

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II Women

Personal Experiences

O. H. 626

MARGARET MARTIN

Interviewed

by

Janice Cafaro

on

October 30, 1985

## MARGARET MARTIN

Born on November 7, 1906, Mrs. Margaret Martin has been a lifelong resident of Youngstown, Ohio. She is the eldest of eight living children born to Edmund Treharne and Margaret Stephens.

During her youth Mrs. Martin attended several elementary schools, South Avenue, Lincoln, and Grant. After two years at South High School, she was forced to leave because her mother had a nervous breakdown and she was consequently needed at home.

In 1924 she continued her education at Hall's Business University, majoring in secretarial studies. Her curriculum included such subjects as business law, commercial law, typing, and shorthand. A talented student, she was hired by her commercial law teacher, Mr. Hesson in 1925. She worked as a legal secretary of Hesson and DeCamp for eight months.

In 1926 she worked as a teller and bookkeeper for the Home Savings & Loan Corporation. After several months she was given a promotion to the Board of Trade, where she was a secretary to Arthur J. Lynch and C. J. Colmery. Mrs. Martin worked in that capacity until her marriage to William Martin on May 14, 1926. Shortly thereafter, she worked part-time for the board for a three month period.

During World War II, Mrs. Martin felt compelled to contribute to the war effort. As a result, she went to work for Republic Steel during the 1940's as a crane follower. She left the mill in the mid 1940's, when women were no longer

needed for production.

Mrs. Martin worked next as a contingent for McKelvey's department store. The adoption of a son in 1945 compelled her to leave her clerking position. Thereafter, she worked part-time as a baby-sitter until several years ago.

A mother of five, Mrs. Martin has been active in Everybody's Bible School. She is currently a member of Western Reserve Methodist Church.

Mrs. Martin is a sports enthusiast, who has played golf at Lee Run and Rocky Ridge courses. She has also bowled at Marhill bowling lanes, a member of the "Wednesday Housewives" pool at Marhill. Her hobbies include reading, crocheting, needlework, stamps, and crossword puzzles.

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INTERVIEWEE: MARGARET MARTIN

INTERVIEWER: Janice Cafaro

SUBJECT: war attitudes, family, crane follower, Republic Steel

DATE: October 30, 1985

C: This is an interview with Mrs. Margaret Martin for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on World War II Women, by Janice Cafaro, at 4603 Washington Square, Apt. 8, Austintown, Ohio, on October 30, 1985, at 3:00 p.m.

Can you tell me a little bit about your background, your family, when you were born, your education?

M: I was born in 1906 on November 7. I was the oldest of eight living children. There were three of them that died before that. There were eleven all together. I grew up in Youngstown, lived in Youngstown all my life. I went to grade school and two years of high school. My mother had a nervous breakdown and I had to drop out. Then I went to business college; at that time you could go to business college without graduating from high school. I took a fourteen month course. I took everything they had: business and commercial law, typing, shorthand. Then I started to work for one of my teachers when he was admitted to the Bar. Then from there I went to Home Savings & Loan Bank and worked there. Then I worked at the Youngstown Board of Trade. Each time was a step up. Then I worked there until I got married. I went back to work in later years just as a clerk in McKelvey's for sales and busy days, things like that. Then I ended up babysitting. That is as far as that goes.

C: In order to compare what World War II was like how about if we start with the years before the war, towards the end of the Depression. Can you tell me a little bit about how your life was like then?

M: I was a child in the First World War. The Second World War

started in 1940. Up until then I was married and had four children. I remember it but I don't know how to go about it. Why don't you ask me the questions.

C: Did you work during that time?

M: Yes, part-time as a hooker in the mill; that is what they called them. I was a crane follower. I worked for Republic Steel and started as a crane follower's helper. I worked there for a few months and then this girl had problems and was laid off. Anyway, I ended up as what they called head hooker, which was a crane follower.

C: What did you do, show it where to go?

M: Yes. I lifted all types. I worked in the pipe mill and at the time I was there I was working on what they called the big pipeline, the one that was running to Alaska. We worked on anywhere from 17" to 24" pipe. For a while I worked on a tester of the where they ran the water through to test the seams in the pipe. Most of the time I was a crane follower. We had to tell the man in the crane how to drop the hooks down. Then we would bring a cable and I would have to crawl under there and get the cable and when he brought it down I would bring it up and hook it to the crane. I would give him signals to take it up then and away.

C: How did you get involved in this?

M: During the war my children were all in school and I thought I might as well try to do my part. I lived out on Warner Road and I had to walk to go to the bus from Warner Road to Logan Avenue. It was a job. It was hard to get there and hard to get my kids taken care of. Part of the time I rode with my husband; he worked at Sheet & Tube. I would ride into town maybe an hour early, maybe two hours early before I had to be there. Then I would go back home, catch a ride or walk. Many times I walked it.

After the pipes came back from wherever the hooker took them after testing then I had to give him directions to drop. Then the pile would drop and I would roll them down until they were in the line. We had to put them in rows in what they called boxes. We laid the 2 X 4's on top and piled another load on that. We piled that until the boxes were filled. I worked there about four years.

One morning I came out to work and one of the men had an accident; he lost his leg. It was on a pile that I had built. I couldn't start to work; I thought maybe it was my fault. They told me no. I knew he had a fault of unloading one tier at a time and then dropping down and getting another. There was always the danger of the pipes on top rolling down. That's

what happened. I stayed there then for another eight months; then I started to get high blood pressure.

C: Did you get high blood pressure from the stress of the job?

M: I think so, yes. My health got bad also from traveling summer and winter going to work.

C: How did your husband feel about you going to work?

M: He didn't like it very much, but then it was helping out. I had two kids in high school and I had to help out.

C: How many women were employed?

M: I don't know. There were about nine in our department, but they had women all over the mill.

C: Was there about 20% women?

M: I would say there was because in every department they had a lot of women. They lost so many men going to the service. That's why women were hired.

C: Did most of these women view their job as just temporary?

M: Yes, most of us did it that way. Some of them didn't last as long as others and some were there when I came in and were there when I left. Pretty soon when the men came back then the women didn't go into that part of the mill.

C: Were they laid off or were they asked to leave?

M: Some of them were asked to leave, yes. One woman came out to work drunk. She climbed in an open railroad car and climbed under the seat or would have been killed. She was asked to leave.

Another one got in trouble with the men. She said the men were nasty to her. I told her you're treated the way you want to be treated.

C: You didn't find that the men resented you?

M: Not me. They got along fine. The only resentment I had was with the union people. At that time you could work and didn't have to belong to the union. They were asking me to join the union. The only harassing I had was if I would go to the restroom there would be somebody in there trying to get me to join the union. One day I got angry and I went to the boss and I said to him, "Mr. Wolf, do I have to belong to the union at work?" I made up my mind I wasn't going to be railroaded. He said, "No, you don't. That's up to you."

I said, "All right then, I'll know how to handle it."  
I didn't have any problems after I told the boss.

C: From your experience then, most of the women, if they wanted to, were able to fit right in with the men?

M: If they acted the lady. Some of them would go out there and cuss and swear and stuff like that. Other ones would go out there and take their job and go ahead and do their job. Then the men sometimes asked for that. Sometimes my crane man wouldn't take my orders. Some of the men were as bad as the women. On a whole I can't say in all my time there that I ever had a man get out of line. I worked with a lot of them. But you find that in all work.

C: I would imagine that was a big adjustment for the men to have all these women working with them.

M: I didn't go in the first year. There were other women in there when I went in there. I think that pretty much was ironed out. I can't speak for when the women first went in the mill. A period of time had gone by and I think maybe rules had been made that we had to follow the same as the men did.

C: Would you say that some of the women tried to act like men?

M: That's it; that's the thing. They tried to act like men and they allowed them to talk to them dirty and things like that.

C: Those women probably had a harder time getting accepted than you?

M: I think so. The one that was fired, she didn't last, only about three or four months.

C: How did your family feel about you working, like your children?

M: When I first started they had to come home on the school bus and they had to be home a while before my husband got home. We worked the shift mostly where he would work the part that I wouldn't work. We tried to have one of us in the home almost all the time.

C: The company cooperated with that?

M: Oh yes.

C: So then your children weren't home alone then?

M: Yes, but they were all in school.

C: It wasn't a big adjustment then?

M: No, not too much. We lived on a farm and they had their own chores to do and things like that.

C: Were you paid the same as a man in your job?

M: I don't know that. I was paid a good wage at the time. I never asked.

C: What did you do before you were a crane follower, before you entered the factory?

M: I didn't do anything.

C: This was your first job?

M: It was my first job after I got married.

C: This was before you went to Youngstown Business College?

M: No, that was after. I went to Hall's Business University, which is now Youngstown University. The men that were in that formed Youngstown University.

C: Then you got married?

M: Then I went to work in my teacher's office. I did all of this before I got married. I did work three months after I got married at my old job because the girl got married and left; they asked me to come in and fill in. It wasn't a job; it was just to help out.

C: I was wondering if you were already employed when you took this other job or whether you had quit?

M: No, I was out.

C: I know you lived on a farm.

M: We farmed our own place. I was partially raised on a farm.

C: What was the farm like?

M: It was hard work but I loved it.

C: Did you start early in the morning?

M: Yes.

C: Did you can?

M: Yes, I canned everything I could beg, borrow, steal, or grow.



I used to pick berries in the Spring and Summer. I canned. Then in the Fall I butchered meat and canned that.

C: You've done this all your life then?

M: All my adult life, yes.

C: How was your life during the Depression? Did it help you that you worked?

M: What I call the Depression was after the First World War. In the Second World War I used to get ration stamps. Me living on the farm, every Fall we would butcher our own meat. At that time people didn't have freezers in their homes and we rented a freezer. I would give my ration stamps away to other people that needed them more than I did. We had chickens and ducks and turkeys on the farm.

C: Then you didn't have as hard a time as other people?

M: No, that's true. We had hard times, but our work was all in the summertime. We had to work hard in order to get it to put it away for the winter. We had our own milk. I made my own butter and things like that where all that stuff was rationed and I didn't need the stamps. I felt that I was entitled to them by the law.

C: Did you help your own family or did you give them to friends?

M: I gave it to my own family if they needed it; if they didn't need it I gave them to somebody else. Many times I went to a store and a woman wanted to buy meat and she couldn't because she didn't have enough stamps. I would slip her some then. I couldn't see hanging onto them when I didn't need them.

C: Do you remember at all what the attitude was during World War II, what people were talking about, what their concerns were?

M: Most of them were concerned with making a living. I was concerned a lot with whether my brothers were going to come back.

C: How many did you have go over there?

M: I had six brothers in all but two of them went over. They all came back. I had one brother come home, get married, and enlist again and went in for the second one. I had one in Germany that had shrapnel in his chest when he came home. One had TB and he wasn't accepted. My youngest one is the one that enlisted twice. He was what they called a tail-gunner in an airplane.

C: What did he do? Do you know exactly what tailgunners do?

M: No. He handled the rear gun in the plane.

C: That sounds dangerous.

M: It was.

C: Did you family correspond with them?

M: Oh yes. They corresponded with us when they could. We wrote to them.

C: Was the mail censored?

M: Oh yes. Some of it was just blanked clear out.

C: What kind of stuff did they censor?

M: Where they were, and anything that they slipped about what they were going to do.

C: By and large you were able to correspond with them fairly regularly?

M: Yes.

C: What goes through your mind having people overseas who are fighting?

M: As a child my uncle was in the First World War and I grew up with that. I can remember things that happened during that, and I can remember one twin uncle coming home and telling his sister that something had happened to John. He said, "Have you heard from him?" She said, "No, but don't think that." He had been shot and he was in the hospital. He had been shot. He wasn't killed, just wounded. I think the same fears went through us when they were overseas.

I had a brother that lived with me a good bit of the time and I got a letter from him that he was in North Carolina in Swananoa. I've never heard of that name. He was there in a medical hospital and I wanted to go see him. The doctor wrote and told me that he was fine. The reason that he was there was because what they called the left nerve was paralyzed. They straightened it out. That was the only one that I can remember.

In the Second War I had a great aunt that had twelve grandchildren, grandsons, in the service. We had it all around us then.

C: It must have been a big adjustment?

M: It was.

C: What kinds of adjustments did you have to make with the men gone?

M: I don't know whether you would call them adjustments or not, but you just couldn't show your grieving to your family members because it would upset them more.

C: Were there feelings that the war would last long?

M: We feared a lot, but we hoped a lot.

C: How old were children at this time?

M: I watch the "Waltons" on television and a lot of times there will be something on that show that will take me back.

C: Do you think that show was a fairly accurate representation of how it was?

M: It takes me back. To me it brings all that back. I think it is accurate. In the program today Churchill was on talking about hoping that they could keep England out of the war. I remember that speech.

C: Did you like Churchill?

M: Yes. I liked Roosevelt too; I think he was one of the best presidents we've ever had. He didn't back down when he made up his mind that he wanted to do so thing for the people. Churchill was a man of the same caliber.

C: Do you remember when they bombed Pearl Harbor?

M: Yes.

C: What was your response?

M: Anger.

C: What was President Roosevelt's reaction?

M: He was angry. He wanted to stay out of it in the worst way. He was like Churchill. When they got into it they did everything they could to do their part.

C: Did people complain? I know people went and enlisted.

M: My brother went down; he was twenty-eight when he enlisted. The places were full of people enlisting.

C: Do you think there was more patriotism back then?

M: I think there was, yes.

C: I was talking to a lady and she said during the war nobody complained; nobody said anything because you just didn't do that.

M: That's right, we didn't do that. Most of us did what we could and took the bitter with the better.

C: That's a big contrast to the Vietnam crisis.

M: I had an adopted child in Vietnam; I know.

C: In addition, I guess a lot of the veterans who came back from World War II had the same thing the Vietnam veterans had, which is a complex.

M: That's true. I didn't find it too much among our's, but I saw it in neighbors. I don't think it was as bad because when they came back they were heroes. When they came back from Vietnam they were nothing.

C: Did Youngstown have a parade for them?

M: They never said much about that. They always had things to say about the country and the life they had in the barracks. I didn't hear too many complaints among my family or anybody else.

C: Do you think that we learned anything from World War II, or did you learn anything?

M: I learned that we shouldn't have anymore, but we've had them just the same. I learned that you work hard and do what you have to do, and you are satisfied. I hate war, but I don't like to be pushed around either.

C: Do you remember D-Day?

M: My niece was visiting me from Columbus. We were downtown at the show and they were running around with horns on the cars telling us the war was over.

C: How long did it take for the boys to start coming back home?

M: Not too long.

C: Do you have anything to say that sticks in your mind about the war or about working?

M: As a woman I wanted to do my part. I felt that doing something like that was helping me to raise my family with some of the things I couldn't have gotten. I also felt good about doing my share. I think we all at a time like that shouldn't depend on others.

C: Going to work was your own initiative?

M: Yes.

C: What would you say the big difference between World War I and World War II was?

M: I think World War I was a war that we had to fight to keep that other maniac from winning. I'm afraid the man we have in there now is going to push us into war.

C: Do you remember the fireside chats?

M: Yes. We listened to all of them.

C: Would you say President Roosevelt reflected the attitude of the whole country?

M: I think he did, yes. He is the one who gave the people so many things. He tried to help the people. There hasn't been anybody since that has.

C: Do you think we had to end the war that way, that Truman had to do what he did?

M: No, I think that was an inhumane way of doing it. I think the atom bomb was a horrible thing.

C: They said Truman only did it because it would have cost more American lives.

Thank you very much for the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW