

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH STOKES HOMAN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY:

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Dawn Goldbacher: This begins an interview with Mr. Stokes Homan on January 10, 1995, in Salisbury, Maryland, with Dawn Goldbacher. Mr. Homan, could you please tell me a little bit about your parents and where you were born?

Stokes Homan: I was born in Carney's Point, New Jersey. My parents are Howard Homan and Grace Homan, ... formerly Grace Hunt from Swedesboro. I was born in 1920.

DG: Were your parents from this country?

SH: Yes.

DG: They were?

SH: Yes.

DG: Were they were born in the New Jersey area?

SH: They were born in the New Jersey area, right.

DG: What did your father do for a living?

SH: Farm, mostly.

DG: Farm?

SH: Yeah, and sales in later life, but, mostly farming.

DG: What type of farming?

SH: ... Vegetable crops.

DG: What about your mother?

SH: Housewife. ...

DG: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

SH: Well, there was five of us.

DG: Were you the oldest, the youngest?

SH: No, I was second.

DG: Did you grow up in Carney's Point?

SH: ... No, I grew up mostly ... around Mullica Hill, New Jersey, and Glassboro, New Jersey, on the farm.

DG: What was it like growing up during the Depression? Did things change for your family?

SH: Yes, it did. My father went through bankruptcy on the farm and we had to struggle, with five kids in school. We never ... had a time when we were destitute, or hungry, or anything of that nature, but, it was a struggle.

DG: Did he continue working on the farm or did he need to go out and find work elsewhere?

SH: Well, ... later on, I guess it would be .. in the late '30s, he worked as a salesman for an agricultural company and left the farm, ... never went back.

DG: He never went back. [laughter]

SH: Not to farm.

DG: Was that by choice or by necessity at that point?

SH: Well, by necessity, I suppose, at that point.

DG: I guess you were about ten-years-old or so when all of this was going on.

SH: Well, yeah, during the Depression, I was ten and twelve, but, by the time ... we left the farm, I was probably sixteen and in high school.

DG: Did you work during that time?

SH: Yeah, part time. Oh, yeah.

DG: What did you do?

SH: Mostly agricultural jobs of all kinds, followed the horse and a mule, probably ten years, all along, through different times.

DG: So, you did that in the summers all through high school?

SH: Right, right through the summers.

DG: You said that you went to Glassboro High School. What was it like? I am somewhat familiar with that area and farming was the thing down there.

SH: The basic industry, I guess, was farming and, of course, in Glassboro, you did have some commerce, had the glass plant, and cider mill, and things of that nature, and farm supplies were the biggest items.

DG: Did you ever work in any of the glass mills or do anything related to that?

SH: No, no.

DG: You only worked in agriculture?

SH: ... Farm supplies.

DG: Is that why you decided to go into agriculture yourself?

SH: I suppose so. That was my background and what I knew, and I was majoring in agriculture in high school. ... I just went on.

DG: What made you pick Rutgers? Was it because it was the semi-state university?

SH: ... No. It was, well, finances, and ... I had a high school teacher [who] was from Rutgers, and, through their encouragement, I was accepted at Rutgers.

DG: How old were you when you started Rutgers?

SH: Eighteen, I guess, when I started at Rutgers.

DG: You attended the College of Agriculture, correct?

SH: Right.

DG: What was life like at Rutgers when you were there?

SH: Well, ... I don't know how it compares to now, but, really, I lived in a living group, the Phelps House. ... All of us were, well, not wealthy. We worked ... at the college farm to pay for our room and so forth and so it was tough. ... We worked with the college, the Ag College.

DG: Was that sort of an co-op living arrangement?

SH: ... That's exactly right.

DG: Now, I think it is called Helyar House. Is that the same place?

SH: Helyar House is correct. It's exactly the same place, except at a different location. ... Right.

DG: What were you responsible for doing there?

SH: Well, I worked mostly in dairy. ... I operated the pasteurizing equipment on weekends. I tended fires in different building and all sorts of jobs like that around the college farm.

DG: That paid for your housing?

SH: That paid for our room. ... That paid for our housing, and, as the co-ops did, we all chipped [in] so much money a week to pay for our food.

DG: What did you do at Rutgers, socially? Was there much to do? How did you meet women, since it was all men at Rutgers at that time?

SH: Well, at Rutgers, ... but, I married an NJC girl, so, I guess they had ways, and their college was right next to the College of Agriculture, and, well, I guess, we just meet through friends and different people. They ask you to go out on a date with them, all that stuff.

DG: How did you meet your wife?

SH: She was a blind date. One of my friends asked me to go out with her. At the time, he was dating her roommate. ...

DG: What was there to do on a typical date?

SH: [laughter] Well, not much, I guess. We went to the movies and things of that nature. ... We went to the (Spa?), I guess. I don't know whether it's still there or not, ... for a soda or so forth, but, there really wasn't much else.

DH: So, was there a hangout?

SH: ... Just the Spa.

DG: The Spa. What exactly was that?

SH: It was a soda fountain.

DG: A soda fountain.

SH: Yeah.

DG: Was it near the College of Agriculture?

SH: ... Close to NJC, in those days, Douglass now. ...

DG: They do not have that anymore. [laughter]

SH: I'm sure not.

DG: You majored in dairy husbandry and minored in education.

SH: Education, right. ...

DG: Could you explain that a little bit?

SH: Well, ... we majored in farming, and we took all the other courses relating to it, like biochemistry, and ... dairy husbandry, animal husbandry, poultry husbandry, and so forth. Then, we took all the Ag class[es] at the Ag campus and we'd cross town for all the other courses, like History and English. ...

DG: The education aspect of it, what was that about? Were you interested in teaching?

SH: Yes, in teaching, in teaching, right. I never followed it. ...

DG: Is that something you wish you would have done?

SH: I probably would have liked it, but, ... I think it was financial as much as anything that I never tried [to teach].

DG: While you were at Rutgers, you were involved in some of the organizations, is that right?

SH: Yeah, Ag clubs, and so forth, not many. ...

DG: You played sports.

SH: I played basketball.

DG: How was that organized, because, at the time you were at Rutgers, you were preparing for war?

SH: Right, well, I guess, ... we didn't think much about it until the last year, but, yes.

DG: What was the atmosphere like? Were people really thinking about it?

SH: In the last year or so before we went, I think, but, up until then, I think it was just kind of foreign. We didn't really consider it, the fact that we were looking at war, but, in our last year, of course, December 7th was my senior year. ... From then on, we all knew right where we were going as soon as we could get there, as soon as they could get us there. ...

DG: So, this was something that, until that last year, you had not really thought about, the consequences this implied for you. In your last year here, was it a voluntary decision you made, that you wanted to become involved, or did you not have a choice?

SH: Didn't have a choice. We knew that we were going in. I think, like a lot of people, I'd rather not, but, we knew we had to go, and it was necessary to go, so, we made the choice. In fact, that year, they had graduation early, so they could get the students out and going. We would get deferred until graduation. ... So, I believe I graduated on the tenth and I was in the service by the fifteenth of May. ...

DG: Did you get to choose which branch of the military you entered?

SH: Yes, we did, ... if you enlisted before ... the draft called you, I mean. You were eligible for the draft and deferred, but, you could enlist.

DG: Okay, but, you did enlist?

SH: [I] did enlist in the Coast Guard.

DG: Did you start right away, as soon as you graduated?

SH: Absolutely.

DG: Where did you go?

SH: I went to Ellis Island, New York Harbor. ...

DG: What was your rank there?

SH: Well, we went in, we took tests, and I went in as a cook, and that's what we were rated. They gave us tests, particularly college students, and if they had some aptitude, some ability, they got ratings, and I went in as a cook.

DG: Is that what you did the entire time?

SH: Well, no. Basically, when I got into Ellis Island, I got into commissary, and what I did from the time I was there was deliver ... the menus and these things for about 1600, 1800 people, and that was ... my duties, to get the supplies in, make up menus, and that sort of thing.

DG: Were you feeding the other members of the Coast Guard? Were there that many of you there?

SH: Oh, yes, oh, yes. ... Ellis Island was a training ground for ship crews, like AP transports, and so forth. ... So, the crews would come in, and be trained until the ships were commissioned

and ready to go, and then, they would move out, and another group would come in. So, it was constant turn-over.

DG: Were most of them getting trained to be sent right over to Europe?

SH: Well, they were going on ships. I mean, ... they were part of ships' crews, most of them.

DG: What do you remember most about that time? What was it like for you?

SH: Well, I guess I remember most about wanting to get out. It was an interruption in my life and I had no interest in staying in the military. I was just looking forward to the time when it would be over and get out.

DG: Was the war something you supported?

SH: Oh, yes, ... I think it was necessary. ... No question about supporting it, it was just necessary, but, it was ... a thing that I wanted over with.

DG: So, you definitely knew that there was no career for you in the military?

SH: Right, right. I had no interest in it.

DG: Do you belong to any veterans' organizations at all?

SH: Well, the VFW.

DG: Are you active?

SH: No, not really.

DG: How long were you in the Coast Guard?

SH: Oh, about three-and-a-half years, roughly.

DG: So, you graduated in 1942 ...

SH: That would be the end of '45, I guess.

DG: What did you do once you left?

SH: Went into agriculture. ... I had interviews, and so forth, and I ended up here, in Salisbury, Maryland, in the poultry industry.

DG: So, you came right down here?

SH: Right, shortly afterwards.

DG: Have you been here ever since?

SH: I've been in Salisbury ever since, yes. ... Since 1946, I guess, I've been in Salisbury.

DG: During your time at Ellis Island, what was it like in terms of segregation? Were there any black soldiers there?

SH: There were ... blacks in there and I had no feeling of segregation. ... I don't remember, specifically, how many blacks there were, but, I had no feeling of the ... military being segregated.

DG: Did they have separate eating quarters?

SH: No. ...

DG: Really? That strikes me as interesting.

SH: No, no.

DG: What about the general atmosphere of the time? Did most people want to be involved in the war or were most people like you, wanting to do their duty in supporting the war, and then, get out?

SH: I would say the majority were like that, wanting to get out, not interested in making a life out of it, certainly, and the prospects of war were terrible, I mean, as far as the prospects of going into it. I think everybody was afraid of combat and rightly so. ...

DG: After a little while, you moved down here to Salisbury. What was the first job you had, what exactly did you do?

SH: I came in here as salesman for a company that sold poultry disease remedies. ... My job was to travel down the shore, diagnose poultry diseases, and recommend remedies.

DG: Is that what you continued to do throughout your career?

SH: No, I gradually moved along and I ended up general manager of a poultry operation, ... (growing?) operations, processing operations, and marketing, the whole thing.

DG: So, you ended up more in the business aspect of the field rather than doing hands-on work.

SH: Right, I ... ended up general manager of roughly 800 people ... in the processing plants, and growing operations, and hatcheries, and so forth.

DG: Is that something that you were happy to be doing again?

SH: Oh, ... it was fine. It was a job. ... It was along the lines that I was indicated in and followed most of my life.

DG: Did you ever switch careers?

SH: Well, in later years, I switched a little. I had a restaurant in Ocean City for a while and I had my real estate brokers license, just in the last few years. ... I got tired of it. I mean, I spent about thirty years in the poultry industry and I had enough, got tired of it.

DG: So, you opened a restaurant. What kind of a restaurant?

SH: Mostly breakfast.

DG: Did you enjoy that?

SH: .. I enjoyed it, a lot of hard work. Yeah, a lot of hours and hard work. ...

DG: Do you still own that restaurant?

SH: No, [I] sold it.

DG: Are you still involved in real estate?

SH: No, now I've retired.

DG: What made you decide to do that?

SH: I don't know. ... Winter months weren't very busy down there, and I took real estate courses, and got my brokerage license. I did that for a few years, ... mostly on a part-time basis.

DG: Okay, so, that was more or less on the side, to keep you busy. Could you tell me a little bit more about your wife? What was her name?

SH: ... Helen Paterson. She was, as I say, an NJC girl. She graduated in '43. ... We had three boys. She died ... just about the fiftieth wedding anniversary.

DG: I am sorry to hear that. So, you had a long life together. ...

SH: Oh, yeah. ... We lived in Salisbury, out here in Salisbury.

DG: Also, you have three boys. Did any of them end up going to Rutgers?

SH: No, no. ... One lives in Piscataway now.

DG: He did not go to Rutgers?

SH: Didn't go to Rutgers. He has a Ph.D. He went to Virginia Tech and got his doctorate in Cornell. ... He's interested in aerospace and he now works for Exxon, ... in combustion research.
...

DG: What about your other two sons?

SH: ... Neither one of them graduated from college. They had two-year degrees. One of them is environmental manager of a town, Princess Anne, here. ... The other son is now in Ogden, Utah. ... He works for a chain of restaurants in future concepts, developing and starting different concepts of restaurants.

DG: Your one son, the environmental manager, is he at all involved with agriculture and the environment?

SH: No, no.

DG: So, none of them decided agriculture was for them?

SH: No, no agriculture.

DG: Were they part of what you were doing when they were young? Did you live on a farm?

SH: No, no, we always lived in town.

DG: So, they did not grow up with it the way you did.

SH: ... No, no, not really. They were in the town of Salisbury, and in Salisbury schools, and so forth, and they were more urban than I was.

DG: What made you move down to Salisbury? Was this where the job market was?

SH: No. ... This is where I was sent when I [was] hired. I put in job applications, and this one, I was hired for, and that's when I came.

DG: Obviously, you must like the town. You have been here ever since.

SH: Oh, yeah, it's been a great place to live, very comfortable. We lived next to [the] city park most of the time we're down here. ... Our city park had supervised recreation all the time for the children and so forth. It's been a great place to grow up and live.

DG: Is basketball still something that you or your sons enjoy?

SH: ... None of my children enjoy basketball. I enjoy watching it. I enjoy most sports. Yeah, I hunt and fish, play golf. ...

DG: I guess you have many opportunities to do that around here.

SH: Sure.

DG: What else would you like to tell us about yourself and what you have done since Rutgers?

SH: I don't have much to tell you. ...

DG: I would like to ask more questions about Rutgers itself. I am a student there, fifty years later. What type of religious activities did they have? Did they have supervised religious services? Were you religious?

SH: No, no, not very. I still don't ... consider myself religious. Well, they had the chapel, and so forth, but, I wasn't involved in the religious activities. ... Most of the time, I was involved in very little activities. Most of it was trying to make money, enough to pay the tuition and get through.

DG: When I looked through the alumni file, I found out that you had a state scholarship. How did you get that?

SH: ... I don't really know. ... I didn't have it when I started, and I think what happened was, one became available, ... probably in my junior year, and it was given to me.

DG: Do you remember how much tuition was back then?

SH: Not exactly. I remember going to school with forty dollars in my pocket and the first tuition bill was something like 113 dollars, or something like that, for that semester, ... and they let me pay it in installments.

DG: Did you pay for your own education or did your parents help?

SH: No, no, I paid ... [for] my own education. ... There wasn't any money at home. ... [There were] five kids in school and it just wasn't there.

DG: So, what did you do to make money? I know you worked at the college farm.

SH: Well, I worked at the college farm, I worked in the restaurant, ... all kinds of things, baby-sit, all kinds of things.

DG: I also noticed that, over the summer, you had written that you worked for the DuPont Dye Company. Do you remember that?

SH: I did, yeah. ...

DH: What did you do there?

SH: At night, I got chemicals ready for the dyes for the next day. I was on night shift. ... For their operations for the next day, I had a list of chemicals to get, to put into the mixing sheds and whatnot.

DG: Did you enjoy working the late shift?

SH: Not particularly, no. Some of the chemicals were harsh, and we had hydrochloric acid and, you know, all kinds of things [that] had to be handled with care. ... It wasn't what you'd call an ideal situation, but, it was money.

DG: Right, right. Did you stay at Rutgers during the summers or did you go home?

SH: No, no.

DG: You stayed at Rutgers?

SH: No, no, I went home. ...

DG: What was life like back home after you had lived at school? Was it a difficult transition?

SH: No, no, not really different. ... No problems with our family ... or anything of that nature.

DG: What about your other brothers and sisters? Did they end up going to college?

SH: No, none of them.

DG: Did any of them of them go to war?

SH: No.

DG: None of them went when you came back?

SH: One brother I had, ... he was killed at nineteen. I had three sisters and they are still alive.

DG: What about your father? Was he involved at all in World War I?

SH: No, he wasn't. I guess, during World War I, he worked at Dupont Powder ... Plant, I guess.
...

DG: They kept him home?

SH: They kept him home.

DG: Do you know what he did for them?

SH: All I ... remember is that he worked in the powder plants. I don't know what he did, what his exact job was, no.

DG: What did your wife do during the war? Was she working at the time?

SH: Yeah, she was. ... We were married during the war, and we had an apartment in Brooklyn, and she worked out there with personnel agencies, and so forth.

DG: What did she study in college?

SH: History.

DG: History, okay.

SH: So, then, after ... we [came] down here, and settled, and had children, she didn't work anymore. She was a housewife.

DG: Do you have grandchildren?

SH: Five.

DG: Five?

SH: Yeah.

DG: Any great-grandchildren on the way?

SH: No, no.

DG: No, not yet?

SH: Not yet, no.

DG: Are any of them close by?

SH: No. ... They're all in New Jersey and Utah.

DG: I was just wondering, about Rutgers, I know I had asked you how you met women back then, but, what was the atmosphere like at Rutgers, in general? What did people do, especially, I guess, your last year, once the pace was stepped up for the war effort? What were people thinking about? Did they even have time to socialize or were they cramming in those last courses?

SH: Well, ... we crammed in the courses and, I think, in the case of most of us, the men, we all knew where we were going. I think the professors knew where we were going, and I think they relaxed a little, and our entertainment, when we had time to do some, was ... drinking beer and socializing with the crowd. ... There was no ... special entertainment.

DG: So, did you enjoy your time in Rutgers?

SH: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. I enjoyed it. It was hard work, but, I enjoyed it.

DG: Thank you, for the most part, that was all I had wanted to ask you. This concludes the interview.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/15/99

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 12/20/99