Janet Bachelet, Narrator

Interviewer unknown [probably high school student]

Date and place unknown

INT: Where were you born? Are you local to the area?

JB: No, I was born near Pittsburgh PA, in 1919. I'll be 92 in March.

INT: Wow. You look great. How did you get into this area from Pennsylvania?

JB: I married a man who had a place near here.

INT: What was his name?

JB: Albert E. Bachelet. I was Janet Bower/Bauer.

INT: How old were you when you got married?

JB: Seventy-four. So I only came up here in 1990.

INT: Really? Wow. When you were younger did you have aspirations to go to college or were your plans always for the Air Force?

JB: My dad started saving accounts—there were four girls—to send all four of us to college and that was when everyone thought a woman was wasting her time to go there. Because of the Depression, I was the only one who got there.

INT: How did the Depression affect your family?

JB: It was terrible because my father was let go from the company that he was in, I guess it was about 1931 and things had really started getting good for us. He didn't work again for about five years. And the money that he had put aside for us ... we had different ways that they kept money. We used to do all our buying on the south side where the mills had gone quiet where everything was cheaper and we used to save things for my mother and dad that went for five dollars so we could spend the five dollars on the south side buying provisions for the next week. Pittsburgh was terrible but somehow or other, we didn't feel bad about it. They worried and we knew they were worried but we got along.

INT: You said you did go to college? Which college?

JB: I had some scholarships and I couldn't afford any of them but there was one unaccredited school way down in the coal mine country, southwestern Pennsylvania, and I got a four-year scholarship full tuition. I was assured by the English teacher that I was going to go to graduate school anyway. The fact that it wasn't accredited wasn't against

it, it was a good school. Well, the president of that school kept it together by giving tuition [for service]—he'd give tuition for somebody who could do the plumbing and somebody else who could do the electric or the cooking. Everybody worked. The tuition was only 100 dollars a semester and we didn't have 100 dollars. I remember once we'd had gone to church where it was warm on a cold night and came back and we were sitting in the parlor and a girl came down who did have money and was on her way to buy something and did we want anything. We each had a dime and so we ordered two cokes, four straws, and a bag of popcorn. That was the kind of evening we had, it was fun. We had a lot of fun but we didn't spend money. [laughs] I did finish there and it was some time later before I went to graduate school. Eventually I went to the University of Chicago and got a PhD in Human Development. That was a new subject. Everybody learns that in the first year of psychology now but it was the big new subject after the war.

INT: After grad school you entered the Air Force?

JB: No, it was long before. It was when I graduated from college. It was 1941, the last class that had everybody in it and one fellow was in uniform because he belonged to the Reserves. Just to say a little bit about how it affected the college students, they began to teach Flight and there were a fair number of fellas who took flight training in a little Cub airplane and I remember one did his first solo flight and got lost so we called him "Wrong Way Corrigan" which was the current news figure of the time. Anyway, the war started and we were talking about *Mein Kampf*, things like that but we all graduated and the fellas all got drafted. I went with my parents for a while, there were some problems, I helped them and eventually I went to Washington and that was already '53.

I wanted to tell you about Air Transport Command. I worked in the mill. I didn't want to teach so I got a job as a stenographer on the south side, they started to pick up and go to work again and so did I. But one of your questions was where was I on December 7th. That was while I was still at home before I went with my parents. I was just at home with my parents when the word came over the radio and we were all struck dumb. We kept on doing things, I was writing to a fella who was a Marine pilot in Corpus Christi. So what's going to happen now? It was huge. It means that anything that's happened since is secondary. That was terrible. We were not ready. All the equipment, all the training, everything to wage war was in a shambles, it was remarkable.

INT: Do you remember the flying of the Hump?

JB: I would like to tell you about the Air Transport Command and then tell you about what it was like to spend a day doing the work we were there to do and a little bit about what it was like getting into Washington, the transportation during the war. Then I had to leave briefly and come back and I worked briefly at the very end of the war I was at the Junior Red Cross headquarters. Mrs. Buckman/Buchman [teacher?] said she thought that was another civilian-in-the-war-effort that I should at least, had a couple of little stories about.

INT: OK, if you'd like to share them.

JB: Do you want to go through with questions or do you want me to just start?

INT: You can just start talking if you like.

JB: Did you know what the Air Transport Command was?

INT: Not previous to talking to you.

JB: There was the U.S. Army Air Force and that's the one you think of when the guys are out there fighting and shooting planes down but for them to be there, they had to have base camps and the ATC was set up to supply everything that they needed to be able to do what they were there to do. So that command had people that would do all that. They had personnel, they'd get the planes you needed to fly, there was just so much necessary. We were in the personnel office. My boss's job was to get the personnel that were needed and it might be pilots and engineers and navigators or it might be cooks and bakers. Whatever was needed. We were divided into wings, there was the European wing that went to London and at that time there was nothing going on in Europe so it was a pretty stationary wing. All the bases had been set up and were staffed. Then there was the South Atlantic wing that went from South America to Italy. My boss had the two that were really in action: the Africa-Middle East at the time they were moving eastward across the desert area and the India-China one which at the time was relatively quiet. About the time we got everything set in North Africa, the Burma Road fell and that was when we got into that. As the troops moved across Africa, somebody had to set up camps. My boss was a red-faced, wild haired guy that had made other people cry and I could understand why because somebody came by and said, "Larry, aren't you going to that meeting?" and he was in the middle of a teletype at the moment but he got up and off he went. We he came back he said, "Where's that telegram?" I said, "You didn't finish dictating it yet." He was like that but he was really pretty wonderful. After the Burma Road fell, he did the personnel for it and he went over to see how things were doing. When he came back I remember two stories: he said there was one man who was carrying so much equipment that every time he moved, he rattled and every time he rattled, he swore. [laughs] Then the other one was that he only met one man coming back who didn't want to come back and he found out that he was wanted for some kind of criminal activity.

I think as long as you have that picture then I can tell you what it was like. Our job was to get those people—Major Lazar would go to the meetings where something was happening and they had to get so and so from here over there to do whatever had to be done. We were Personnel so he would give me the information and I typed wires that had to be sent to the place where the personnel were, list the personnel, what their per diem would be, what kind of equipment, if they were to have shots of some kind, everything that was necessary for them to be ready to leave. I can still remember staying late to type some of them because they went the full page and a quarter of the way down another page, they were so long. We developed a system where an "A" stood for the equipment and a "B" stood for the per diem and whatever the variations were came as numbers

underneath and we ended up sending a wire like that [holds fingers indicating approximately four inches] "C3" or what have you. That was one of the things that made a big difference. Before I sent those things I had to get priority and there was a priority office and when I'd walk in, they'd groan. Most of the time it was something critical and it might be something like ten cooks and bakers would go when a general was waiting for a seat, it was that kind of thing. The priority office had to decide who had the priority for whatever seats were available.

INT: Do you remember one of the most intense moments?

JB: I do have a couple of SNAFUs. One of them was personal and the other one I heard about. One time somebody was needed in one of these wings, and the secretaries never knew why unless they put two and two together from the newspapers, they had to have somebody ready to leave this country and get there immediately. There just happened to be some people at Love Field in Dallas that met all the requirements, they just had to fly over to Florida. I had typed the wire that ordered them to go and I could just picture them all at the train station saying good-bye to their wives and everything. Word came through that there was a group already in Florida ready to go and they decided it was so critical that they let them go first. Then I pictured all these people standing on the platform 'You're not going after all.' [laughs] That to me was something that said to me how some of these things that seem so awful at headquarters 'How could they be so mixed up?' That there was behind it some kind of critical need. The other one that I heard about was that there was a whole shipment of equipment and supplies going to Alaska Wing and while they were in flight they got word that there was something on that flight desperately needed in the South Pacific and they simply sent the crew to the South Pacific. So down in the South Pacific men got parkas, fur hoods, gloves. 'How could they be so mixed up, to send that stuff to us?' and that's why. The stuff was really going somewhere else where it was needed.

INT: You met your husband when you were older, right? Was he in the war effort?

JB: He was at the Bell Laboratories of AT&T; they were the foremost research laboratory. They did sound for the sound movies, they did hearing that's now for hearing aids; they just did all kinds of things. He started out with long distance calling, tracking when voices would disappear. For instance, if you were calling from New York to somewhere up in Maine by the time it got there it might be three times, you couldn't hear it and the operator would repeat, and they still call them repeater stations. [laughs] From that he went through television, he went through the revolution in computers, and his last job—he was twenty years older than I—before he retired was transmission on Telstar. He was up in Bethel, Maine. Anything that had to do with transmission equipment that was going into Telstar, that was his field. During the war he wanted to see if he could manage to go, he was sure he couldn't but he went through the whole business and they were all ready to take him and he said 'I suppose I should show you this' and he showed them the letter that said under no circumstances was he to be drafted. He was needed for the war effort in his work there. I don't know what they are but I know he got at least six

patents that were top secret so he was doing things, one of them he said when they were firing at a Japanese plane over a battleship, they'd be following the plane and they'd end up shooting the battleship. He developed some kind of mechanism that would show the trajectory that would show the officer-in-charge when it time to say stop, you're going to hit the battleship. So one of the patents was how to get that information.

INT: But he still wanted to be in combat?

JB: I think he just wanted to see what he could do and what they would do.

INT: Did you find that most young men wanted to be drafted?

JB: Everybody that I knew just took it for granted; everybody that was able had to go.

INT: What was this country like with most of the young men over at war?

JB: I was sorry to see Sunday come because it was so close to Monday. Gravelly Point was down by the national airport and they had transportation from the old post office and you had to get a bus to go there and come back and the last bus left at 6:00 or 6:30 and if you missed that you had to out and wait for a bus coming in from Virginia and they were always filled to the doors and they would often just go by and not stop at all. So everybody would take a ride if they could get it. One woman took a ride with a man and she said he had such interesting eyebrows and she knew she'd seen him somewhere. He said, "The name's Brown, ma'am." When he was letting her out in Washington, he said "The name's Lewis" and it was John L., the big labor boss who had eyebrows you could practically shelter under. You just took whoever came along and one time I was with one other and we said "Where are you from?" and he said "You'll never guess." I said "How about Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania?" and he almost drove off the roadway, because he was. That shows the way we got in town was to take whatever ride offered, it was so crowded.

And then when you say what did you do, I know I dated a fella, I don't remember seeing him a lot but when we did, he was stationed south of the District in Virginia, in the Navy and he'd come up to a coffee shop and we'd talk far into the night. That was for me a very stressful time. I was looking for somebody who was in the South Pacific and hoping that everything was all right and worried and anxious about this and that. I went to one enlisted men's affair and didn't like it at all. Anyway there wasn't time, I'd get something to eat and went in and did what was necessary, and went to sleep and got up and went to work again. This was very much my wartime experience. But I have letters from one friend whose future husband went abroad and her letters are full of the time she and the other girls went out and danced. She said how nice it would have been to be dancing with a fella. [laughs] She lived in Buffalo, not in Washington, D.C., and she lived at home and she was probably working but not the way we were. She shows that my experience was not typical.

INT: Do you remember when FDR died?

JB: We were just devastated, it was just a blow for everybody. I remember being on the streetcars within hours, within a couple days of it, and people were just at a loss.

INT: What do you think about [President] Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan?

JB: I guess I'm in the same place he was, I had to put their lives against ours and not knowing as we know, that Pandora's box had opened, and that Pandora's box was beautiful compared to what the atomic bomb opened. I guess I'd have to be in favor.

INT: Did you feel that most people shared your sentiments?

JB: I think so. That fella that I dated in Washington was at Oak Ridge or wherever they were working on it, he said he knew just enough to know that when the atomic bomb was used, that that's was what they were working on but that there were fellas working under him, hammering on pipes, saying "Boy, I'm glad I had nothing to do with that." [laughs]

INT: Going back to the Hump, flying over the Himalayas, did you know any of the pilots that actually did that?

JB: No, I was strictly in the office.

INT: So after the Air Force, what did you do?

JB: Well the first thing is the way things evolved, I had to leave. They had a policy that if you worked for the government, they wanted to keep people from stealing from one department to another and if you voluntarily left a job, you couldn't rehire in the government for three months. I was ready to go back to work in a couple of months and I went to work at the Junior Red Cross. The Junior Red Cross, like the Red Cross, had chapters all over the country and Mrs. Buchman said to be sure to tell you that the Junior Red Cross was sending things to the orphan children in the war district and they got psychiatric advice about whether shoes were better than candy or vice versa. And the answer was to send both shoes and candy because the kids need both. It seems early but I'm quite sure it was M&Ms because they were something chocolate that you could ship. They had a good photographer at a place where these were being given out by, of all things, the Sisters of Charity. They wore the great white peaked headdress and white robes, they were beautiful to look at and we had photographs of the beautiful Sisters of Charity and a child with shoes like this [shows hugging] and others getting their candy. They were a wonderful excuse to go to Public Relations and big papers. If it was really good, it went over to the headquarters across the street. Any picture had a standard caption that said what was going on and one lead that was specific to the picture. These had gone through the whole Red Cross and had been typed up and approved, came over to us for final approval of the Director of the Junior Red Cross. My boss and I were looking at these things and enjoying them tremendously, we read them and they looked wonderful, and we gave them to the boss and he came storming into the room, waving one of them and asking who did it. One of the captions with the candy said "Candy's

dandy but liquor is quicker." [laughs] That had gone from the typist to the head of her department, to the head of Publicity, to us and to him, and it would have gone out to the newspapers but he found it. That was one thing that the Junior Red Cross did for the Red Cross.

The other one that I was telling her about was kapok, it was used for flotation and you couldn't get it. It was an eastern product and no longer available and they found milkweed was the best substitute. And one thing the chapters did was go out on milkweed searches and send it in to the government. I was a writer for the Junior Red Cross and I made a thing like "The house that Jack built" where I used milkweed instead of kapok. I looked and looked to find that because I have it somewhere, but I just moved here and I don't know where anything is. The chapters did anything they could to help the war effort. I was working at the headquarters and tried to publicize the best things that they did. So after the war, what's your question?

INT: You met and married your husband, of course.

JB: Not for many years.

INT: If you don't mind, why was that? Were you just busy with work?

JB: Everybody would ask all time why aren't you married. If you can ever figure that out, you tell me. [laughs] I have no principle; I was not for this or against that, that's just the way things turned out. I didn't meet the person I was hoping to meet.

INT: Looking back on the war would you say it had a positive effect on your life?

JB: I have a general feeling that everything has a positive effect in the long run. I learned some negative things about some of the people. I learned not to say certain things to one woman who reported everything that was useful to the commander. She was very sweet and people liked her very much but they didn't know that if they confided in her… So I learned a few things. But mostly all my life I've had better people around, better. I don't think it was negative and I don't think it was really positive, it was just what happened.

INT: Well, that's all I have today.

JB: I'm still in touch with my wartime boss's daughter. He died at 101. She's out in New Zealand and I still hear from her.

INT: Do you keep in touch with anyone else from that time?

JB: I have college friends and we had a 70th anniversary a couple of years ago. I've kept in touch but by this time, they're dying.

INT: That about sums it up. Thank you very much.