

Margaret Higgins
Civilian during World War Two
Hudson Falls H.S.
Interviewer
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Q: So, where did you grow up?

MH: New York City.

Q: And what was your childhood like?

MH: Oh. Much more fun than your childhood today, believe me. I mean, we played outside, we had a lot of fun. I always wanted to be a school teacher so I played with little ones, teach them and I take home their papers and grade them. I skated and bicycled. Well, things you can't do much over here. I liked sports. Went to school.

Q: Was New York City as busy as it is today?

MH: No. Not quite as busy. I mean I went to every parade. It was every Macy's Thanksgiving parade until I moved out of the city. It was great. I mean we were in the city all the time. Big movies when you wanted to see Frank Sinatra and all the big bands. Once in a while you didn't go to school you know.

Q: Did you have any siblings?

MH: One brother. He was older than I was.

Q: Do you remember anything that stands out from the Great Depression?

MH: No. I can never remember not having. I mean my parents; my father always worked and at those times you rented a nice apartment for \$45 a month. Things were cheaper. Quart of milk maybe 10-15 cents. We grew up differently. We didn't want everything that kids today have. We didn't have those things. We had a ball and a bat or dolls. Not greedy like today's children.

Q: Did you notice any difference after the war started because you said you didn't notice not having everything?

MH: After the war started, I was older; perhaps your age or a little younger. Things went on rationing. We had to use stamps to go to the store enough for a quarter pound of butter a month. That's the only thing I ever stole in my life. I loved butter. I stole quarter pound of butter one day. Then they came out with margarine. It was nothing but a lard with a yellow pill that you mixed to make margarine. Then we had USOs and

these bond rallies started on the streets where these stars would go. War bonds were cheaper then. Celebrities went overseas after the war. During the war, we had USOs where people like you would help out and service men passing through. They'd have dances. USOs were in different parts. I went to dances. There were dance halls back then in the city. It was no pick-up place or something like that. It was just a friendly place. That was some of the things that we did.

Q: Would they send rationing tickets to your house?

MH: We picked them up. I think we picked them up and you got stamps for gas rationing and food. Cigarettes were going overseas so anybody that smoked would stand on line because cigarette stores, we had regular cigarette stores would have so many cigarettes a week and people would know about it and they'd stand on line for blocks and blocks for a pack of cigarettes.

Q: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

MH: I was still in home with my parents. My brother was working over in Connecticut. We were taking the bus to go over and have dinner with him that Sunday. That's when we heard about Pearl Harbor. Then my brother went into service right after that. He was in the service till the war ended.

Q: When you heard about it did you think to yourself that he might be going?

MH: It was terrible. We knew something was going to happen. I mean because the amount of people that were killed in that was absolutely terrible. Everybody was just at war and we had to get right back into it. We had to. There was no stopping that.

Q: Did you think at the time that your brother should have been in it?

MH: Yes definitely.

Q: Besides your brother being in it did you personally know anybody else?

MH: My favorite cousin I was very fond of. We studied together. He was killed. His plane was struck down over Africa. He was never found.

Q: Did you keep in touch with your brother?

MH: Yeah until I moved up this way. He was four years older. We were not too close but close enough. He lives in Florida now. He's still alive. I talked to him a year ago.

Q: Do you remember like if you would send letters or if your parents would?

MH: It wasn't too bad then. That wasn't too bad. He'd get the letters and things. I used to write to him all the time. As a matter of fact, one time I sent him meat. Everybody wrote to the boys then. Everybody. You should be doing that now too.

Q: What kind of jobs did your parents have? Did the jobs change from before the war and during it?

MH: No, my father worked for the Hearst Newspaper. Journal and things for years and years. A long time later after the war, he went with the world telegram. And he was always in the newspaper business. My mother was a bookkeeper. During and before the war, she was one of the first bookkeepers to run a machine. Elliot Fisher Bookkeeping Machine. She was in politics too. She was always working for a party. She never changed jobs either. She was always a bookkeeper.

Q: Did you have any jobs?

MH: Yeah. The last one I had, I was working for this American Chicle Company which you've heard of and the government had a section in there. American Chicle company made chicklets and they packed the rations that was sent over to the boys. The K rations and 10-in-1 rations in which they put some food, non-perishables and maybe some toiletry items and then chewing gum, cigarettes. So, it was all packed there and we made the payroll out for those people. That was the one I had. That was right before Billy, my son was born in '45.

Q: Did you do anything during war time that you consider supportive or patriotic?

MH: Yeah. I went a couple times to the USOs and serve the boys. We get them something to eat. I did write a lot to the boys in the service other than that no.

Q: Are those basically the things that other civilians were doing too?

MH: Yeah.

Q: Did they have anything to pay for the war like those ribbons for the cars? Did they do anything similar like that?

MH: No. The greatest one of all was war bonds. Buy war bonds. I don't remember anything associated with something like that.

Q: Do you remember the war correspondence Ernie Pyle was?

MH: Yeah. He flew a plane I believe.

Q: do you remember when he was killed and how you felt about that?

MH: I don't think it affected me one way or the other.

Q: What about when FDR died?

MH: That was kind of a sad thing. He was pretty well-liked president. I liked FDR. He was a great speaker in things with his fireside chats. He was well known.

Q: Was it a shock when he died?

MH: I don't remember it being a shock. I mean when he died it was a great shock to everybody but maybe I wasn't that conscious about it at the time. I don't remember it being a shock to me.

Q: Any memorial services in your area for it?

MH: Probably but I'm not aware of it.

Q: When Truman took over as a president did you agree with his plan to use atomic bomb?

MH: No. I really didn't but that's a thing you can talk about forever. I didn't agree with it and I still don't. It caused so much destruction. I mean you can wipe out a whole country with it. I don't think it's necessary.

Q: Did you have any grudge against the Japanese then?

MH: No, the Japanese were treated very badly back then. They were prisoners of war. Not even prisoners of war, they were confined to our country to these little huts that they would live in and they would take them right out of their homes. I mean they are American citizens. No, I never had any grudge against them.

Q: During the war, there were a lot of Jewish concentration camps. Being a civilian, did you hear a lot about them?

MH: Yes, we did.

Q: Were there other news topics that were really well known like that?

MH: No. I don't remember.

Q: What are your feelings on the war in Iraq?

MH: I think it was an unnecessary war and I don't think we should've gone over in the first place. We should get out of there now. They found no weapons of destruction which

makes another liar out of the president. I want to see him and I advise you to watch it Friday night on 20-20. It's going to be interviewed there. He and his wife. But that is just senseless war.

Q: Do you have any other stories or comments about World War II?

MH: No. There was a lot of funny things. When we had the air raid. They had air raids you know. And they had drills. They had these men that would go around the streets because you have to dim all the lights. You had to close the curtains. These men had these masks and they had flashlight telling people to turn their lights off. That was one of the funny things. There is not much else that I...

Q: Did they do those a lot?

MH: No. For the planes, when they were going to bomb, they didn't want them to see any lights. I mean we are better than Europe but I mean we had it there for a while and it was just interesting. I mean a lot of things were. They were hard but they were funny. When you get together a bunch of people on a line waiting for a pack of cigarettes or a bunch of people with two stamps to get butter or cheese or something, it has light moments you try to keep. They throw in the movies then try to be good to make people have a laugh because people were very sad and things since we lost a lot of boys in the war. Everybody waited for that telegram so it was painful but it's over and hopefully we won't have a third one. You won't have to see one. Don't be surprised if you do but I hope you don't.

Q: You had an interest in the women in the war? Why?

MH: because I wanted to join the service and I inquired all about it and my parents wouldn't let me go on the service. I wanted to be an aviator.

Q: Did anybody you know get to go into it?

MH: No. I didn't have any friends that were in it.

Q: What would you have done if you had gone to it?

MH: I really don't know at all. Most of the things that women did when they went out into the service was desk jobs, papers and all that cause in those times women didn't actually go out in the front lines to fight like they do today. I just thought it would be interesting. I left college anyway so I would do that and see part of the world but I'm just as glad that I didn't I might've ended dead.

Q: Where would you have been able to go to see the world?

MH: Well, wherever the fighting was. I would've probably stayed in this country. Women didn't go overseas that much. They did go over, well the ones in service but it's not like today. It is nothing like today.

Q: What was it more like?

MH: It was a man's war. The women stayed home and they went to the factories and I mean that's where they get Rosie the Riveter. That's when women first started wearing slacks in the factories. They were bringing in paychecks and that's how they supported the war.

Q: When were you married?

MH: When was I married? Oh, for heaven's sake. Let's see now. In '43.

Q: So, was your husband in the war?

MH: No.

Q: Do you remember where your brother was stationed?

MH: My brother was stationed in Italy that's where he got his purple heart.

Q: Do you know what he got it for?

MH: I don't know. I have the piece of the paper. If I knew where that piece of paper was right now, I would go get it for you right now but I have no idea where I put it. I don't know but he went to the front lines to warn that the enemy was coming and things. He didn't have to do that but he did so that was above and beyond the duty so that's why he got that.

Q: Do you know if your brother when the war was over if he used the GI Bill to go to school?

MH: No. He didn't use the GI Bill. I think he used it as for getting a home and things were concerned. I mean that they did. They didn't get the home for free but they got help getting a home. As a matter of fact, when I say '43 with being married and things that was when I had a home. Well no I didn't have a home back then. It's a little more complicated than that.

Q: Including your brother and anyone else that came home, did you notice any differences in how they acted or anything?

MH: Well, a lot of people suffered a lot with trauma or things. I didn't have that much around me because we were pretty sad over losing one boy over there. A lot of boys that

came home would have nightmares for years after and things you know these battles and things you couldn't help. I mean you don't come home and say let's party you know it takes time get used to things.

Q: What kind of movies were they playing?

MH: Well, at that time a lot of it was musical. I loved musical so it was all dancing and it was really nice. It had those kinds of music for big production. Margaret Mitchell wrote that book and they produced that. That was a beautiful movie (*Gone with the Wind*). Most of them were made to cheer people up and bring little pleasure during the war. We wouldn't want all films and that you know. They tried to get a little bit with this. I don't know any others that were that outstanding at the time.

Q: Were the movie theaters similar to those that are here today?

MH: No. I mean no, we didn't have big things with five screens in one place. You went to the movies and there was one movie and there wasn't too many. Maybe there would be one like Hundredth Street and then another in hundred and eighty street then another in hundred and seventy street. But then when you went into the city, that's where you had the movies with the, oh I mean nothing like today. They were great. You had shows. Stage shows along with your two movies. News and it was really really great to see. It was really entertaining. You would have people on the stage whether it be magicians or dancers or others. The movies was a treat. You go to movies and you'd see a show and it cost you a quarter or something then you'd have enough money with your allowance. Allowance yeah. I would hate to think what you people would do with the allowance we got. Like a quarter a week. Quarter a week you could go to movies and get ice cream and be happy.

Q: Was going to the movies geared more as family outing or friends?

MH: Yeah. Family. Every Friday night, my mother and father me and my brother when we were kinds, we would go to Chinese restaurants and eat really nice and then we go to the movies and then come home. We would stop at an ice cream parlor and have an ice cream soda or sundae and we would go home. It was really nice. It was much more family oriented than it is today.

Q: Did you have any opinions on Douglas MacArthur?

MH: He was a good man and he was a good leader. I don't know you know as I say, I was not all into the war that much and things no more than I am today. I don't even like to watch it or anything. He was a good man. He was a good leader. He's well-respected and everything but I don't have too much to say about him.

Q: Since movies was family oriented, was it the same when you went to USOs?

MH: I mean it was strictly all women. It was all girls who went down there. Some of them would serve. Others wait the table. You know you would all just be hostesses that's what you are. The soldiers comfortable in place and things. They'd have bands, music and they would be dancing. And when it was all over, everybody would go their separate ways. There was some romances that came out of that thing. That was something different you know. No nonsense allowed in such place. You couldn't do anything like that. You would just go home. In the city, if you didn't have a car, you would ride subways and volley cars and little bit different. You wouldn't be late out at night doing that.

Q: When you were in the city, did you live in an apartment?

MH: Mhm.

Q: Was it easier to live in houses then?

MH: No. I lived in an apartment. The city was just mostly apartments. There were some brownstones they call 'em in the city itself and out of the city a little way up into the section where I live. There was all apartments there. There were some nice apartments when I was younger. That's why I say I don't ever remember being hit by depression or anything. It seemed to me my family was always alright. If you only have \$45 a week lived in an apartment with elevators and everything, it was real nice.

Q: If you could sum up your experiences as being a civilian during the war, what would you say?

MH: I'd say great big thank you to all Americans who lost their lives and all women who gave up all their time and efforts in working and everything else to save the country and keep us safe. I mean because they did a terrific job. That was a war that was for fighting. It was a war worth fighting for you know. But of course, everybody said no, we didn't need that war because who'd ever thought we'd have a second one after the first one. We will undoubtedly have a third one too before the rate that it's going. I don't know. It's just something that you live through and you thank god that it never touched our shores. I mean we don't know what war is like. We see it on the television. It looks like a movie to me when I watch it television but I mean we have never experienced it when people are getting killed all around or our apartments blow up. I hope I never have to see it and I hope you never have to see it. I'm happy that it all passed over and finished and not come again.

Q: Ok. Well, thank you.

MH: You're welcome I'm sure.