I am with you.

All my love,
Your Wes.

Letter 16

Camp Wheeler, Georgia

Tuesday, June 6th [1944, D-Day]

Darling,

Everyone, every where is talking about it. All seem to have high spirits, and anticipation of success "goes without saying." Radios have been giving news flashes all morning. There just hasn't been any other programs at all. Commentators give eyewitness accounts of the first troops hitting the beaches. Officers and enlisted men alike crowd around loudspeakers, trying to form a mental picture of the invasion. We all wonder if it will have any effect on us, and cause a change of plans. So far no word of any kind has been given out. Much will hinge on the opposition or lack of opposition the troops may encounter. Everyone places great faith in the command, responsible for the invasion. We must, and will win!

Just one year ago tonight, I walked into Aunt Mabel's house and met you! Since then my life has changed. I met a girl who was to steal my heart, and make me a prouder boy than I have ever been before. Because that love has become my most precious possession on earth.

Now only a few days remain until I am on my way home to you. They can't pass fast enough! There is so much about you I love. The way you smile and your eyes betray your inner feelings--youth and vitality--the songs we sang, the things we did. The days that seemed so long and the nights so short.

I have the platoon picture, but as yet I haven't had time to look at it. The company picture turned out very good, but I don't get that until next week. I just saw a sample print.

Ted wrote me a very long letter this week, or maybe I told you already. If you [yes?] this is repetition. He has put the car back in commission, and said I can use it when I am home if I want to. It doesn't matter, I know mother will let me use the Chrysler if I want it. Nothing like having two cars at one's disposal.

Today is still, clear, and hot. The sun looked like a huge tomato as it popped over the horizon this morning.

Have to go to lunch.

All my love

Wes.

Letter 17.

Camp Wheeler, Georgia
Sunday, June 11th [1944]

My Darling,

This is the last letter from Camp Wheeler, and when you read this I should be almost home. Now that basic is over, it seems like a short time, but actually it is over four months since that day in January when the bus left Bergenfield and took me to Camp Dix [actually Fort Dix, New Jersey]. Many things have happened since then. I've become a soldier in the finest army in the world, fighting for the fundamentals of human freedom, without which no peoples can hope to live a happy and secure life.

God and my country have been good to me. Under my church and the stars and stripes I have been able to choose my own profession, work for an education, and love the girl of my choice. In none of the axis nations is this possible. I need not fear a knock on the door, what I may say in public, or what I may do consciously or unconsciously. In this country my home is my castle, my God my fortress. Everything a free people believe in, live for, and desire is at stake. That people have called upon ten million young men and women to lay aside their normal civilian lives, and take up arms to defend and assure that way of life for the present and future generations. All are working or fighting for the day when the conflict ends and the flower of manhood and womanhood return home to their wives, husbands and loved ones.

But the job does not end there. A way of life must be originated which will help all people to live peaceful lives. The world has withstood two major wars but it may not withstand a third.

[end of fragment]

Letter 18.

Camp Wheeler, Georgia

[undated letter, sometime between June 11 and 16, 1944]

My Darling, only two and one half decades ago, another line of American doughboys began a march across the Continent of Europe in order to preserve the principles of freedom that we are fighting for today. They did their part, but we did not do ours. We failed them, even though they did not fail us. It must not re-occur. Human lives cannot be replaced. Nor will re-imbusement alieve [relieve?] heart ache and memories. Only time can heal them, and sometimes even this cannot.

This is not just a war of armies, but rather a war of people and their beliefs. One of regimentation [sic] and subjection of one race to the will of another. The other a belief in freedom, and equality, so precious, that some are willing to die so others may have them.

But I didn't mean to be so serious! It will be good to see Red, you, "our folks," and some of the familiar things I knew years back. To feel the warm sun in the garden, and meet friends.

Now that only a few hours remain until I'm on my way home, I begin to feel like a caged lion, awaiting freedom; freedom and you.

Darling, I love you very very much!

All my love

Wes.

P.S. I'll have a barrack bag full of clothes etc. with me and want to see about my Wasserman [?].

Letter 19.

Camp Wheeler, Georgia
[June 16, 1944]

My Darling,

Do you remember a night in June, Sunday, to be exact, the 6th, when Bud Westervelt came home from Fort Jackson for a short furlough? You were visiting Grace that weekend, and spent the night at her apartment.

Sunday morning Bud arrived and you thought you should go home to Hillsdale, however, you didn't and spent the afternoon playing ping pong and badminton. You had supper at Bud's house, and stayed overnight. While Bud and his family were eating, some relatives down the street came in to say hello and spend the evening.

Bud's cousin, Wes, I think was his name, sat across the room from you and a few times offered you cigarettes and chatted with you in an off hand way to help make you feel at home. You were wearing a yellow dress that night, and after his family went home Wes walked to Grace's apartment with you to carry your bag back, since you were staying at Bud's house, and would go to work from there in the morning.

It was raining when dawn broke, and Wes stopped at the station to say hello on the way to work at his office in Paterson. You were dressed in yellow and wore a white hat, with all the freshness and fragrance of spring.

You made a lasting impression on him for he called during the week to say hello. The hand holding the telephone trembled, and he was skeptical of the reception his voice would receive. You were glad to hear his voice, at least your voice sounded so, and later when you agree to answer his letter when he wrote, he was sure. He made a visit to Hillsdale the following Sunday to meet your family. The evening was spent at home, and it really was a pleasant evening. You played the piano, one of the songs was "You are always in my heart." You never guessed that later he would be! He hoped you didn't mind staying at home instead of going out. All seemed well, because you asked him to come again, and really meant it! He agreed to.

The summertime came and with it many hours of work in his family garden. He like to work the soil, and see things grow. He was an agriculturist at heart, and the soil was mother earth to him. His family always had a large family garden, fronting along Hillsdale Avenue, and He [sic] prided in the fact that it looked beautiful from the road. Straight rows, devoid of weeds, and a dust mulch on top to retain the soil moisture.

You did not see very much of him, since he boarded away from home, and came to Cresskill only on weekends. Sunday night he would stop at Hillsdale to see you, or take you out on his way back to Paterson. You seemed to enjoy a mutual attraction for each other, but only in a friendly sort of way. You cared for him, but did your best to hide it.

Some nights you went to the movies, other times you stayed at home, playing cards, reading or winding balls of yarn for your bedspread. All the while both of you were kidding each

other, knowing you were falling in love, but not quite sure enough to admit it. You knew you loved him, and your eyes showed it, but he had to be positive of his love for you.

His work was in the Extension Service, helping farmers solve food problems, and general adult educational work. The farmers had an annual outing each year in the fall during October. He asked you to go. I'll never forget the night he spoke to you about it. You never had given him any inkling as to your idea of outings, although you had been to his house on Sunday a few times for barbecue [sic] chicken, and seemed to enjoy it. He was hoping against hope you would say yes, and was a bit timid when he asked you. You said yes, and so that weekend you found yourself Passaic County bound.

The afternoon was warm and sunny and you danced the evening away. The night was clear and the moon and stars very bright. You walked with him hand in hand, and sat on the rail fence beside the road. He wanted to kiss you but was not sure of your reaction, and I don't remember whether he did or not, but that really doesn't matter.

The Christmas season came, and with it the usual gaiety, color and presents of the holiday. Your family went to church on Christmas Eve, and opened their presents upon returning home, until the early hours of the morning. Those days that followed were filled with much happiness for both you and Wes. Going places together, doing things together, and having a wonderful time.

In January Wes left for the Army, and your heart went with him. You loved him very much, and now your life seemed empty. Your nurses aid work became even more important than ever to you, so much so that you overdid it, and almost had a nervous breakdown as the result.

You were very proud to wear the service pin Wes gave you, and your love for him shined in your eyes for everyone to see. And though your heart was breaking the day you saw him off, you managed to smile and hide the tears, that you felt must come. You wrote to him every day, and he replied, both of you declaring your love for each other, and praying for the day when peace would come and you would be together again.

Wes tried hard to be a good soldier, learning his lesson well, and fitting himself to the mode of military life, so you would be proud of him, and help to speed the day when millions of young men could return to civilian life, and live as they had before the war.

My Darling, I've loved you dearly, more than anything on earth, so much that nothing is worth doing, unless I do it well, and we both share in the satisfaction of a job well done.

Tomorrow is your wedding day, and I must say goodbye to the girl I took to movies, and picnics; Goodbye to the girl I love. For tomorrow when you are married you will be my wife. I love you and always will.

All my love,
Wes.

Marie E. Picker and Westervelt Griffin were married the next day, June 17, 1944.

Letter 20.

Camp Wheeler, Georgia

[The stationery is Camp Wheeler, but the letter was apparently written from Fort Meade, Maryland]

25 June 44

My Darling Wife,

This morning when I wrote the new address book material, I saw the one you had written. Just that little bit of handwriting brought a lot of emotion, almost as though you were here along side of me praying for my safe return. I just had to sit down and write a note to you.

I can't put into words the feelings I had when the Chrysler left Tenafly taking you back home and I went on to New York. I almost wanted to cry out to you and bring you back, but you were out of hearing. I watched the car as it moved out of sight behind the buildings and the flashed by the traffic light on County Road heading for Cresskill.

Everybody in the barracks [is busy--unreadable because the binding obscures the line]: some writing letters, some reading, some singing, and others just talking.

While in Washington yesterday, (we came into Washington instead of killing time in Baltimore) we went out by the Washington Monument to see the War Bond rally display of captured axis [sic] air corp equipment [sic]. ME 109's ME 110's, barrage balloons, engines, etc.

By the way I'm buying a \$10 bond each month out of my pay. It will be mailed to you at 17 Cedar St. You can put it with the rest. I'd suggest you put them altogether [sic] and use your own discession [sic] as to where you keep them. I married a girl with good common sense, so I'll leave it up to you, darling. I have to get a G.I. haircut this afternoon if I can get a seat at the barber shop. You know, one of those close babies, that you don't like!

No more of the Wheeler gang have arrived as yet. I guess it is too early. Most likely later on this afternoon they'll start to roll in.

Under separate cover I'm sending you a paper with information you may want to know, and don't know where to go for the answers. You'll find them in the booklet. I hope it will ship free.

This is my complete address.

Pvt. Westervelt Griffin 42103421
1st Replacement Regiment (Infantry)
Army Ground Forces Replacement Dept #1
Co A, 2nd Bn. 1st Regiment
Fort George G. Meade,
Maryland

Use the address on the envelope rather than the above; It is much shorter.

It was rather comical yesterday--after getting to camp we had breakfast at 9:30 and went

back to our area for orientation. At 11:15 chow call sounded again. We told the Sgt. we had eaten only an hour-and-a-half before, and he said, "Well go eat again. It won't hurt you." I couldn't eat a darn thing, but did manage to down a cup of coffee and a piece of pie.

You had better not send any food down, since we won't be able to take any with us, and I wouldn't want to leave any behind. It would be a job to keep it here since we do not have foot lockers to go around and have to share them, three men to one locker.

I love you darling, oh so very very much! I miss you in the evening, and most of all at night. The bed seems so empty without you, and your head on my shoulder.

I love you, dear,

All my love
Your husband Wes

Letter 21.

Camp Wheeler, Georgia

[Again, the stationery is from Camp Wheeler, but the letter was written from Fort Meade]
25 June '44

My Dear Wife,

I just had to tell you I love you before turning in. The hands of the watch are creeping toward nine o'clock, and before long my first Sunday away from my wife will be a day of the past.

This letter will not be mailed until tomorrow morning, but you should have Tuesday or Wednesday. By the way if I write you at the office should I use the married or maiden name? I would rather use the married (Mrs. Westervelt Griffin) one. Can you blame me?

The twilight is very quiet and restful. The time of day I like to be with you most of all. The ride in the hansom through the park, a kiss or two in the dark seclusion of its interior, the touch of your hand on mine, your cheek against mine, your head on my shoulder, have all become a part of my life, just a tree needs its leaves.

I love you with a love so strong, it cannot be denied, nor can time or space decrease it, rather it strengthens with each new experience.

I miss your goodnight kiss. The warmth of your body pressed against mine. The chills that run along my spine when you take me skyward. Your hand in my hand, and your fingers in my hair. Your bosom so silken and soft, that brings such peace of mind after emotion.

I love you so deeply and dearly that words cannot wholly express it. "My wife"-- the words are music, the relationship a reality. Goodnight my dear. Peaceful dreams--bright with the hopes and prayers of a new day. I miss you terribly.

All my love
Your husband

Letter 22.

Postcard, Fort Meade, postmark June 30, 1944

Darling,

One card deserves another. Thanks for the thought. A letter is on the way to keep you company, until I can write again tomorrow.

Lots of love

Your Wes.

Letter 23.

Postcard, Fort Meade, postmark June 30, 1944

Darling,

Just another card to keep the postman busy!

Keep smiling, and get ready to make more fudge. You know an army travels on its stomach, and what could be better on the inside.

Love

Wes

Letter 24.

[No return address, but written from Fort Meade or Camp Kilmer]

11 July 1944

Dearest and Darling Wife,

I felt like chatting with you again tonight so here comes another letter. I was thinking over some of the things that happened before I came into the army, that in a way were amusing, when I look at them now.

Do you remember my telling you about the time I was to visit Joan and Karl for the evening, and then had to go back to the room in Clifton, or was it home, because Karl's father was taken sick. Poor Joan was so afraid I wouldn't come back and might be insulted because of the circumstances and the drive. And then the time I went to the Breeding farm in Karl and Joan's car and had the flat with no spare. The gang really had some experience that time!

I've often wondered what Arthur Butt would say now, after what I told him at the farmers outing last fall, now that we are married. "No not yet" has become an opportune phrase at that. We did have so much fun that Saturday!

I hope you don't mind my slipping back into the past every once in awhile, but it is fun to talk with you about things we did together, or things I did along business lines. I do like to think and plan for the future too, so don't think I'm looking back over my shoulder; I still have my eyes ahead.

How is the garden doing? Are those thirteen tomato plants I put in still alive? Keep them watered and you'll be having tomatoes a plenty [sic], especially the beef stake [sic] babies, even though your garden is small.

I love you very much.

All my love

Your Wes.

Letter 25.

Co F 4th Pl. APO 15374
c/o PM New York, NY

[no date; probably mid-July 1944]

My Darling Wife,

This is your first "V" mail letter from your husband, and quite a novelty to write one. I still like the long type of letter better, but a few of these once in awhile will make the letters a little different.

I read the Bishops Jaegers (?) this afternoon. For many a good laugh I highly recommend it. Aunt Molly, I believe has a copy.

Keep your chin up darling, and say hello to everybody at Hillsdale for me. I don't know what we are heading into, but I'll be OK! Don't try to do too much Nurse's Aide work, and get as much sunshine as you can. I love you very much.

All my love

Your Wes

On July 18, 1944, Wes was shipped to Europe. The night before he left, he began a letter home, and continued it over several days.

Letter 26.

Monday [July 17, 1944]

[location and possibly date torn out, probably by military censor, the letter written at sea]

Darling Wife,

Just think one month ago was the big day! The time has slipped away so fast hasn't it dear? No mail came this noon, and if there is none tonight I will have had a mail-less day.

Tonight is lovely. A gentle breeze blows about the boat now and then, and thank goodness, it is not as hot, and stuffy.

The sky is devoid of color. No moon, no stars, and no sun. It is just in-between the sunset and rise of the moon.

A fellow in back of me has just begun to play the mouth organ, and the boys are collecting. They always seem to be able to sing any time, any place. Most of the older songs like "My Gal Sal," "Daisy," etc. It is quite nice too. It has been a while since I sang to your playing, but somehow I just didn't feel in the mood. I think you understand. My heart just wasn't in it.

The day light is fading rapidly now. Here and there a small purple cloud appears in the eastern sky, with streaks of lighter purple for a background. I'm going to turn in. More tomorrow.--

Up and about at 6:15 am. Breakfast. Coffee, oatmeal, bread and butter, and sausage. We had cleared the harbor and were on the high seas before we were allowed on deck.

The sea is blue, really a dark blue, with white clouds in a light blue sky. The sun is bright and warm, and feels good since there is a breeze blowing. Everyone is on deck. Some playing cards, some craps, some just standing at the rail, others sleeping, and a few writing like me.

I went to the ship's canteen this morning. The soda was warm, candy soft, but cigarettes were only 50 cents a carton. I didn't get any yet since my belt was full and I would have no place to keep them. There is a slight roll and pitch to the boat but not enough to cause any trouble. The water is calm. Wait until we hit the deep water. Then there will be men at the rail!

I watched the shoreline fade from sight as the sun broke through the morning haze, and felt so far away from you. I miss you terribly, darling, and wish you were right here with me. I love you very much! I'm going to catch a few winks of sleep. Be back later.

I woke up at noon and had lunch. The meals aren't too much to brag about, but they do satisfy the appetite. That's about all.

I can't mail any letters until the boat docks but I will write a few lines each day while on the water. I love you very much

All my love
Your husband.

Letter 27.

Somewhere in England

Monday 31 July 1944

My Darling Wife,

You have no idea how good it feels to sleep on something solid for a change and not in a hammock that swings and sways. It felt funny when we stepped off the boat onto the dock. It felt as though the dock was rocking. But now I have my "land legs."

It was quite cool last night. So cool I slept in my fatigues with two blankets, and my overcoat on top of them. It is a far cry from the heat I left in 'Jersey.

It stays light a long time over here. Until ten or eleven p.m. making daylight for seventeen hours.

I love you very much.

All my love

Your husband

Letter 28.

Somewhere in England
Thursday 3 August 1944

Dearest Wife,

Today for the lack of a new letter I read one sent when I was back in states. I opened it a[nd] there you were, talking to me. A letter means so much now, more than it ever did before.

Once in awhile we have access to a radio, and hear music that plays on the heart strings, and cause that lump in the throat. They remind us of you folks and home.

The English people are friendly and we get along very well with the Brittish (sic) Soldiers we have seen so far. The authorities back home and on the boat coming over cautioned us about certain things that might be touchy spots, but from what I can see so far, we have taken to them, and they to us in splendid shape. I think because the job we have in hand is far bigger than either of us or our countries. Hitler and his stooges must be licked and the Tommy and the Yank are the ones who can do it. But enough of this! You'll be saying, why not something about us! You're right dear, but I just wanted to pass on these thoughts that come to me at a time when they do become rather important to me.

Right now on the radio a short wave program from New York is coming through. I guess they are picked up and rebroadcast by B.B.C. Guess what the song is! "People will say we're in love." Remember one July 2nd when you played it and I sang it? Little did we know what lay in store for us a year later. Another one, "Long Ago and Far Away." Golly but they make the place seem more like home! "Marie Eleana," and "Going my way." I remember sitting in the theater in New York, (at your insistance) and seeing Bing Crosby, (for which I was glad later), and holding your hand all the while. Your perfume floated upward and you were so close! Darling, I love you very very much. Gee I miss you so! I hope and pray you're all right, and long so to hold you close in my arms.

I love you very much.

All my love
Your Wes.

Letter 29.

Somewhere in France

Saturday August 1944 [the date is omitted; most likely August 12 or 19]

Dearest and Darling Wife,

This is some of the "V" mail paper I brought with me from the states. The dampness make the glued flaps stick together, and rather than throw them away, since all the paper I can get is V mail stationery, I tore off the flaps and made it into ordinary writing paper. As you can see it serves the purpose.

Last night we went down to see the U.S.O. show. It was very good. A magician acted as M of C and in addition the program included, a juggler, a dancer, a singer, and an accordion player. I liked the magician and the juggler the best.

The former, took the dog tags from around the neck of two soldiers during a trick and they never know it. Neither did the audience! The juggler had a metal vase that always seemed to have more water in it. The boys really did enjoy it and we take our hats off to the performers who go right into the battle zones to keep up the morale of the men. They can't put enough of the U.S.O. shows on the road for my part. We really look forward to each performance. This is the first we have seen here, and are already hoping for another very soon!

Suppose I tell you something about our home in France! It is a one room apartment, without bath or running water. The room is very spacious, measuring roughly eight feet long by six feet wide. The ceiling is a trifle low, about 3 feet, tied to tree branches outside to do away with center posts. We are dug in the ground about two feet, giving us a rifle rack for three rifles, a bar for gas masks and rifle belts on the right wall, and a s[h]elf dug into the ground on the left to hold our extra clothes, haversacks, toilet articles etc. Oh yes, on the right wall bar we also have hooks to hang the mess kits so they can dry on the inside and not give any overhead reflection. The dirt walls are covered with cardboard to keep the dirt from crumbling and going all over our bed. The bed has a straw "mattress". This is about two inches of hay spread over the ground to make the bed softer. Over this we spread raincoats to keep the ground dampness from coming through underneath. Over these we spread the blankets, using a field jacket for a pillow, and a GI towel for a pillow case. So can see under the circumstances we really are quite comfortable. In a way it is almost like the days we spent camping on the Palisades in Jersey. We certainly do get plenty of fresh air and exercise.

I love you very much. Remember me to the folks in Yonkers, and give my love to the family.

All my love

Your Wes.

Letter 30.

Somewhere in France
Monday 28 Aug. 1944

My Darling Wife,

I ran out of writing paper so I'm using the inside wrapper from a pack of cigarettes. I'm in good health, sleep fairly well, and think of you all the time.

We move around quite a bit, and eat mostly K rations with a hot breakfast. So many of the boys seems to have post war plans like ours. I love you very much.

All my love
Your husband.

Letter 31.

Somewhere in France

Sat. Oct. 7, 1944

Hello Darling,

I'm sending the one strap of my watch. Will you send me another one. This one is worn out. Today has been warm and sunny, more like a June than an October day. The nights are very cool and damp.

I love you very much dear, and think of you all the time. The things we want to do later when I can get home. I've pictured us using our silver, crystal, linen, and candles. It will be fun, won't it? All in good time I suppose. I hope you are feeling OK, and the hospital work agrees with you. I am fine, and in good spirits.

Give my love to all, and say hello to Jack, Norine, Baby Leslie, Mr. and Mrs. Aselford and the newlyweds.

Give my love to my family for me. I'll try to write them soon.

I love you very much.

All my love

Your husband Wes.

Wes was captured by the Germans two days later, on October 9, 1944.

Letter 32.

[German postcard, written in pencil]

Kriegsgefangenenlager [Prisoner-of-War Camp]

Datum: Nov. 26, 1944

Hello Darling, I love you very much! Tell Ted to get Revelation long cut with plenty of papers. I have a swell lot of plans for us if they meet with your approval for us when I get home. A happy Holiday season to you dear, and send my greetings to our families and friends. Watch the stars, dear, I am. I love you very much, all my love
Wes

Letter 33.

Kriegsgefangenenlager

Datum: Dec. 25, 1944

Hello Darling, Christmas Day! We have just finished supper, and are sitting about relaxing with full stomachs. For dinner we had rabbit, dressing, turnips, potatoes & coffee. For supper, brown gravy on bread and cake baked by the Frau at the big house. A very enjoyable day. But I missed you. I love you,
All my love
Wes.

Wes was liberated by the 82nd Airborne Division at Wittenberg, Germany, on May 3, 1945.

Letter 34.

May 6, 1945
Somewhere in France

Hello Darling,

I have been recovered by the Yanks, and in a reception area on my way home. These stamps are two that I have kept ever since I was captured.

I'm in good health, and feel fine. I love you very much. Tell everybody I'll see them soon. In about four weeks, I think.

All my love
Wes.

Letter 35.

Western Union telegram, 5-26-45

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS PLEASURE THAT
YOUR HUSBAND PRIVATE GRIFFIN WESTERFELT RETURNED TO MILITARY
PATROL 08 MAY 45

J. A. ULIO
ADJUTANT GENERAL OF THE ARMY

Wes returned to the United States on June 12, 1945.

Letter 36.

Western Union telegram, 1945 Jun 12

GOOD NEWS YOUR HUSBAND IS HOME HEAR HIM ON WPAT 93 ON YOUR DIAL
WEDNESDAY 1205 NOON

DAVE GOLDEN
PUB RELATIONS WPAT PATERSON NJ.

Wes then went to Camp Joseph T. Robinson, Arkansas, for what passed as debriefing for former prisoners of war in those days. He received his Honorable Discharge from Camp Robinson on December 4, 1945.