

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALMA GEIST CAP

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

TARA KRAENZLIN

and

BARBARA TOMBLIN

PERTH AMBOY, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

PAUL NICHOLS

Tara Kraenzlin: This begins an interview with Alma Geist Cap on May 6, 1997 in Perth Amboy, New Jersey with Tara Kraenzlin and ...

Barbara Tomblin: Barbara Tomblin. We usually like to construct a kind of life history and we usually like to start by asking about your parents. You said a little bit about them in the pre-interview and you noted that you were born in Califon.

AGC: That's right.

BT: So, you obviously spent a lot of time there. We were curious about how your parents met and how they came to end up living in Califon.

AGC: Well, my father was born in Middle Valley, which is just a short ways up the road from Califon. His father had come from Germany in 1870, and was in the creamery in Califon, and they moved into town when my father was very young. ... He was in Califon all his life. He was first a pattern-maker with Taylor-Wharton Iron and Steel in High Bridge, then, he was a rural mail carrier. ... No, it's the other way around. [laughter] First, he was a rural mail carrier, and then, he was a pattern-maker. Of course, there were no high schools in the area in the time, but, he went to Plainfield to business college, and, taking a great risk, decided to buy a mill in Califon, which was a grinding mill. He made his own pancake and buckwheat flour, which he advertised by setting up suppers all over the county. It was very well-received. Of course, this was a big dairy country, at that time, and, now, about all the fields grow are houses. There has been no mill and no creamery for quite a while, and, now, there's not even a railroad.

BT: Yes, the railroad used to go to High Bridge.

AGC: My mother grew up in Newark, but, her older sister, who was twenty years older than my mother, had been a secretary, and had married a young lawyer, who was practicing in Newark, but, lived in Califon, and moved back in Califon. Mother spent summer vacations in Califon, and there, met my father swimming and playing tennis. She went to Montclair State, came to Califon as a schoolteacher, and they were married in 1914. Dad was very interested in volunteering. He was vice-president of the State Volunteer Fireman's Association. He was heavily into Masonic lodges. He was county treasurer for Hunterdon County. He was vice-president of a bank, vice-president of an insurance company, all while he was running the mill. My mother suffered her first minor stroke when she was only forty-seven-years-old, but, it never prevented her from doing anything. She wrote and directed minstrel shows.

BT: You had mentioned that.

AGC: She was very active in the church, doing all kinds of innovative programs for them. [She] raised four children. Very much ... a night owl, she never got up to fix my dad's breakfast and that was a bone of contention for a long time, but, she was always up until one or two o'clock, writing, or sewing, or doing something, and he had to get up early. He always made his own breakfast, which was two eggs. It's a wonder he lived so long with two eggs for breakfast. So, one day, I decided, "Gee, it's too bad no one's getting up to make Dad's breakfast." So, I got up

and fixed the eggs. I soon found out that he didn't want anybody to do that, he just wanted something to complain about. So, he was also mayor of the town for twenty-two years.

BT: Mayor of Califon?

AGC: Of Califon. Mother was clerk of the Board of Education for forty-four years. ... A bit more about my mother, her maiden name was Haggerty. All of her ancestors had come over very early, some in revolutionary times, and all of them no later than the early 1800s, and settled in the Allamuchy area. ... Their names are very prominent up at the Tranquility Cemetery there. My grandmother, that I knew very well because she lived with my Aunt Mamie, which was only four houses down from us, was a remarkable woman, very free-spirited, very much of a leader, and a wonderful pie-baker. Her pies were always looked forward to, Mrs. Haggerty's Pies. I'm trying to think. [laughter] Anyway, she married Stephen Haggerty and moved to Newark. My mother had the sister and three brothers. All, of course, are now deceased. I can't think of anything else along this line right now.

TK: Going back to your youth in Califon, what do you remember about grade school?

AGC: Oh, I just want to tell you one thing more about my father. I told you about his father, his ancestry. If I may?

TK: Of course.

AGC: I had told you that my father's father was German, but, his mother was of French Huguenot descent, Perrine, and her ancestors had been the first Huguenot family to be married in Elizabethtown, in the 1600s. I think that's enough about that.

TK: I was just going to ask you about what it was like growing up with this mill. How did that play a part in your lives, the rural aspects?

AGC: Well, the mill played a big part, because there were two mill ponds, and the swimming pool was the upper mill pond, and this was beautiful. It's now complete destruction. The dams are broken through, it's full of tin, broken things. ... It was always a big drawing card for the whole neighborhood. My father had to post a, "No Swimming," sign to cover insurance, but, he used to go up and wash his car sometimes on Sunday afternoon, and there was a concrete block over the gateway. ... He'd put the car there, and wash it, and people would come out from the city, park all along the road, and go swimming, and what he'd hear is, "You can't wash your car here." He says, "Well, why not?" "Well, I know the owner of this space, and he wouldn't approve of it at all, and I'm going to see that he's told." My dad didn't say who he was, he'd just say, "Well, why don't you just do that?" That was my father. My father would not sign a contract, incidentally. He said, "If my word is not good enough, that's too bad. I won't do business with you." [laughter]

BT: So, he kept everything basically on the up-and-up?

AGC: And, the fact that he was treasurer at the time of the Lindbergh trial gave me one of my memorable moments. He got us ... right behind ... Betty Gow and the butler, sitting right behind the bar rail. Our pictures were all over the country in the papers. So, that was fun.

BT: Even to this day, I talk to a lot of people about the Lindbergh affair. Even if they did not live in Flemington, they remember the trial. It is a very, very vivid memory for a lot of people.

AGC: Very vivid memories, and, of course, we had a woman from Califon who was on the jury, so, she was always the celebrity in town. [laughter]

TK: Where did you end up going to high school?

AGC: To High Bridge.

TK: How far away was that?

AGC: That was six miles. We went by bus, except on the mornings when I had to play in the orchestra, because, in those days, your extracurricular activities were either before or after [classes], and the bus did not wait for you. If you were in extracurricular [activities], you either walked to High Bridge, or you found a ride, or you took the milk train down, and most people cannot believe the milk train. It just had a caboose on the back with a little round stove, two red plush seats. A young man by the name of Milton Young also played in the orchestra, and he and I would take the milk train down, and that let us off way down the hill from the high school. So, not only did we have to get the milk train at six o'clock in the morning, but, we had to walk up this hill. I no longer play the violin, because I lost the end of this finger in World War II in a very strange accident. Another Red Cross worker and I ran a recreation hall, and we had collapsible chairs, and we were making designs for a dance that we were having. ... I moved my chair and it cut off the end of the finger. So, that was the end of my violin-playing days.

TK: You had been playing the violin all along?

AGC: That's what I was playing. I was never very good, so, it was no loss, no loss.

BT: No end of a career?

AGC: No end of a career, no. [laughter]

TK: Did you perform in high school, though?

AGC: Oh, yes, I even performed in eighth grade graduation. A solo.

TK: How large was your high school?

AGC: There were fifty in my class. ... I was president, senior year. I have been elected president ever since. We will be celebrating our sixty-fifth reunion and I'm still class president. So, when

people complain about holding an office too long, I say, "I think I can top you." Of course, our class is very much decimated now. We did have a formal reunion for our sixtieth, but, I doubt that we'll have a formal reunion for our sixty-fifth. We may get together for an informal luncheon.

TK: Have you met regularly over the years?

AGC: We didn't meet, actually, until our fortieth year, but, we've met since then every five years. I wasn't a very good president. [laughter]

BT: You did not call any meetings. [laughter]

AGC: Didn't call any meetings, but, we had kept in close touch, all of us. We, of course, went to Washington, DC for our senior year [trip], and that was a big treat, you know. I'm sure that seniors now wouldn't think much of that, but, to us, that was wonderful.

BT: Many of the people that we talk to had never really been outside of the greater New York area by high school graduation.

AGC: The class before me, now this was, again, the way my father acted, had their money saved for the Washington trip. That was when the banks were closed and they were told they couldn't go on the trip. My dad raised money for them to go on the trip.

BT: Oh, how wonderful.

TK: With the mill, did your father made ends meet during Depression?

AGC: Yes, he owned a lot of land at that time, because people couldn't pay. He owned many farms for a while, but, ... eventually, they got back on their feet, and not that he farmed them, he left them bare, but, he held the titles, because they owed him the money. ... Well, we ate a lot of pancakes, I'll say that, and my mother, frankly, was not a good cook, except on special occasions. My grandmother was wonderful. When she cooked, it was fine. She made pies for us, as I said, and desserts. We were great dessert eaters. It wasn't enough to have like Jell-O for dessert. That was Sunday, Jell-O, but, we also had to have cake, maybe pie, too. ... So, how'd I get off on this? We're talking about high school.

TK: The Depression.

AGC: The Depression. Yes. Of course, that affected my life after college even, but, we can go into that when we get up to college, but, high school was a wonderful experience, just ... great. I can't think of an unhappy moment in high school, except one unhappy moment, physically. The building was no great shakes and had a very rough floor. I reached down to pick up something, and got a big splinter under my fingernail, and, oh, it was very painful. ... I had to be rushed to the doctor. I took everything there was to take in high school, all these courses. So, when the principal, Russell Woglon, would get up with an examination schedule, he would read it and say,

“Now, is there anyone with a conflict?” My hand would always go up, “Not you,” he said, “We’ll solve you later.” [laughter]

BT: We know you have a conflict.

AGC: “We know you have a conflict.” ... I had my first real thinking experience with a history teacher in high school. I was on the debating team, of course, and we were to come up with, “Was any war in the entire ... [history of the] world ever necessary?” Well, I said, “Certainly, the American Revolution.” He looked at me and said, “Why?” and that was one of the best thinking questions that I’ve had in my entire life. Very clever man, he’s elderly now. He and his wife, whom he met while teaching at High Bridge, came to our sixtieth reunion. They are now in Florida. So, he was very young at the time. It was his first teaching job.

BT: That was a relatively rural, and still is, a fairly rural area.

TK: For New Jersey.

AGC: Well, of course, the high school no longer exists.

BT: Where does everybody go?

AGC: Voorhees.

BT: Voorhees, yes.

AGC: Well, they didn’t always go to Voorhees. ... I mean they went first to North Hunterdon, and then, to Voorhees.

BT: So, you really thought you got a pretty good education.

AGC: I think so, I think so.

BT: We are always curious about how people made decisions about going to college. In those days, there usually were not high school guidance counselors.

AGC: No, we didn’t have any, ... but, of course, there was no question that I was going to college. My mother had gone to college. I was certainly going to college and ... I was very interested in Antioch College. I had read a lot about it, and had wanted to go to Antioch, ... but, I had also applied to NJC. I needed a scholarship. You said my dad made out well. Well, he did a lot of things, but, money ... was always in short supply, and I applied for the Hickman Scholarship, for Douglass, and got it. So, since I got that scholarship and didn’t get a scholarship at Antioch, I went to NJC.

TK: Where did you live as a freshman?

AGC: I lived on Jameson as a freshman and this was a very unhappy experience. I had a beautiful roommate, really gorgeous, who partied too much and came home drunk, flunked out ... about three months after we started. So, that was not a very happy experience, but, I was always very busy at college, because ... I had the scholarship for academics, but, I didn't have anything to cover room and board. So, I waited on tables, and, in those days, it was Cooper Hall. We had to wear uniforms, which we had to launder ourselves. It was all very formal. You had your own table with eight people and you had those for the entire year. This was your family.

TK: You ate at the regular times?

AGC: We ate before, in a separate dining room, the waitresses ate, and, of course, ... the fellow waitresses have become my best friends to this day. They're still my best friends.

TK: They were all other students?

AGC: All students, yes. All students. Well, that wasn't enough either, because, then, I didn't have any spending money. So, in addition, I typed papers for people.

BT: You must have been very busy.

AGC: I was very busy and I used to have to do it in a queer position. ... I would have to do it after lights were supposed to be out and the only lights that were supposed to be on were in the bathrooms. So, I would go in and stretch out, put a pillow on my knees, and put the typewriter on the pillow, and type in the bathroom.

BT: Did anybody ever wonder what was up?

AGC: Our trays were really heavy, and I'm a strong person. But, in the third year, I began to have trouble with my spine, and they said I must not carry those trays anymore. So, in those days, it was WPA, well, it wasn't that, but, it was assistance to students, and I was what was called a, "Professorial Assistant." In other words, I corrected papers. So, that's what I did senior year for spending money.

BT: Oh, that is nice. Now, when you waited tables, did you wait all three meals?

AGC: Three meals. ... Now, my first year in college, I gained thirty pounds, because, I told you, my mother was not a good cook. We grew up on pancakes, peas, and fried steak, when we could get it. My brother always said that he never knew what steak tasted like until he left home. [laughter] She was too busy running the town and everything else, ... but, when she wanted to, she could do it. In fact, she loved to decorate cakes. That was another thing that was in great demand. She was a cake decorator for special occasions. ...

BT: Had you ever lived away from home before?

AGC: We had traveled a lot. In fact, my going to college was up in the air, because we went out to the Chicago World's Fair. That was the summer before. We always traveled. ...

BT: Now, that is very interesting, because a lot of people we have interviewed really did not leave New Jersey.

AGC: Well, we had relatives in Virginia, so, we went down there quite often. We ... traveled the Hudson River Line a great deal, because my dad's sister had married a Lutheran minister, and his parish was in the Albany area. So, we would take the Hudson River Day Line up and I was always ... the oldest child. I had a sister, younger, and two younger brothers, but, I got so much attention in the four years that I was the only child that I was taught to speak very early. ... I don't remember this, but, my family tells me this, so, I think it must be true, that, when I was just a little tyke, just slightly over a year old, people would say, "Oh, what a cute little girl. What's her name?" and I would say, "My name is Alma Winifred Geist. I come from Califon, New Jersey. I am a Methodist and a Republican." [laughter] And, the people. I was taught to say this, so, you can see that I was brought up to know what I was, no question. [laughter]

BT: Just out of curiosity, and for the record of the Methodists here, you went to the Califon Methodist Church from the time you were a child?

AGC: Yes, right. Now, I'm the oldest. I have never changed my membership. I'm an associate member here.

BT: You have never changed. So, you still belong to Califon?

AGC: Well, I don't go there. All my activities are here, but, technically, [I] belong to Califon, and, as associate member here, I can do everything, except be the lay representative to the annual conference, but, they didn't know that, and I was the lay representative for five years before they found out I wasn't supposed to do that. [laughter] Anyway, ... well, my one brother, Bobby, died. He succeeded my father as the mayor of Califon. [laughter] ... His wife still lives in Califon. My other brother has retired and gone to South Carolina, but, we still keep Thanksgiving, every year, together as a family reunion, and we trade around. This year, it's my turn. The only one that everyone manages to make is the one in South Carolina, I guess, because it's just the joy of traveling, and, since my son lives just north of Atlanta, it's more convenient for him. ...

TK: I noticed that your father, though, never joined the Methodist Church. What was his religion?

AGC: He had no religion. He, as I said, was a man of his word. He could not recite a creed, because he did not agree with the creed, and he [said], "I'm sorry, I will not say this. I do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. I don't believe in the virgin birth."

BT: I am not going to say it.

AGC: "I'm not going to say it," ... but, he was chairman of the Board of Trustees. He left what money he had left to the church.

BT: Did he attend church?

AGC: Oh, yes.

BT: He just did not officially join.

AGC: And, he also tried to sing, if my mother couldn't stop him. [laughter] She had a wonderful voice, ... which she lost after about her third stroke. By the way, she was also an author, and she wrote a book, which went through three printings, of the history of Califon.

BT: Yes, you mentioned that. I will have to look that up.

AGC: It's out of print, but, it's gone through three printings.

TK: They probably have it at Special Collections at Alexander Library.

AGC: It's called The Califon Story.

BT: I have been to the church, and the chapel in the back, of course, is the original (Roleman?) church.

AGC: That's right. ... Well, we kind of got up to college and didn't get much farther. ... I was very interested in learning German, because I thought, "With a name like Geist, I ought to know some German." See, my grandfather, who was, "Rah-Rah-American," refused to speak German. The only thing that he would say, once in a while, when he got angry with us, he'd say, "*Du Krautkopf*," which means, "Cabbage-head," ... but, other than that, no German. So, I thought I'd better learn it. With a name like Geist, I should know some German. So, I lived in the German House, and we had the most wonderful professor called Dr. Alice Schlimbach, who became a friend for life. She had a summer home in Ouray, Colorado, because she said that was the Switzerland of America, and she entertained my husband and me out there, and then, she came back, and died at Nedford Lakes. I was in touch with her at all those different locations.

TK: As a student, I learned a little bit about a scandal in the German Department in the 1930s, involving Professor Hauptmann.

AGC: Herr Hauptmann? Herr Hauptmann and I were very good friends.

TK: What is your take on the story?

BT: He just sort of disappeared.

AGC: He disappeared with his whole family, but, he was a marvelous teacher, absolutely marvelous. In fact, my memory of him helped later when I taught high school, because I used to give the performance of what he would do on his first day of class. Now, you don't want to hear that, that's too long a story, but, kids used to howl when I'd do this for my first classes.

TK: He was also pretty active with the German House?

AGC: Oh, yes. In fact, we all had to listen to Hitler's broadcasts. He bought a special short-wave radio for the House, but, we were stupid. We thought this was funny. We really thought this was ridiculous, since not one of us took this man seriously. In fact, I have a picture in my album of my standing out in front of the German House with a whole group of us saying, "*Heil Hitler*," as a joke, because we couldn't believe it.

BT: His rantings and ravings, if you heard it now, and I think at the time, sounded comical.

AGC: It did. It was really, ... but, I'll tell you, the first time, I was frightened. My roommate at the German House was going to Germany for summer. I forget the name of the ship, I think it was the *Bremen*, and we were allowed on to say good-bye, but, me, I have a tendency, if someone says not to go somewhere, I have a tendency to go there. It's just natural. So, this sign there says, "*Gahr Keine Intrit*." [Translation: Don't Enter.] I knew what that meant, so, I go down, and I opened this box, it's full of gas masks. You never saw anyone go up the stairs so fast in my life and I was frightened. Believe me, I didn't go any other places on that ship where it said, "Don't Enter."

TK: Did Professor Hauptmann leave during the time that you were at NJC?

AGC: Yes, he did. I think that the Bergel thing ...

TK: The Bergel thing?

AGC: The Bergel thing, yeah, may have been overstretched, but, Hauptmann was definitely a Nazi, no question about it, but, to me, he was always very good. In fact, I had to wear his tuxedo once. ... He was great for putting on plays, and we had to have this Christmas entertainment on the steps of the chapel, and my parents, who always came to everything, they were wonderful about that, all their kids, anything that they did. ... This was in December. It began to snow. Hauptmann had gotten pine torches from Germany to use, directly sent over. But, I was to be a drunk on New Year's Eve, and I had to get up in his attic, and try on this tuxedo. ... I was asked, "You went up into the attic with Herr Hauptmann?" but, I didn't think anything of it. His wife was really a very plain soul, but, I think, maybe, the brighter of the two. They put on wonderful entertainments at their house. They'd invite you to supper. They had a house just off of Douglass campus.

TK: Did she work in the department as well?

AGC: Yes, she did.

TK: As a secretary or something?

AGC: As I recall, Mrs. Hauptmann also taught. Alice Schlimbach was my favorite professor, and, of course, Miss Hickman was the most wonderful professor anyone could ever have.

TK: What was that in?

AGC: That was in history. I was a history major, history, with minors in English and German, and she was internationally active. She attended the conference in San Francisco, the forming of the United Nations. Hickman Hall is named in her honor. Emily Hickman.

BT: Yes, she was very well-known.

AGC: And, I was very, very fortunate to be one of eight seniors who were selected to meet with her for coffee and dessert every Wednesday night at her house. ... Funny things that I remember, she served coffee in cups that she had collected from around the world. One Halloween, she didn't serve coffee at all. She just served cider and doughnuts. I was so disappointed, because I used to look forward to what cup I would get and what its history was. [laughter]

TK: What would you discuss?

AGC: Oh, we had reading to do. It was assigned. Some world question, and then, we were to discuss it, and, if you didn't do it, you were no longer a member of the group. ...

TK: Regarding the assignment?

AGC: Her questions ... were, "Write everything you know about, ..." and you never knew what the question was going to be. If I talk so much about this, we'll never get to the Red Cross. [laughter]

TK: It is just interesting to us, especially since very few people actually remember the Bergel case, but, we read about it, so, it is interesting, for me at least.

AGC: Well, I do think it was overstretched, but, there's no question at all that Hauptmann was exceedingly dictatorial. He was a real Nazi.

TK: Well, historians found the same thing. What did you do immediately after graduation?

AGC: Well, in those days, you couldn't do your practice teaching until after graduation, so, I did my practice teaching at Somerville High School. A woman from Califon, taught at Somerville, so, I commuted with her. I didn't have a car, of course, and then, of course, there was no way to get into teaching. This was still in the midst of the Depression, there wasn't a school which wanted a history teacher or an English teacher, but, a very interesting thing, my grandfather, who, as I said, would speak no German, became very ill that spring, and reverted to German, spoke no

English at all, and I was the only one who knew German. So, I stayed with him and he died that spring, but, my German came in handy at that point. Well, every summer vacation, I had waited on tables. I didn't have to carry a tray. This was in a summer camp on Culver's Lake, called Culvermere. All the waiters and waitresses were college students, and we carried the meals on, like, little carts to the table. ... We also had to teach a sport. I taught swimming and archery. We also had to be available to dance with the guests in the evening and we had to put on a show Saturdays. So, this was very good training for the Red Cross.

BT: I was going to say. This was certainly good training for what you did later.

AGC: Good training, yeah, good training. So, I thought, "Well, there was no teaching job available, no sign, so, [I should] look for what I could do." I answered job ads in papers. It turned out that what sounded like a good job in Boston was a job selling books, door-to-door. Well, I went to Boston and sold something called, "Journeys Through Bookland," or tried to sell, "Journeys Through Bookland." I had great success being invited in for a cup of coffee, talking to the people, and then, when they told me how hard up they were, I kept thinking, "They really can't afford this." ... So, I was not a successful [bookseller], ... although, I finished that year. Well, back home, ... I couldn't keep selling books in Boston, so, I thought, "What now?" Well, I had heard that there were opportunities in secretarial work, which is why I went to Rider, and, during my year at Rider, I lived with a retired school teacher, Miss Carter, who lived in Morrisville, Pennsylvania, right across the river. Of course, Rider, at that time, was still downtown in Trenton and I walked everyday. You wouldn't dare do that [today], across the bridge, all the way through Trenton. She was very demanding, very wonderful, very knowledgeable, an interesting person, but, I was to dust on Saturdays, and, for the corners of the stairs, I had to wrap a toothpick in cloth and clean the corner of the stairs, but, she also bought me a new dress for Easter, because she said, "I really think that you need a new dress." So, I was going to say something else about Miss Carter, because she was a wonderful person, but, Rider was a very good experience, very fine. I learned English there that I had not learned in college, because their English training was very strict and that was not a strong point in college, though. I think that's what made it possible to be as good an editor as I was later on. My first interview was in Sayreville and Miss Carter gave me advice. She said, "There are going to be a lot of applicants for this position. I want you to be noticed and I'm going to buy you a hat." She bought a red, straw hat with a feather right up like this. I had a black suit, I remember, and a red pin. I thought I looked pretty spiffy. There were forty of us lined up for this position. We went in, everyone, there were no women on the board. They were all men seated around the table, and they had papers that they're supposed to mark things off, ... how you impressed them. Well, they asked questions. None of the men were looking at me at all and I thought, "This isn't going to do. I have to do something. ... They haven't even looked at my hat yet." [laughter] So, I put my hands on the table and said, "Gentlemen," I said, "I want you to know that I bought a new hat especially for this interview and not one of you has looked at me yet." I got the job. [laughter]

BT: I cannot believe you said that.

AGC: I got the job, but, that wasn't all. They offered me the job at twelve-hundred, which was the standard rate for a beginner, and I said, "I have had a year of post-graduate education. I

believe I should get more than the basic rate.” I got twelve-fifty, [laughter] but, three of us shared a room. Actually, it was a downstairs apartment, but, it had one bedroom, not far from the school. It was a very pleasant, old house, but, it was just one bedroom, so, there was a double bed and a single bed. So, we used to switch about who had to share the double bed. [laughter] ...

TK: Were your other roommates also teachers?

AGC: Yeah, we were all teachers.

BT: All teachers?

AGC: All teachers.

BT: Did you have a car or did you just walk?

AGC: Walked. It was within walking distance. No, ... I didn't get a car of my own until after the war.

BT: Most people did not.

AGC: Anyway, I did have a car once. I can tell you about that later. ... This is a good story about a car. Anyway, this was where I met Charlie, my husband. ... One of the teachers lived in Perth Amboy, and he saw us together on the street when I was over visiting her, and he saw her later, because they knew each other, and asked her to introduce us. ... We dated while I was teaching, but, I'd just broken up, not too long ago, with a man that I'd been going with for years and I thought surely we were mated, because we were both born on the same day. ... [laughter]

BT: It was a sign.

AGC: But, it wasn't, no. I didn't think Charlie was right either, because he was Polish and he was Catholic.

BT: It sounds like you had very different backgrounds.

AGC: Very different background. In fact, he never went to school after fourteen. It was all self-education. This was because his own mother had died, his father married again, and his step-mother said, “Big, strong boy. He gotta go to work.” So, he went to work, but, he always was interested in learning, always ... and I went back to work at the college. He and every dean that I worked with were the greatest of friends, and Dean Corwin invited us up to her house, after she retired, and he was always at ease, and, when I was working at the hospital, in public relations, ... he was the photographer, the official city photographer. ... Of course, he'd have to take pictures of the dances and the dinners, and he knew most of the doctors by their first names, because he had grown up with them. ... There was Dr. Fine, who was one of the most respected of the doctors, and Charlie'd say, “Hi, Iggy.” [laughter] ...

BT: Now, when you were first teaching in Sayreville, had the war started in Europe by then?

AGC: The war started when I was there and very dramatically. It was a Sunday afternoon, if you remember, when the Japanese attacked. ... I had the radio on in the living room, in the place where we were living, and I had papers out. I was correcting papers when the news came over, and, of course, the next day, everyone ... came to school and everything stopped. ... Franklin Roosevelt's address was piped throughout the school, and, of course, everyone was excited and in tears. ... Charlie, by that time, or shortly after, was inducted in [the] service, although he was thirty-six at the time. So, he was one of the older men, but, that was where my father's car story comes in. You may not want all this on tape, because it goes on forever. ...

BT: That is fine. The war is always fascinating.

AGC: Dad loaned me the car for a week. Of course, gas was very scarce, but, he had it, because he was in agriculture. Not that he wasted it, because he was very patriotic, but, he loaned me the car. I don't know why I wanted it. I had something to do. He said, "Okay, you can have the car for a week." Well, Charlie came up from camp, and I was out, and he left a message. Oh, this was the second year, 1942, and, at ... that time, I was rooming with just one teacher in South Amboy. ... He came over to see me, and left a note saying he was leaving on the train from Newark at so-and-so, and I thought, "I've gotta get there, I've gotta get there." So, I took the car to Newark, parked it across from the station, ran out just as the train was leaving the station. He caught me, ... pulled me on the train, and I rode to Washington, DC with him, just so that we could talk to each other. So, I came back. I had not noticed that the gas tank was almost empty. I thought, "How am I going to get back to South Amboy?" and this was like six o'clock in the morning, because I had taken a return train from Washington, DC. So, here I am, no gas, I have no ration card for gas, what am I going to do? I thought, "I may as well start and see how far it goes." Well, it was beginning to whum-whum-whum. ... There was a diner. I pulled off the road, went into the diner. There were several truckers there. I talked to them. I said, "I'm in a terrible pickle." One said, "I'll siphon you some gas." So, I got back.

BT: During the war, with rationing, if you did not have a card and you ran out of gas, you were in trouble.

AGC: So, he siphoned some gas, and I got back, and I got back in time to get to school. [laughter] ... That was one of the more interesting adventures of my time, I think.

BT: When you were at NJC, before the war, was there much discussion about the looming war situation?

AGC: Oh, peace rallies. Yes, peace rallies.

BT: We forgot to ask about that.

AGC: There were a lot of peace rallies, and I can remember one chemistry professor, I can see him and I can't think of his [name]. ...

-----END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE-----

AGC: ... The rally organizers came around and opened the doors to each classroom. The professor went over, closed the door, and said, "If you go through this door, you are no longer a chemistry student." No one left. They knew that he meant it. Is that what you're asking for? ... We kind of got lost in contact. I would like to speak about one more professor.

BT: Sure.

TK: Who is that?

AGC: George P. Schmidt. He was an American history professor, just a marvelous gentleman, and so knowledgeable. ... People just loved his class, and Margaret Judson, who taught history, and was very much of a perfectionist, and, later, she was acting dean of the college.

BT: Yes, I recognize the name.

AGC: After I graduated, they used to have seminars, every once in a while, and George Schmidt conducted some of them, and I remember a note from him one time that said, "Alma, please come back to this. You're the only one I can count on to ask questions." [laughter] My yearbook kind of did me in. My parents always thought that I studied a great deal, which I did, when I could, but, I was a busy gal doing all these things to earn money. So, my yearbook write-up goes on telling about how I like to sing, and my nickname in camp was, "Canary," etc., and then, it said, "But, the thing about Alma, she never seems to study, and, yet, she's always a step ahead with the answers." [laughter] ... My parents said, "What does this mean, you never seem to study?" I said, "Well, I slept with books under my pillow," and that's the truth. I did.

BT: We did not ask you anything about the social life.

TK: Did you go over to College Avenue?

BT: Did you date the fellows at Rutgers or go to parties there?

AGC: Well, I was dating Jimmy Johnson, the man that I told you about. Of course, he came from High Bridge. He was not ... a Rutgers student, but, I did date a couple of Rutgers students, but, not to any great [extent]. One man from Milltown, but, Jimmy was my date even up through senior prom.

BT: So, would he come to New Brunswick? What did you do when you went out on dates, since he was not a Rutgers student?

AGC: Oh, well, ... some High Bridge fellows were at Rutgers, so, we were always included in the fraternity parties, or whatever else, and they knew Jimmy, of course. ...

BT: So, you did get over to Rutgers campus?

AGC: Oh, yes. When we could.

BT: I know there were concerts, a lot of people talked about them.

AGC: The concerts were in the gym and the concerts were very formal affairs. You went in a long evening gown, over by bus, all of us, in our evening gowns, [laughter] in the gym. ... But, that's where I got my first and only heartthrob performer, Nelson Eddy. I was crazy about Nelson Eddy. ... Even after I graduated and was working, he gave a couple of concerts up at White Plains, and I would go up to his concerts, and I never missed a Nelson Eddy-Jeanette McDonald movie, never. In fact, I have a Nelson Eddy scrapbook. ... I didn't do this with anyone else. It was just Nelson Eddy. ... Of course, traditions were very high, at this point, and they were really observed. Campus Night on Antilles Field was a tragedy for me, this was [as] a freshman. I didn't have many clothes, and I had a nice wool skirt that I wore to Campus Night, and got too close to the brazier, where they cook the hot dogs, and made a hole right in the front of my good skirt. [laughter] Tragedy, and, of course, the honor system was really an honor system, at that point, and it worked. It really did. ... I have to think of a professor by the name of Jessie Fiske, who taught botany. I was an ice skater, and skated whenever I could. I was ice skating out near Milltown one Sunday, and had a botany exam the next day, and I fell, and put these two teeth through my lower lip. I had to go to the infirmary. I was all bound up and I had this botany exam the next day. I could scarcely see, and I was in such terrible pain, but, I was forced to take the exam, but, she called me aside after, and said, "Look, ... I'm not going to grade you on that exam. ... I'm going to give you what you should have gotten, 'cause I know what you should have gotten," and she said, "I couldn't stand seeing you there with those rabbit ears," because they had ... [me] all bound up with these rabbit ears on the top. [laughter] I still have the scar.

BT: I did that in a car accident.

AGC: And, my teeth cracked.

BT: Your whole jaw swells. I could not drink out of a straw. I could not get anything in, everything just swells, and with the stitches, it just swells up.

AGC: And, my teeth cracked right across the front and that's why the top of the tooth is a different color from the bottom of the tooth. ... But, she was a great horse woman. At that point, we had a riding ring on campus.

TK: Where was that?

AGC: Where Hickman Hall is now.

BT: Oh, really?

AGC: A riding ring, and the girls, it was a part of the physical education program, and they wore all the proper clothes, you know, the riding outfits, the high boots, and we had festival on Antilles. Have others told you about that? That was part of the physical education program. A big festival, with original dances and costumes, and my poor parents came to that, too, of course, and this dance we had to do, ... it was some kind of a gypsy dance, and it was a two-piece costume, and, I remember, my dad says, "There should have been more of your costume in the middle." [laughter] Oh, this was a big thing. The dancers took up all of Antilles Field. It was huge.

TK: That was every spring?

AGC: Every spring.

TK: What were some of the other traditions?

AGC: Canoeing, too, out on Westen's Mills. That was a regular course.

BT: A course?

AGC: Canoeing. ... Horseback and canoeing.

BT: But, you learned archery in the summer.

AGC: Yeah, archery. I took archery.

BT: I always thought archery was hard. I never did well in archery.

AGC: Archery and hockey. Field hockey.

BT: Field hockey?

TK: Which was your favorite?

BT: Ice skating?

AGC: I loved to ice skate. Can't do that anymore, since I fell on both knees, now.

BT: I have given it up, too. You get hurt, at this age, I mean, I am about forty-five and it is just not worth it.

AGC: No, the year that I really injured myself, although I recovered from that, and that's not why I gave up ice skating. ... (As I said, remember how I said he said, "Don't go through that door, don't go through it.") I did not want to go out of that chemistry class. ... So, I went to a Sonja Henie movie, and I'd seen all the things that she did, and, of course, there was great skating on the Charles River, which was just down from the little place that I lived, a walk-up

apartment on Beacon Hill. So, I used to go skating down there. ... Some people had lined up barrels to fly over, and I thought, “Well, I can do that.” I didn’t do it. ... I caught the toe of my skate in the last barrel, and, boy, did I go down. [laughter] It hurt. So, for quite a while, that leg was a little unreliable.

TK: I noticed when you started teaching, you also started leading the Girl Scouts.

AGC: Oh, yes. We had a great time. I had a senior troop and I took them into New York. I took them up to the Cloisters. We’d go to the restaurants. I remember there was a place called Butler Hall, which was up on the Columbia campus, and it was a very fancy restaurant, at the time. ... I took the girls, and they ordered tea, and they brought out, for each place, ... a slice of a lemon on a little glass dish. They brought individual creamers in the little pitcher. They brought the sugar, by each place. The girls thought this was so funny. They started to laugh uncontrollably, you know, and I was thinking, “How am I going to calm this room down?” but, they still talk about that. ... At least four of those girls still write to me at Christmas time.

BT: How did you end up being a leader? Were they just looking for volunteers?

AGC: I think one of the other teachers was in it and asked me to help out. We didn’t have Girl Scouts in Califon when I was growing up. We had Girl Reserves.

BT: Mariners?

AGC: No. It was connected with the YMCA. I forget the title of it.

TK: We had something like that when I was little. So, the Girl Scouts were relatively new when you were doing it.

AGC: Well, at least, we had the Youth Temperance Council, and two marvelous leaders. A lot of us were in that, when I was in Califon. There was temperance education in the schools.

BT: Oh. That I did not know.

AGC: Yes. Miss Parker taught it. They had a summer camp. There were two sisters. They had a summer camp and they also led the Youth Temperance Council. In fact, quite a few summers, I went to an encampment for YTC leaders. ... I’ll never forget, one year, my father, again, we were asked to bring curtains and bedspreads to make our rooms attractive. They sent this card saying, “Please bring curtains and bedspread,” and my dad had typed, on his own typewriter, down at the bottom, “Also, please bring bed and dresser.” [laughter] I looked at this, “I can’t go. We can’t get everything that we need.” He was a great kidder.

BT: I guess we should get on to the war.

AGC: How did I get in.

BT: I mean, at some point. You have got this teaching job.

AGC: Well, I taught for two, '41-'42, '42-'43, ... years, right? Edna Newby was in service and I wanted to, too. So, I applied.

BT: Yes, we talked to Edna before.

AGC: So, I applied, ... but, they decided I hadn't had enough experience. Well, I got the experience. My brother was in Camp Le Jeune in Louisiana, and I decided to go down to Louisiana to see him, and, on the way, would visit a young man from Califon who was in Biloxi, Mississippi. So, I stopped to see him, and we went to the USO there, and I got talking to some of the people, and they said, "Oh, could you stay a while? We need some help here. Some of the things that you can do." So, I stayed a month, and then, went back to teaching. ... I had a free month, and that gave me the experience, so that when I found out where you could apply for the Red Cross, I applied for the Red Cross, of course, the recreation division, not nursing, and was accepted, and what a check they gave. People came up from Washington. They questioned people all around town.

TK: What sort of questioning?

AGC: I don't know. The people just said that they had been questioning, you know, family background. They wanted to hear it from someone besides the family. ... Our training was very strict, as you'll see from notes. We were there in the American University in Washington, DC, for two weeks, an intensive course, and then, we were sent on a field trip, to make sure that we could do it, and my assignment was out in La Crosse, Wisconsin, at the hospital there, because I didn't know what kind of recreation I was going to get, and this was the hospital job, and I was nervous. My first day on the ward, how am I going to make out? Nature solved it. I went in with all my arms full of things, ... projects and such. I tripped, fell, everything went all directions. Some of these poor, infirmed, hobbling people jumped out of their beds to help me ... up. Never had any trouble like that. The ice was broken. Passed that test, I guess, went back to Washington, and then, we had to wait, almost a month, in Washington, not knowing when we would get sent out. Finally, the train to San Francisco, where we waited another month, because the war wasn't going as fast as they thought it would. Well, our ship was the USS *President Grant*, which was an old boat that had been decommissioned after World War I. It was an old liner and we really chugged across the Pacific. ... There were fifty-four of us Red Cross girls. There were six of us in a stateroom for two. They had built double bunk-beds, and we had to rotate, because the top bed was so close to the ceiling that you could scarcely breath. So, most of us, when it was our turn for the top bed, simply took the bedroll and went out on deck, because it was too tight. ... The hold was full of Australians who had been in the Battle of Tobruk and they were going back to Australia.

BT: Well, that is interesting to me.

AGC: And, they were talking a lot about how wonderful Australia was, and we'd see it, and how they celebrated Christmas, because we left San Francisco shortly after Thanksgiving. So, you

can see how long we'd been waiting, because I went to Washington on Labor Day, ... and they said about the lights, and everything. Of course, when we got [there], there were no lights in Australia. Everything was blackout and the centers of the streets had all been dug up for air raid shelters. So, there were no parks in the middle of the streets. We were delayed going across, because there was a big battle that we had to avoid, and the ship ran out of water.

BT: I was going to say, water is usually rationed on those ships.

AGC: Rationed is right. ... For the six of us, we had one pitcher of water a day for about the last week, because we were on the ship for twenty-one days. ... I'm thinking of the poor fellows down in the hold, because they were in tight, almost like in a slave ship. It was really sad.

BT: So, this was at the end of '43?

AGC: This was the end of '43.

TK: What did you think when you found out you would be going out to the Pacific?

AGC: We didn't know where we were going. No one told us, but, I must tell you, I had a tooth problem in San Francisco, and had to have a wisdom tooth out in San Francisco. Afterward, I went to a drug store. I thought some ice cream would taste good. ... Of course, we were told not to talk to anybody, and there was this very nice woman who sat next to me, and engaged in conversation, but, I wasn't going to tell her anything. Well, she said, "You're going overseas and I'd like to do something for the fellows overseas. When you get where you're going, I'll give you my address. You give me your APO number and I will send you magazines regularly," and she did. She did. We were friends for life. ... In fact, when I got back, she was waiting for me and took me up to her little hotel room, a wonderful woman by the name of Laura Conrad. She died about ten years ago.

BT: Now, you wore a uniform? The Red Cross had uniforms?

AGC: Yeah. This is some of my show and tell.

BT: Oh, great.

TK: We love that.

BT: We are talking about the uniform, which you said was gray in the winter.

AGC: Gray, quite heavy, but, quite attractive, I think, in the winter. In summer, it was a seersucker, two kinds, one with long sleeves and one with short sleeves.

TK: Now, you had a rank, you said, that was ...

AGC: Equivalent to a lieutenant.

BT: That, of course, implies that the military women and military officers did not fraternize or socialize with the enlisted men.

AGC: Well, fraternization with the enlisted men comes later, after I get to Townsville. [laughter] Well, going over, there were, as I said, fifty-four girls, but, there were only six Red Cross men, and I have very little to say about the Red Cross men. All of them that I met, except for one, seemed to be misfits. People kind of out of place and not quite with it. ... We had one, it was sad, ... [in] a tent next to us at (Helton?) Hall in Townsville, and he would just sit at his desk ... all day and do nothing. He did not work with us in any way. That was his job. He was supposed to be there to be a counselor and a helper to the fellows. Occasionally, he did help someone who needed leave, and would come to him for that, but, most of the time, he just sat there with his feet on his desk, and the dead leaves blowing around the tent. There may have been some good ones, but, I just didn't meet them.

BT: They were, then, obviously, not of draft age, or they were conscientious objectors.

AGC: They might have been conscientious objectors. I know one of them was a minister. He might well have been a conscientious objector. I never got to know any of them really well, except one, I did go up, when we finally [landed]. ... Oh, I better go back to when we finally landed. We landed in Brisbane, which is one of the drawings I did. It was the day before Christmas, which is their heat of the summer. We had to go down the gangplank wearing everything, including the helmet, the uniform, the overcoat, the knapsack, everything, and we had to walk, carrying all of this, a mile through the sand to a barracks, in the heat. There was supposed to be screening on the windows, but, it was all broken. Thank goodness we did have some screening on the beds, although, I think all of us had got dengue fever at one time or another. You know, dengue fever is the lesser kind of malaria, and we all were yellow, because we took Atabrine.

BT: I was going to say, you took Atabrine as a malaria reducer. You turn that wonderful color.

AGC: Yeah, beautiful.

BT: So, you went to Brisbane.

AGC: Boarded a train, immediately. Well, the next day, we boarded the train, the Narrow Gauge Railway, and went from there down to Sydney, where we waited another almost two weeks for an assignment, and, during that time, I took advantage, and went up to Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains, which was wonderful. ... [I] was there for New Year's, and we went to church, Sunday morning, and they began to play what I recognized as, "America," and I thought, "Isn't this nice? There are a lot of Yanks here and they're recognizing us." Suddenly, realizing it's the English ...

BT: "God Save the Queen."

AGC: “God Save the Queen,” [laughter] but, that was a gorgeous experience. If I ever get back to Australia, I want to go back to Katoomba again and see what’s happened to it.

BT: Townsville was in the north?

AGC: Townsville was north. Well, I finally got word to go to Townsville and was told that it would be in a recreation hall. I was to replace a woman who had been transferred, and the gal that I was to work with had been there for a little while, and it was with the Fifth Army Air Force Repair Base. There were eight thousand men on the base. Helton Hall was a very large, airplane-hanger-sized recreation hall with a stage. There was a band that would rival Glen Miller’s, because, when you get eight thousand men, you get a lot of talent. The ride was fascinating. Of course, the Narrow Gauge Railway is interesting because you sway. No food is served on the train. There are stops along the way, and you dash out, and get your Koba-Tie, or whatever. Of course, learning the Australian words was quite interesting. Koba-Tie, or cup of tea, and I found out that a cracker was a “biscuit” and a biscuit was a scone. And other experiences, odd ones, like, one day, one of the Australian fellows asked if I’d be interested in going to the, “ricing field.” I said, “I’m particularly not interested in that.” He wanted me to go to the races with him, the ricing field. [laughter] That was the races. Anyway, we got to Townsville, and we were, at that time, quartered in a house across the river. There were about ten of us in that house, and most of them worked in the service club in town. ... I’d like to explain this, because many people don’t know about this difference between the service club and an on post. Some of them also worked at the Garbutt Field airbase, serving doughnuts. ... At a Red Cross establishment in town, in Australia, must charge for services, and that was one thing. That was an understanding which had to be signed with the Australian government, because they said they could not put their merchants into jeopardy. So, they were forced, by contract with the Australian government, to charge for any service at their club. It was not a high charge, but, it was a charge, and a lot of people carry that as a bad memory of the Red Cross, but, this was something forced upon the Red Cross. In our place, we could not charge for anything.

BT: Because you were on base.

AGC: On base, but, at our big dances, we had two thousand Australian hostesses. The fellows wanted hamburgers, but, we didn’t have any money to get hamburgers with. Well, we arranged for some of the soldiers, on their own, to contribute enough money to buy hamburgers. The cooks set up a place which was off of our property where they cooked the hamburgers. So, the people could go from the dance to get the hamburgers, but, it wasn’t on our property. ... Oh, one of the big things we did each week was bingo, which the fellows loved. One thing that we had to give away, we had a whole shipment of bathing trunks, inside marked, “Property of the Red Cross,” and we’d give one [away] each week as one of the prizes. The cooks, who would bend over backwards and do anything for us, would bake pies and cakes for prizes. Neither Mary nor I smoked, but, we had our cigarette ration, so, that was a prize. Neither one of us drank beer, so, we had a beer ration, so, that was a prize. So, that’s how we got our prizes for bingo. Our big events were the dances and one dance each month was a theme dance. If you want to turn this off, I’ll just show you. ... Our two thousand Australian hostesses, which had to go through a training course, really, [and] they had to have their backgrounds checked, which was quite a job.

That didn't all happen after I got there, because Helton Hall was in existence when I came, and a lot of that had been done, but, we had dances each Sunday with this marvelous orchestra. It sounded like Glen Miller, but, once a month, we had a theme dance. I can recall some. One was an Easter parade. You were supposed to come with fancy hats. One was, "School Days," where they were supposed to look like little girls back in school, and we would have special invitations to the cabarets, and a dance card waiting for them when they came. ... I'll never forget, they had big poles and we would try to dress the poles in something themed. I'll never forget a bad mistake I had made. We were to be Southern belles, and the men, who were very clever, and, of course, we had lots of parachute silk that we could use, had created these costumes, and I said, "You know, I think they would look better if they had arms." So, very cooperative, they cut up some more parachute silk, and made arms, and that made the girls look like football players. So, I said, "Sorry, fellas, you have to take the arms away." Bad mistake, but, the theme dances were really lots of fun. We had a library. A lot of fellows came over just to talk or to write letters. Bingo, did I discuss bingo before, on the tape? Did we do that on the tape?

BT: Yes.

AGC: OK, don't need to talk about that again, then. ... Maybe I better go into Woody now and how we met. We had an advisory committee of men from the different groups. The eight thousand men were in different units, so, there was a representative of each unit on our advisory committee, and head of the advisory committee was Staff Sergeant Woodard Hogan, and Staff Sergeant Woodard Hogan and I got very friendly, very fast. We were not supposed to fraternize, but, we did more than fraternize. We wanted to get married. So, in April, we put in, because it needed special permission, since I had officer status and he was a noncommissioned officer. It took a long time to get permission. It did not come through until the next September. That's a long time, but, having a steady boyfriend helped. Of course, we were friendly with everyone, but, everyone knew I was Woody's girl, was a help, in more ways than one, because it fended off the others.

TK: The unwanted seekers.

AGC: I don't mean that I didn't like them, but, I was not open, you know, and this was one of the problems.

BT: Because there were how many women, at this point, on the base?

AGC: Just Mary and I, just the two of us.

TK: Also, the occasional Australian hostess?

AGC: Well, the only time that the Australians were there were for the weekly dances. They came out by these huge busses, the same busses that transported the men to work every day. As I had said before, it was just like going to a factory. The men boarded these busses, it took them to work on the planes and back.

BT: Now, did you live in a barracks or an officers' quarters?

AGC: We ate with the officers. We ate with the officers while we were on the base. ... In this group, there were about twelve of us, with the gals that were at Garbutt Airfield, and those who worked in town, in the house. Then, a few more workers came in, and we moved up to a larger house on the other side of the river, on the hill, and we lived there. Finally, a barracks opened, and they closed that house, and we moved to barracks. So, while I was there, we were in three different places, but, after Woody and I finally were married, on September the 30th, I was very, very lucky. I found an apartment that was ideal. ... How I got this, I'll never know, it was up a long flight of stairs, facing the ocean, triple windows. It still had its Australian problems. For example, our table, you had to keep the legs in tin cans with oil in them, because all the little animals would climb up. The refrigerator had to be kept the same way. We had a shower, no tub, and a frog came with the shower, [laughter] and ... he was so inquisitive, and would sit there watching with the big, bulging eyes, and I always felt that I really ought to cover up. [laughter] This frog was seeing too much. I managed to get some curtain material, and got an army cot, that was our sofa, and made a cover for that. One thing we did at Helton Hall was make silhouettes of the men with a lantern and ... they would send these home. ... I had a silhouette of myself and Woody, which I mounted on some cloth, and that was our wall decoration. Our furniture was very scarce. We had a table and a couple of chairs, but, we entertained. We entertained all his friends, one time. I don't mean often, because I was working, but, one time, we [had] about eight of his friends over for dinner, and, one time, I entertained all the Red Cross girls, ... but, the land lady was the most fascinating woman. Her name was Mrs. Strombini. She was a Scot, and she had been sent to Italy to be, quote, "finished," and had married an Italian engineer who came to Australia for the opal mines, but, he was deceased. ... She had this very lovely home which she had carved into her own living place and two apartments. ... We had a banana tree in the front yard and a papaya tree in the back, but, it didn't last very long, because we were married in September. ... I found it early in October. The word was that the men would be moving north, because MacArthur was moving in, and, of course, he moved into Leyte, and just a couple of months after he moved in, Mary and I were to go up and establish a recreation hall in Leyte, outside of Tacloban, and we were assigned our own C-47, just the two of us.

BT: That is incredible.

AGC: And, we stopped in New Guinea, and we stopped in Palau on the way up, and that was quite an experience, because, in Palau, the men had been there under very rough conditions.

BT: Palau was very difficult.

AGC: And, they wanted to give us souvenirs, and brought skulls, and said, "Wouldn't you want this?" They were insulted when we said, "No." These weren't our men, these were men who were on Palau. In Leyte, our headquarters was a tent. By that time, we had our first experience with a black troop and segregation, because the ones who had come up and established a camp were up on this stuff. There was a black Air Force group that was down on the other side and the two would have nothing to do with one another, but, Mary and I decided that we should serve both groups. So, we made a special effort to go down, and invite the black unit, and we thought,

“What shall we do?” and this shows how ignorant both of us were. We had a phonograph, and we had some records, and we thought, “Now, what would they like? They probably like Stephen Foster.”

BT: Oh, dear.

AGC: It shows how stupid we were. ... So, they walked out and we didn't know why. We found out, and then, we apologized afterward. We went down, and apologized to their command, said we had no intention of being insulting. We thought that they'd like that, but, they didn't want to hear that.

BT: Did they come back?

AGC: Oh, yes. They came back, but, when they came up, the white men would leave. We never could get a group in at the same time, never. ... Not mingle at all, but, they would come up, and they kind of worked it out. When the one group would be there, the other one wouldn't. Of course, we didn't have much. It was a very simple place. We finally got a piano. ... The Filipinos were wonderful. They were so hospitable. Someone had buried it in his backyard. That's what they did with their sewing machines. They were bringing out their sewing [machines]. Of course, the Japanese were still not very far away and they were still bombing a bit, at that point. ...

BT: I wondered about that, if there was any real military activity going on there.

AGC: In fact, one of the men that had already come up from the Townsville unit came running up, “Look. Look.” He says, “I've got a shrapnel wound. Look at that.” He says, “I'm going to get a Purple Heart.” He was so happy, you know, because he'd finally been in the war. It seems that a bomb had dropped one night in the camp and a couple of them had gotten shrapnel.

BT: You never really saw anyone in the air?

AGC: Yeah, we saw some flying over.

BT: But, you did not have to worry about them.

AGC: Not really, no, but, the most terrifying sight that I saw, we were there when the nurses were brought back from Santo Thomas, the prison in Manila, and they were just walking skeletons and zombies. Their camp was on the other side of the road from ours, not connected with us.

BT: They were sent there before they went back to the States.

AGC: Yeah, they did. They were there about a week before they were sent back.

BT: They got uniforms for the first time. They had never seen a uniform. They were very thin, I assume.

AGC: Yeah. Very thin, and very vacant, very, because I had tooth trouble there, too. I had to have another wisdom tooth out. So, the doctors were down in that camp, so, I had to go down, and I saw a lot of them, really, really close. Otherwise, if you were across the road, you could just see them from a distance, but, I saw them up close.

BT: They really did look like that.

AGC: So, I lost two wisdom teeth in the Red Cross. [laughter] We had people playing the piano. We did have some magazines. We served coffee and a horrible citrus drink that was supplied by the Red Cross. It's a wonder it didn't kill people, because, one night, we forgot to clean out the tub that it was in, and it ate right through the bottom, [laughter] because we mixed everything in these big vats, big containers. So, the Filipinos were very friendly and this is where I was so impressed by the Filipino women that we met. I had not known, these are doctors, they're lawyers, they are wonderful people. ... At that point, though, they were all still in their guerrilla uniforms. They weren't practicing. They carried guns when they walked. They took us out to their village one night, by bus, but, they rode guard. We went out by a bus. By this time, I'm pregnant, ... but, I don't want to leave, because Woody hasn't come up yet.

TK: Wait a minute, he is still in Australia?

AGC: He's still in Australia and they're bringing them up by boat.

BT: Oh, okay, so, you were waiting for him to come.

AGC: ... Well, I was fine. I was very early in the pregnancy. I used to get sick sometimes in the morning, but, I'd just throw up, and then, I'd be fine. I'll tell you a bit more about that later, but, anyway, we went out, and they had this hall with windows, but, they had just little slits that the windows opened, and they had a gun stationed at every window, and they had a dance for us. ... Most of the Filipino men were very small, and I'm big, so, one of them came up, and said, "I would very much like to dance with you, but, you are so big and I am so small." ... There was a Chinese dance instructor, because there's so many Chinese in the Philippines, and I could dance with him. He was tall, the tallest Chinese I have ever seen, and he had been a dance teacher, and he had his troop of dancers, Filipina girls, who were gorgeous, beautifully gorgeous, and I went to Easter service in Tacloban, and was so admiring of the beauty of the women. ... A lot of them were Spanish more than Filipino, but, gorgeous people.

BT: So, there were still Japanese? Obviously they were worried that there were still some Japanese hiding out in the hills.

AGC: Oh, yes.

BT: That was very typical in the beginning, too. The Japanese would not surrender and you never knew. They would come down and stand in the chow line.

AGC: You know, we furnished ... our tent and got lots of supplies simply by scrounging on the beach, because the debris from the invasion was still there. So, we went out and got pieces, lots of things, ... from the beach, and I think you'll be interested in this picture. This Filipino did this picture for me, and it's on a C-ration box, [laughter] and it's a wonder that it has lasted. Of course, I framed it after we got home.

TK: That is neat.

AGC: But, ... if I take it down, you can see it says, "C-ration box." ...

BT: Was it a wooden C-ration box?

AGC: No. Cardboard.

BT: Cardboard?

AGC: Cardboard.

BT: It is still in one piece?

AGC: It's still there.

BT: That is kind of amazing.

AGC: Isn't that?

BT: I assume that is a rice paddy.

AGC: Yeah, that's a rice paddy ... and you can see it's a raised technique. Of course, the water buffalo, and the dried meat hanging out, and the warning, "Don't go in any of the water," because the streams were all infected with these snails and things. So, just shortly after Easter, we were told that we would be ... sent up to Manila, but, while we were still in Leyte, a lot of the men from the Air Force base in Australia were on ships out in the bay. We took the Filipino dance troupe out to the ships. ... Here are these gorgeous girls in these beautiful Filipina costumes and these Filipina shoes, which ... had heels like this, they were carved wood, going up those ship ladders in these shoes, and then, dancing these intricate dances. Have you ever seen the Filipino dances?

BT: I have not seen the dance.

AGC: Where they dance ...

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

TK: This continues an interview with Alma Cap on May 6, 1997, with Tara Kraenzlin and ...

BT: Barbara Tomblin.

TK: You were talking about seeing the Filipino dancers. Do you want to finish that?

AGC: Yes, I was talking about their marvelous ballets. They'd dance, and they had men with poles going up and down, and they're hopping around in tune with the candles on their heads. Candles on their heads, their posture was so fantastic and their coordination was beautiful. Beautiful girls, but, at this time, I was about five months pregnant, and I really didn't show it very much, but, I had gained weight. I happen to be fond of something that most people can't stand, and that's raisin pie, and, every once in a while, at the mess, when they'd have raisin pie, ... I'd eat two pieces. One of the fellows on the ship knew me back then, and says, "I told you to watch out for that raisin pie." [laughter] I didn't tell him that it wasn't raisin pie. In fact, I hadn't told anybody.

BT: I was going to say, when you knew you were pregnant, did you tell anybody?

AGC: No one at all.

BT: I do not know whether the Red Cross rules were the same as the rules for the military, but, I do know that for nurses and others, that would get you back to the States.

AGC: That's why I didn't tell anybody.

TK: So, you just looked as if you had put on weight, then?

BT: Five months, you do not show too much.

AGC: Yeah, there's more to that story, too. Anyway, in Manila, we were all sent to a house in Quezon City, which is north of Manila. It was fascinating. The house had no roof. So, they put parachutes up, but, it was the dry season, so, they weren't expecting rain, and the house was kept immaculate. We had a little Filipino house boy who took coconut shells, strapped them to his feet, and polished the floors in this house with no roof. We had excitement one night when a lone Japanese got into our compound and they found him getting water out of our Lister bag, which was hanging outside. I was assigned to work on making a club out of the burned-out Manila Post Office. I didn't have much building experience, but, all you have to do, with so many men around, is say what you need and they find it for you, except, I made one stupid error. I was supposed to figure out how much bread we would need to serve how many people might come. We located a bakery and I was to design a container to bring it over. I don't know why they assigned me. I figured out how many loaves, how much space I would need, and they made this big container with four bars [that] four men could carry. It was so heavy that four men couldn't carry it. So, all they had to do was ... cut it in half. [laughter] That was my wonderful

production. Well, then, they needed some help out at the Seabees camp. Believe it or not, I ... taught the Seabees something. They were making a stage curtain, and they had lots of burlap, but, they wanted to make sea horses designed in a different color. ... I said, "Well, I have quite a bit of red crepe paper in my supplies, and all you have to do is put the crepe paper in boiling water, and it will color the water." So, they got their red sea horses, and I was quite proud that I was able to show the Seabees how to do something, and I had a great advantage. I had a Jeep at my service in my Manila. It turned out that the husband of my dearest long-time friend, from the age of two, was in control of pests in the entire area and had the use of a Jeep. We went shopping in Chinatown in Manila. While he shopped, I had to sit in the Jeep and hold his pistol. Heaven only knows what I would have done with it if I had had to use it. Then, when I went shopping, he sat in the Jeep and held the pistol.

BT: Who did you expect to have to use the pistol on? Marauding Japanese?

AGC: No, no, not Japanese, but, somebody, you know. There were a lot of poor people in Manila and they're looking for something.

BT: So, you were really worried about the locals?

AGC: The locals, yeah.

BT: My understanding of Manila was that there was a lot of street fighting in Manila and parts of Manila had been bombed.

AGC: Well, it was a real wreck when we got there.

BT: I was pretty sure it was a wreck,.

AGC: It was.

BT: It must have been a very depressing place to drive through.

AGC: I had a great experience there, too. I went to the opening night of the symphony, the state symphony. The big cathedral had lost its roof, but, the Army brought in these big spotlights on each side, and arched them up, so that it gave the appearance of the roof, and, of course, Imelda Marcos and her husband were there, presiding, and it was a very impressive concert. ... Mary Magoon, my partner, finally got married to her staff sergeant. This had been a long trail. They had gotten permission even before Woody and I got ours, and Mary had made this beautiful gown before she left Townsville out of parachute silk, and she had pearls, and everything else, and a train. She had thought she was going to be married in a cathedral. Well, Bill finally caught up with her in Tacloban and there was nothing there but mud and dirt floors. ... She cut off the train. She was finally married in the Manila cathedral, where she could have used her train. [laughter] I was to have been her maid-of-honor, but, by that time, I couldn't properly get my suit buttoned and it looked a little odd. In fact, when I was coming home on the train, finally, they said, "Boy, that Red Cross uniform is unbecoming." [laughter] I was still in my uniform, and, by

then, I was seven months pregnant. Finally, ... Woody did get north, and we managed to get a little tiny place, and how I survived, how the baby survived, I'll never know. This was a place with no facilities at all. It was about six apartments and the only place that you could get water was a little, old well down in the center. ... We got our laundry done, though, by taking it into the club in town and they did the laundry. So, I didn't have to use the well water, but, if we wanted any water, that was it. Well, we decided it was about time that I let somebody know I'm pregnant. So, I was examined at Santo Thomas.

BT: Oh, you were?

AGC: And, the question was, "Why do you think you're pregnant?" Well, I said, "Don't you think?" [laughter] Then, they decided this was seven months. So, it didn't really show that much, but, the waist was mighty tight, and people were always saying to me, because they would all leap off the back of the truck, and ... I got down carefully, ... and they would say, "Why, Alma? You're always leaping around?" and I'd say, "No, I just don't feel secure."

BT: So, you were there for seven months and had no real prenatal care. Were you taking vitamins or all those good things they do for women now?

AGC: No, no food. I mean, no proper food.

TK: You were lucky.

AGC: Anyway, he decided I was, so, they began to think about shipping me home, but, meanwhile, I had to keep busy while I was there. I had to work and I was fine. In fact, at one point, I was handing out stuff on the corner. ... The other girls were sick. I had a disease of my legs. ... It was kind of like impetigo, that I had gotten in Tacloban, anyway, charming. Anyway, they assigned me to go up, and distribute ditty bags for people returning from the front, and that was another very bad experience, because I was standing there, handing out, and these men were kind of like the nurses from Santo Thomas, ... just walking through, not even saying, "Thank you." A couple were completely out of it and I saw an officer who had turned into an animal. They had him roped ... around a tree, and he was hopping around on his feet, and barking like a dog. It was horrible.

BT: There was some very nasty fighting. That is a campaign that has been very much forgotten, but, it went on for a long time.

AGC: Well, it's just like when I went to Alaska, a couple of years ago. I found out about the fighting in [the] Aleutians and I hadn't realized that at all.

BT: It was not a lot, but, there was some.

AGC: Yeah, there was. It was quite serious. Well, that was about it.

BT: You went back by ship?

AGC: No, went back by plane.

BT: That must have been a long, arduous journey.

AGC: Yes, it was, and that's how I can say I've visited every state in the Union, because we landed in Hawaii, and that's the only time I've ever been in Hawaii. So, that's stretching it a bit, but, at least I can say I've been in every state in the Union.

BT: Was it a C-47?

AGC: C-54. It was a big one.

BT: Are there any other details about the trip?

AGC: An hour out of Hawaii, one of the engines got an oil leak. ... "Shall we keep going or shall we turn back?" They decided to keep going. So, I got to San Francisco, and I had let my friend Laura Conrad know that I was coming, and she met me. I went back to Washington by train. By this time, I had the disease that I needed to go to the toilet all the time, and I was assigned to an upper berth, which meant I had to keep ringing for the porter all the time to bring me a ladder. So, finally, he says, "I'm going to leave this ladder here." [laughter] Well, it didn't take too long to process out and [I] went home. The baby was born, healthy and wonderful. Woody's parents were very supportive. They had me come up to Hoosick Falls even before the baby was born, and then, they came down, but, Woody himself was not very supportive, and, when he finally got home, very bad news. He said, you know, "I hate to tell you this, but, I've decided I'm still in love with the girl I was in love with before I went overseas." His mother always blamed me for the death of his father, because she said he mourned so when Woody and I separated that it killed him, which I thought was an awful lot of guilt to put on me.

BT: That is a bit unfair.

TK: Yes, considering the situation, also.

AGC: His sister always kept in touch with me. She died several years ago, older sister. The father died about a year after we separated. So, he really did. He really mourned.

TK: There must have been something else wrong.

AGC: I think there was. I was visiting in Perth Amboy the same gal that I taught with. ... Charlie was on the street. He says, "Hi, Sweetheart. Where have you been all this time?" That was the beginning.

BT: I was going to say that I did not realize you had known him before.

AGC: We were married, ... for, gee, how many years, forty-nine? forty-six? approximately. ...

BT: So, you met him in Perth Amboy?

AGC: Before the war.

BT: But, I mean, how long after the war did you actually meet him again? I mean, you were a single parent for a while.

AGC: Yeah, yeah, I taught school in High Bridge. By that time, I got a car, ... and my mother and her older sister, who was still active at that time, took care of Allen when I taught.

BT: What did you do?

TK: At this time, it was not as easy.

AGC: And, for three years, I headed a drive for clothing for the poor people in Greece, and it was funny, because I had a coat that I'd had before the war that had a fur collar. It was definitely a woman's coat, and I got a thank-you note from a letter from a man in Greece that said, "I am so enjoying your coat," and it struck me as so funny, this man was wearing my coat with a fur collar. [laughter] Well, then, when Charlie and I were married, we lived in a walk-up apartment, and Allen, he always thought of Allen as his son. Allen had never had any curiosity about his father at all, never.

BT: You told him about his father?

AGC: Oh, yes.

BT: But, he was not curious?

AGC: He didn't want to get in touch with him. He says, "This is my dad." That's the way he wanted it.

BT: He was never curious? He never seemed to be very interested?

AGC: Well, I told him, because I wanted him to know, but, he never was interested. I thought he might at least want to try to meet him, or something.

BT: Do you think that was because it was a wartime romance or it was just his personality?

AGC: You mean why did we separate?

BT: There were a lot of wartime romances that lasted for many years.

AGC: I really think he was in love with me, at the time. I really do, but, remember, it was a different situation. There, I was in an important position, two girls and eight thousand men, and I was a big trophy for him. ...

BT: Yeah, that is quite a responsibility.

AGC: Really, it was, and here I was, just somebody else, and he really had been in love with her. They had been officially engaged when he went overseas, but, they broke off, and I have a letter that he wrote his mother, telling me that he had fallen in love with this girl [referring to me]. He had broken his engagement, but, evidently, when he saw her again, it fueled something, or, maybe it was just his, "I'm home now," and he wanted to get ... rid of the other part of his life. I don't know.

BT: It really does sound war related. I mean, a lot of people did not adjust well, or were ill-suited, and got married in a hurry. Now, that was not your case.

AGC: No, no.

BT: You knew him well.

AGC: I knew him well. ...

BT: I mean, some people maybe have three dates, get married in the fabulous overseas, and, when they get back, the marriage does not work out.

AGC: No, but, you would have thought sometime, while we were waiting for the approval to come through, that something [might happen]. I don't know either.

TK: So, then, you were remarried in 1949?

AGC: 1949.

TK: Did you move after that?

AGC: Yeah. We had such a hard job finding a place to live here in Perth Amboy, because housing was so scarce in '49, and my sister-in-law went with me while we looked at apartments, and we finally found a third floor walk-up over on Watson Avenue. It was supposed to be furnished. All it had was a refrigerator, a kitchen table, one chair, and a bed in the bedroom. That was the furnished apartment. There was no fire escape. It was just a third floor walk-up. ... So, the landlady said, "Do you have any children?" My sister-in-law, without [hesitating], went, "No, no children." So, she said, "Well, you're just going to have to leave Allen in Califon for a little while, and, after you're here, then, you can bring him down." Well, that's what we did. ... Afterward, I went to the landlady and said, "You know, we were so anxious to get an apartment and my sister-in-law saw that we weren't going to get one," because this had happened several other places, "and so, she stepped in, but, I do have a boy." "OK, bring him," she said. So, and

this was very dramatic, ... it's a wonder he was born as well as he was, but, he was born with amblyopia, you know, rolling eye. ... I got the money for his operation by appearing on Queen for a Day. [laughter]

TK: Tell us that story.

AGC: Well, you wrote in, you know. ... There was a big talk about that later, that there must have been scandals, that they told the contestants. Well, they did take you into a private room, and they asked you questions, and it happened that I knew the answers to all the questions that they asked me, so, they didn't. I don't know whether they would have, if I hadn't known the answers, whether they would have prompted me or not, but, it just happened to be questions that I knew the answers to. So, I went all the way up to the top and I got enough money for the operation.

TK: Were you selected based on what you wanted to use the money for?

AGC: Yeah, I had written that I had wanted it for an operation. ...

TK: That must have been neat.

AGC: Well, these weren't big prizes, the way they are now. It was like a thousand dollars. ... They weren't huge prizes, the way they are so often, but, it was enough for the operation. We were in Newark and my mother said, "Don't take him back to that little apartment." ... He had a crib. He was four, at the time, but, he was still sleeping in the crib, and it was right by the window in our apartment. She says, "Bring him up to Califon for a couple of days." So, we all went up to Califon and stayed that night. That was the night of the explosion here, in South Amboy, and, in our apartment, the bed, which was right by the window, we came home, found that window was shattered, and the glass had gone right into the bed, just like this, and, if he had been there, he would have been pinned down by these glass shards. So, this was just ...

TK: One of those things.

AGC: A wonderful thing.

BT: A miracle, really.

AGC: A miracle, ... and we stayed there until we bought this house, and getting this house was a problem. We worked with several realtors and they said, "How much money do you have down?" Well, I said, "Well, we really don't have any money down." Neither of us had any money. Charlie had had a war injury and he had spent all of his assets trying to get better. The GIs never helped enough and I didn't have anything. I taught for three years. ... Well, I had a little, but, not enough for a down payment, but, my father, ... as part of his insurance business, he looked at houses to see what their value was. So, he said, "If you find a house that I think is reasonable, I'll advance the down payment with the expectation that you pay it back," but, we couldn't say how much it would be, because that would depend on [many things]. Well, he

would make the decision on how much he would want to pay. So, he came down and he looked at this house. He went down to the cellar. ... This house was built in 1911 and it's very solid. It has these big beams down in the cellar and he says, "Buy it." He saw the beams and he said to buy it. So, we've been here ever since.

BT: Now, were you able to use the GI Bill, because Charlie was in the Army?

AGC: Well, he was on disability, of course. He got a pension for that, which he added to his salary. He had to relearn. He had not been a photographer before going in the Army. He was a plumber, ... among other things. Plumber, electrician, he could do anything, which is one reason we were able to keep this house and why I find it so difficult to do it now, because he could fix anything. He rewired, he replumbed, he did everything, but, I can't do any of those things. We were very happy here and I worked at Douglass for sixteen years, as editor of the bulletin and director of alumnae events. I was very active in the American Alumni Council, which became the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education.

BT: We are going to have to do a whole other interview with you on that. Douglass should have its own oral history program to do that.

AGC: Then, when Allen finished Antioch, he's the one that finally went to Antioch. [laughter]
...

BT: Yeah. I knew Antioch sounded so familiar. He went to Antioch.

AGC: ... He went instead of me, and he met his wife there, which was very interesting, because Antioch, as you know, is a very informal college, and his girlfriend was from Nashville, Tennessee, and invited him down for the weekend. He went, kind of like an Antioch student looks. She had never told him much about her family. It turned out that her father was Harry Avery, the attorney general of Tennessee. They were having the governor for dinner that night, and ... Allen is there with his Antioch clothes. So, Barbara's grandmother, who was very much of a lady, she was a Tiffany, took Allen out and bought him proper clothes to meet the governor. [laughter] She was always very fond of Allen. Allen never quite came up to the family's expectations. Barbara was satisfied, but, the family kept dig-dig-digging. Finally, it got uncomfortable, and they divorced, ... but, Barbara has remained a wonderful friend, and, when we had my eightieth birthday party, a surprise, she came up for the birthday party.

BT: Now, did they have any children?

AGC: Yes, they had one.

TK: So, you have one grandchild?

AGC: I have three grandchildren. Allen is on his third marriage. I hope this one works. The second marriage was a gal who had chased him, while he was still married to Barbara, and it just didn't work out, although, it did produce a wonderful grandson. They stayed married for about

six years, separating quite often, and then, getting back together, trying to make it work. Allen always said, "If I had worked as hard on trying to save my first marriage as I did my second, I'd still be married to Barbara." but, he's now been married three years to a girl who was divorced and came with a girl, so, I have a granddaughter. So, I have three grandchildren.

TK: Would you like to talk a little about what you did in your job working with NJC?

AGC: Well, I edited the magazine. ... Editing isn't just editing. It means a lot of writing. [laughter] The unsigned articles were all mine. I had different jobs, ... always the editor, but, had different jobs. For example, at one time, I was the club coordinator, then, another time, I was the class coordinator, then, another time, I was coordinator of special events, like the leaders' conference, or receptions for the seniors, any special events during the year.

TK: You really enjoyed that?

AGC: Oh, yes, very much. I enjoyed everything. The only trouble is, I was there sixteen years and it got to the point of, "Oh, Alma does that. Yeah, let's ask Alma. Oh, Alma can do that." ... I was working ... seven days a week. Allen had finished Antioch. I didn't have to meet the tuition, for which the two incomes were needed, so, I thought, "Well, I'll take it easy." Well, I found out that, when I came home, and didn't have the other income, we couldn't do the things we wanted to do. So, I thought I'd better go back to work, but, I didn't think it was a good thing to go back to the same place. It never is, things march on. So, I went into hospital public relations. I was there, first at what's now Raritan Bay Medical Center, and then, over at Robert Wood Johnson, and that's [until] I retired. I worked until I was sixty-seven and I'm glad, because that extra social security helps, because the jobs that I held were all great titles, but, little money.

BT: Do you think your experience in World War II, doing what you did with the Red Cross and organizing all those people, not only the servicemen who came to the clubs, but, also, the Advisory Council, helped you later on, particularly in the jobs like Robert Wood Johnson?

AGC: Oh, yes. I think every experience was a help to another experience.

BT: I mean, one thing kind of did lead to another. Alumni relations, in a way, are the same thing, people bringing people together.

TK: So, you actually ended up with a connection to New Brunswick as a town for many years after you went through NJC.

AGC: Oh, sure, and I am still active with [the university]. ... I have the Margaret T. Corwin Award for Alumnae Service. Barbara Smith was my assistant editor when I started, and then, transferred, because there was a much better job with a pension. See, we had no pension at Douglass when I went, because we were employees of the Associate Alumnae. So, all the while I was there, I had no pension. The gal that took the job after I left wouldn't come until she was guaranteed a pension. ... Those who work for the Associate Alumnae are now paid by Rutgers,

but, the Associate Alumnae turns over to Rutgers the money to pay the people, but, that way, they're on the university pension system.

BT: We are familiar with that process.

AGC: But, see, sixteen years, I had no pension benefits. So, how did I get on that? You were asking me what I did?

TK: I was just asking you about your connection to New Brunswick.

AGC: ... I was just over at Crossroads Theater this Sunday, to the "Jitney," the new play, because Julia Baxter Bates was a classmate of mine and she was the first black to be enrolled at Douglass.

BT: Oh, now, that is interesting, because I ask if there were any black girls.

AGC: First one, ... but, she was not allowed to live on campus. She was forced to commute.

TK: What year did she graduate? Did she graduate with your year?

AGC: Yes, '38, 1938, and we have remained good friends. We were good friends, because we were both in education and she was much more accepted by the classmates than by the professors. A lot of the professors, for example, she told me the ... head of the Education Department called her in especially and said, "Julia, I want you to transfer out of this. There is no job in education for you," and that has been her life work. She kept it up and she has made remarkable advancements. She ... has gotten all kinds of awards. She's gotten the University Award.

TK: They definitely have things named after her, or something, because her name definitely rings a bell.

BT: It even rings a bell with me.

AGC: This Crossroads Theater thing was a benefit for the Julia Baxter Bates scholarship. Of course, she was there.

TK: The year that she came, did other people come the following year? Did she start the integration or was her entry an isolated incident?

AGC: Actually, there may have been some, but, not a great rush, and the first ones that were allowed to live on campus, ... I forget whether it was '47 or '49. It was quite a few years afterward. Evelyn Sermons Field was one of those and she's been a great leader, also. Now, I'm not saying that there weren't any blacks in the interim, but, I don't really know.

BT: The people that I asked said no.

AGC: There may not have been many after that, but, Julia came from a wonderful family. They were out in Bernardsville. They were leaders in the town. She was a very fine person, but, it's interesting. When we went to the dances, she danced with her boyfriend all night. There was never an exchange.

BT: But, she did go to the dances?

TK: Was her boyfriend one of the black students at Rutgers?

AGC: ... No, he wasn't a Rutgers student. He was a college student, but, I can't recall which college. He was a college student. He came from a background equally as good as hers.

TK: So, it was probably difficult in those first years, but, you were saying that the students reacted well to her.

AGC: Oh, yes. In fact, she keeps in touch with quite a few people still, 'cause I saw her just Sunday afternoon, and she was telling me about some other classmates that she had had lunch with in New York. She lives in Brooklyn. So, well, one thing you hadn't asked me about is what I thought of the women in the war.

BT: Oh, yes.

AGC: I have ... nothing but respect for the nurses. I think they were wonderful, but, the WACs I had no respect for at all.

BT: Now, you saw WACs both in Townsville and in the Philippines?

AGC: Only in the Philippines. I didn't see any in town. They all seemed to be queer. They had pet monkeys that they used to wear around their necks. ... I just didn't like that kind of thing, that's all. [laughter] I didn't get to know any of them, but, they didn't make a good impression on me, and the men certainly did not speak well of them. Of course, I don't know what the men were saying about us, either. It depends on who's talking to whom.

BT: Sometimes there was a deliberate campaign out there to discredit them. The one thing I did not think to do in my book was to ask men what they thought of the nurses. It would have been hearsay anyway, but ...

TK: By comparison?

BT: Well, I think you would have gotten a lot of different opinions, but, I did not even bother to do that. I just talked to the nurses themselves.

AGC: I didn't have much contact with the nurses. The only ones were the couple of times that I was in the hospital, and had contact with them, and, sometimes, some of our men were hospitalized, and I never heard a bad report from them.

BT: Well, you were really there, most of the time, just with one other Red Cross woman.

AGC: Completely.

BT: So, you really were not in constant contact with nurses or WACs.

AGC: We were not quartered together at all.

BT: You really did not have the community there of other women.

AGC: No, and, a lot of times, it was just Mary and me.

BT: Yeah, I was saying it was just the two of you surrounded by all those guys.

TK: Also, you both pretty soon thereafter had boyfriends, and then, got married. You were saying that you were glad, because it warned off other would-be suitors.

AGC: Mary stayed married. In fact, she and Bill just celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary not long ago and Bill is suffering from Alzheimer's, unfortunately. Mary was older than I am. She's already eighty-four. ...

BT: You were a fairly mature person when you went.

AGC: Oh, sure.

BT: Into the Red Cross.

AGC: Well, I was born in 1916, and I went in in 1943, so, I was what?

TK: Twenty-seven.

AGC: Twenty-seven.

BT: I am sure that that was helpful, you know, going so far from home and having the kind of responsibilities that you were given.

AGC: They didn't take any young. There were none ... that [were] ... really young. I mean, I don't mean they were old. ...

TK: You were talking before about if you ever get back to Australia. So, do you think you will ever get back to the Philippines or Australia ever?

AGC: No. I would love to go back to Australia. ... However, I have to figure I've been there, and there are so many other places that I want to see, and I got an excellent report from my sister, who brought things back from Townsville. She and her husband toured Australia and she brought back a lot of stuff, newspapers from Townsville, so, I got kind of an update on that. Well, update, that was about ten years ago, but, it was quite an update from fifty years ago.

BT: Well, I think we have covered everything. Is there anything else?

TK: Oh, yeah, we wanted to ask you if there was anything that we did not ask you about that you think is important to include.

AGC: I can't think of anything. I was going to show you more of my things. ...

BT: We can do that.

TK: After you came back, you were married again. Did you ever work as a teacher again?

AGC: Not after my second marriage. I did teach three years at High Bridge High School before that. I've gotten terribly involved in volunteer work. The thing that I do now that is so very important and takes up so much time is with the Proprietary House Association, here in Perth Amboy. Are you aware of what the Proprietary House is?

BT: I am not.

TK: No.

AGC: This is the only royal governor's mansion in the entire United States that still exists from the colonial period and isn't a recreation, the way Williamsburg is and Tryon Palace, and it's right here in Perth Amboy, 149 Kearny Avenue. It was occupied by New Jersey's last royal governor, William Franklin, who was the illegitimate but always acknowledged son of Benjamin. He remained loyal to the king to the end. Benjamin visited him at least twice at the house, trying to get him to change sides. He says, "I will make you the postmaster of Philadelphia if you will come over to the revolutionary side," and William said, "I've already been. [laughter] ... I am now the royal governor." He really believed, he was totally convinced, that the Revolution was a silly war and that they should have stayed with Great Britain.

TK: So, you ended up continuing your interest in history on a volunteer basis.

AGC: Oh, yes, and the Association had gone downhill. It was formed in 1967, but, there was a big division about what should be done with the house, because it had been added on to after William was imprisoned. It had been vandalized and a lot of it destroyed, not the structure. They had added on to it and it became the first of New Jersey's great seaside hotels, so, it's bigger than it was, originally, and the question was, "Do they tear down all that was built and leave just the royal residence or not?" The National Park people says, "No way. That building is

1808, 1809. That itself is important,” but, then, the question is, “How do you interpret this? What is it? You have the royal governor’s mansion, you have a seaside hotel.” ... Whatever we do, we cannot change what’s there now, so, we have to do it through interpretation, but, everyone thinks it’s a very important property. ... Anyway, the Association had gotten down to, like, two thousand dollars in the bank and eighty-six members. ... I had been a charter member, but, I hadn’t really worked at it until I retired, or almost retired, and I came in, and then, I was president. Well, first, I was membership secretary, then, I was president for five years, and now, President Emeriti, and we got three hundred and fifty-six members and sixty-eight thousand dollars in the bank, which may not sound like much, but, it was a lot to begin with, and we’ve kind of gone on from there. There’s quite an active program, but, our problem is, we had an estimate on restoring the place and the estimate is seven million dollars. So, raising seven million dollars is something we haven’t been able to do, [laughter] but, we keep plugging, and, at least, it’s stabilized.

TK: So, you have the interest, now, in Perth Amboy much like you had the interest in Califon?

AGC: Oh, yes, and I’m active in the hospital auxiliary. I edit their newsletter, which is another case of edit is another word for write, [laughter] and I’m very active in the church. Still keep ties with Califon and my son. I drive down to Atlanta at least three times a year.

BT: That is quite a drive.

AGC: Yeah. People say, “You mean you’re driving down alone?” I say, “Sure, why not?”

BT: Good for you. Wow.

AGC: As long as the eyes hold out. That’s the one thing that bothers me. The reaction time, I don’t seem to have any problem with that. My eyes get tired.

[Tape Paused]

Well, we were talking about a chance to meet Mrs. MacArthur. My meeting with her was not really personal, but, before Mary and I were sent north, we were sent down to Brisbane for a week of rest and relaxation, and, at the country club where we stayed, Mrs. MacArthur was there with Arthur, the son, and the Chinese nurse. ... They had an assigned table in the dining room, which was right next to the table that Mary and I had. So, we had a good chance to observe them. Of course, every Army person that happened to be there would make a point of coming up and greeting Mrs. MacArthur. She was always very gracious to them. We never, at any point, spoke directly to her. We felt that that was not our prerogative, but, we did notice the way that Arthur was treated. He was practically spoon fed by his Chinese nurse, and, by this time, he was, I would say, four or five, maybe older, ... but, certainly too old for the kind of care he was getting, and I was wondering, at the time, how that might affect his later life.

TK: Did you have any interesting experiences in Manila?

AGC: Yes, I was in Manila on two very special days, both of which I remember so clearly. The one was the death of Roosevelt. The headlines were huge and everyone really was in mourning, the Filipinos, the GIs, everyone. Whether they agreed with him or not, they were in mourning, and the second very memorable event was VE-Day, and the reaction of the GIs in Manila at the time. Everyone that I met, they were kind of in a congratulatory mood. "While I'm glad for them and it's great that it's over for them, but, boy, we had a long way yet to go," and they were really convinced that they did. They thought the war was far from over.

BT: I heard that and it was expected to go on.

AGC: Yeah, yeah, and this is ... why there was such a fuss about the Enola Gay in the Smithsonian. I think that people who were in it ... really knew the truth. When I say they knew the truth, they knew the truth as they saw it. They didn't really know what was going on in Japan, but, I really believe Japan would have carried on.

BT: That is becoming more popular, historically.

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