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World War II
Dr. Mormino
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Interview with Jean Waters

Jean Elizabeth Waters was born on July 15, 1922 in the small town of Belmont, New York. There were only 3,000 people who lived there and it was the size of the University of South Florida. Waters said that she could go anywhere from her house on foot because everything was right there. Her father, Harry Rogers, was a wealthy civil engineer and surveyor and her mother, Eva Rogers, a socialite, lived an aristocratic life. In fact, Rogers was the first person in the city to own an automobile. Waters also had a sister five years junior to her named Evelyn. Growing up, Waters enjoyed the rich life. She recalls her childhood being "ideal." One of her fondest memories in Belmont was skating in the winter. A river ran straight through the town, and, during the winter, would freeze over, allowing the town's people to skate there. They "toasted marshmallows and ate hotdogs," she says. Waters was only about nine or ten at the time. She also remembers the town's candy factory, where she and many others would get to eat free candy in the winter. "We went through trays and trays of chocolates. They would let us pick out what we wanted," she recalls.

Waters was very fond of her father growing up. She remembers him being "very talented and creative. He was the jack of all trades." Although they were an affluent family, they did not do very well during the Depression. Water's father only made \$17 a week; the service of a surveyor was not needed much then. However, he also ran a chicken coop in their garden, which allowed them to eat normally during a time so many people were starving. They ate chicken every Sunday and eggs on other days, which was there "protein for the rest of the week." Waters attended Belmont High School, where she excelled in sports. She not only played every sport

that existed in her high school but was also captain for every sport as well. When she graduated, she received a ribbon for being captain of all the sports team. She had also become a feature writer for the school's newspaper in her junior year, and became the editor in her senior year. "I just loved writing." When asked what she felt when Pearl Harbor was attacked, Waters replied "devastation and disbelief. I could not believe that it happen. Not being able to see it or be close to it—it didn't seem real. Then all of a sudden, we hated the Japanese. We hated them!"

After high school, Waters wanted to go to college but could not afford the money. But when her neighborhood friend had asked her to apply with her for Ferdonia College, Waters, who played several instruments including the clarinet and the violin, jumped at the offer to study music. They both auditioned together and although her friend did not get in, Waters was accepted. Water's aunt, who donated clothes to the family from time to time, payed for her tuition and for three years, Waters studied music as well studied for her degree in teaching. Although rationing and donating to the army had become common in America by then, Waters never felt she had to sacrifice anything. "I didn't feel like I was missing a lot. We did without sugar but that's the only thing I can remember." In 1943, the war had been well under way and Waters was "totally bored. There was no dancing, no dating, no nothing." During that time, Waters and her friends would walk down to the ice cream parlor every night and drink sodas together, and every night they had walked there, they would pass the post office with a huge sign that asked women to come join and work for the navy. "It said 'join the navy and see the world.'" Waters said that she had passed that sign so many times that she eventually became "brainwashed" and decided leave school for some time (she was in her junior year) and join the navy. She attended Hunter's College, an exclusive girl's school in New York where Waters received basic training. She greatly enjoyed Hunter's College. There she saw an electric train

for the very first time in her life, which was located just outside of her building. Waters recalls waving outside of her window to the passengers in the train every time it passed by. After that, she became a "WAVE." WAVES stood for Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, and women who joined were commissioned in the women's reserve of the Navy. They could even hold rank up to that of commander.

After Waters finished her training, she was sent to Yeoman's School in Iowa State to learn how to be a secretary. There she learned skills such as short hand and typing, and also served as the chapel's helper in Sunday services. When her training was completed, Waters was allowed to choose three places anywhere in the country that she would like to be stationed at. Her first choice was Hawaii. "I wanted so bad to go to Hawaii," she laughs. Her second and third choices were Bremerton Naval Yard in Seattle and Farragut, Idaho, respectively. Water's was granted to stay in Bremerton which she recalls being "fantastic." She remembers the many roses that grew there which were "just beautiful." But her major experience there was getting to go on board the decks of the aircraft carriers the Wasp and the Hornet, which had been severely bombed and were sent to Bremerton to be repaired. The aircraft carriers were as big as "two or three football fields." But what had struck her most was the crater-sized hole located in the bowels of the Wasp. Waters remembers looking down the whole to see four decks below her that had been completely wiped out. The sight deeply affected Waters, saying, "none of us could hardly speak." After staying in Bremerton for ten months, Waters was sent to Idaho and, luckily, was sent with the same group of women she worked with and had gotten to be friends with in Bremerton. Her four fellow WAVES shared a bunkhouse together in the naval base, which was located in the mountains. They did many activities together, including swimming in one of the six swimming pools there. While there, the WAVES were allowed to stay in a house just for

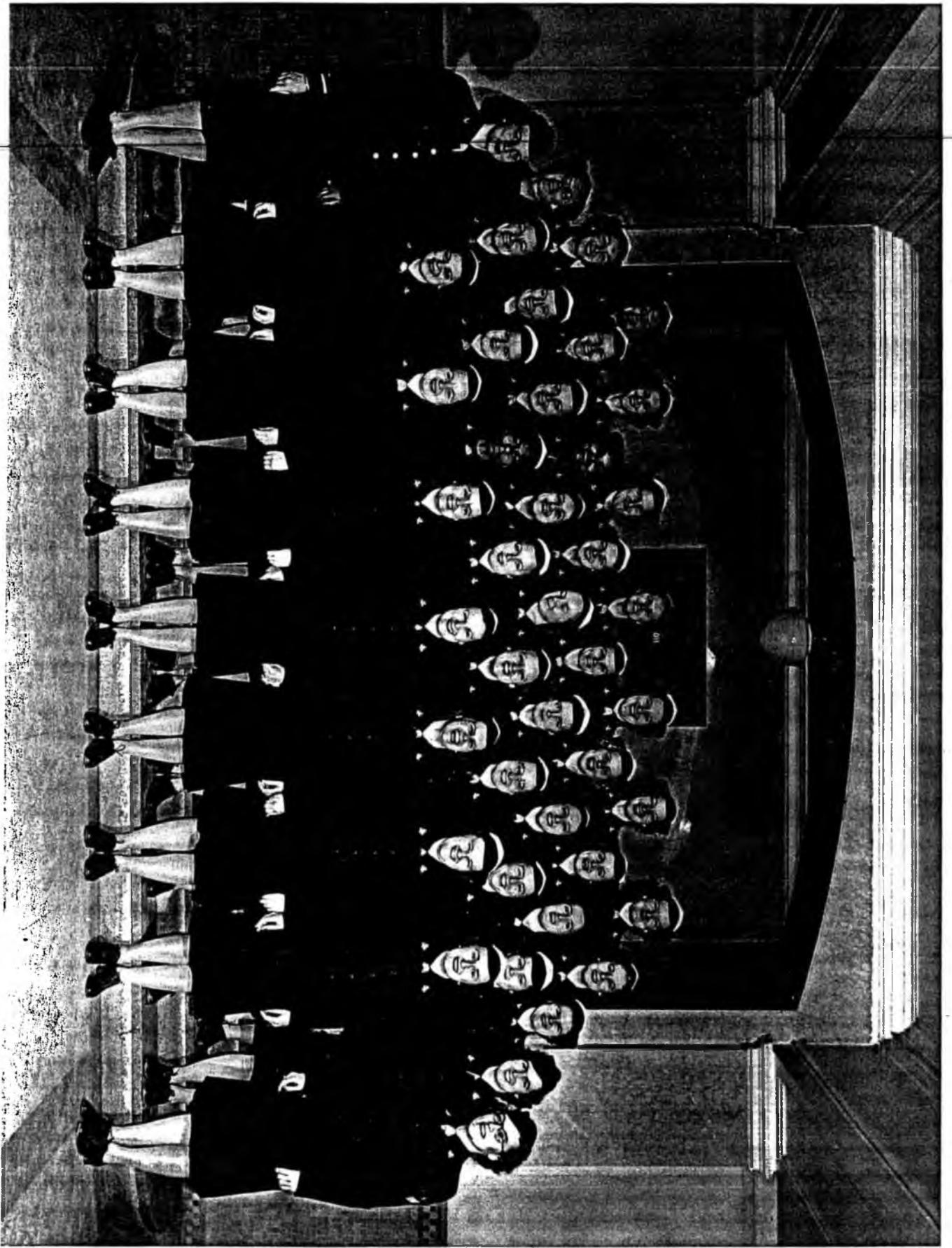
them on Lake Ponderay. A local man who had originally intended to live there with his wife when he finished it built the house. But "the day he finished building it was the day his wife died." He therefore decided to donate it to the navy, but it was strictly for the WAVES and no one else. Waters recalls some nights when she and her friends got to sleep outside on the hammocks which she liked because the stars looked so beautiful and up close that she felt like she could "pluck them from the sky." The only scary part about sleeping on the hammocks was the squirrels, which would run up and down the hammocks but Waters did not mind. Waters also remembers the good times she spent with a woman everyone called "Pee-Wee," for being short. Everyone enjoyed her good sense of humor and she "always had something funny to say." Waters also remembers the large amount of food the Navy would give to the WAVES. Just for breakfast, Waters was given "four eggs, a heap full of bacon, and seven or eight bananas." She tried giving back the food but the Navy would insist that she keep it. Waters never knew what to do with the excess food. "We were women. We couldn't finish all that food." Although Waters and her friends enjoyed spending time on the base, the work was unpleasant. Their job was to "inventory the personal effects of the men that had been killed" in the war. Because the work was so depressing, Waters and her friends would go out as often as possible and do "silly things" in order to keep their mind off of their work and off of the war as well.

Waters stayed in Farragutt for eight months and then returned to Seattle where she was honorably discharged and sent back home to Belmont. She went back to Ferdonia and finished the rest of her college career on her G.I. Bill, which helped pay for her schooling. When the war was over, Waters remembers the country feeling "total elation," and Waters personally felt "relief, elation and joy. It was over!" After she received her degree in teaching, Waters was offered to teach in a school about 30 miles away from home. But Waters soon grew tired of the

commute and was bored with the town itself. Having noticed this, Waters friend, Jimmy Harris, offered her to board with Harris' aunt in a town called Olein, about 30 miles away from Belmont. The town was more heavily populated and livelier than Belmont, so Waters decided to quit teaching after three years and live with Harris' aunt and took up a job in a major plant there. She later met Harris uncle, George Waters, an ex-marine who was stationed in Guada Canal, and they both got married; Waters was 24. Waters then returned to teaching again and George became a traveling salesman and sold coffee. He then worked at a poultry plant and sold poultry in various places as far as Maryland. But in 1948, they moved to Sarasota. Waters remembered Sarasota being a "cultural city. They had operas and artists displays and all kinds of things that you don't find in most cities." Waters especially enjoyed the beach, where she and her husband would take walks together. They shortly thereafter moved to Tampa where George was hired to work for McCormick Spice Company. He had started off as a salesman but eventually became district manager and was responsible for selling spices from Jacksonville to Key West. When he became divisional manager, George sold spices to all of Florida, Georgia and North Carolina. He also became friends with George Jenkins, the late owner of Publix. Jenkins was so pleased with George's work that he hired him to be manager of all the spices in all Publix stores. Thus, George had a very lucrative job and Waters was a teacher again. They had one daughter, Kathy. They lived in Lutz for some time and owned a small stable with two horses that Waters and Kathy would ride together. Kathy won many riding competitions but had to give up riding when the family moved back to Tampa because the taxes were too high in Lutz. Waters was married to George for 44 years before he died of Alzheimer's disease in 1999.

For Waters, the most important lesson learned from the war, both individually and nationally, was "that war is almost unbelievable, it's so cruel, it's so pointless. Men hating men

so bad that they would go to war. Nations hating other nations so badly that they would hate each other enough to kill and destroy. That's the way it affected me. It was just an unnecessary tragedy. I couldn't believe that human beings had that in them to do those things."



Hunter's College 1943



Jean's Class in Belmont after the war



Harry Roger's car in early 1900s.
He was the first one in Belmont to
own an automobile.