

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II: The Homefront

Personal Experience

O. H. 1455

HILDA CANNON BARBUTO

Interviewed

by

Rebecca Smith

on

October 21, 1991

## HILDA K. CANNON BARBUTO

Hilda Cannon was born [in] Bromley-By-Bow, the east end of London, England on December 9, 1925. [She was] the third of five children. Her parents were Samuel and Agnes Freeman Cannon. Hilda's father had served in the Royal Army during World War II. Though her formal schooling ended at age 14, she received the equivalent of a high school diploma.

Hilda was only 13 when the war broke out in 1939, but she was well aware of approaching events by the time she was ten. She remembers hearing Hitler "ranting and raving" on the radio, seeing newsreels of the public persecution of German Jews, and listening to her parents talk about the Brownshirts. Even then, at such a young age, she wondered "why the good people didn't put the bad people down."

Once the war began, Hilda's two brothers were called into the service. Her older brother, George, was called up almost immediately. Her father went to work whenever the government was building factories et cetera. She found out later that he worked at the factory she went to that made the rockets. At the time, he did this, [they] did not know the various places and towns that he went to work at. Her father worked at governmental construction while her oldest brother, George, served in the Royal Artillery Force in North Africa, and Arthur served in the Royal Engineers in France a few years later. He was two years younger than she was. At the age of 18, all males were conscripted. Hilda did not see her eldest brother for the next eight years.

Hilda's family was evacuated to the northern part of England

during the Battle of Britain. They returned later, even though they were in danger of being bombed. At 18, she would have been "called up" but she volunteered to work in a munitions factory at the age of 14 1/2, known as a shadow factory because of the secrecy surrounding them. A person could volunteer for other war work if they chose to do so before reaching the age of 18. To this day, she does not know where [the] factories were. In one factory, she worked on a lapping machine [for] smoothing out the barrel of the Brenn gun. The second factory was a cordite plant in which explosives were made for rockets.

During the war, Hilda met her future husband, Paul Barbuto, an American soldier stationed in England. In 1947, she left her family in England and came to America to be married. She and Paul have resided most of their married life in East Liverpool, Ohio, raising five children. In looking back upon her memories, Hilda states that, while material things lost their significance, the family became all-important, an idea she impressed upon her own children. Today, Hilda is quite active in her parish, St. Ann's Church, where she [is] the singing cantor and liturgy chairperson. While most of her time is spent with her church and her family, Hilda is also considering writing a book about the very events described in her interview.

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INTERVIEWEE: HILDA CANNON BARBUTO  
INTERVIEWER: Rebecca Smith  
SUBJECT: evacuation, black outs, strafings, Neville Chamberlain, secrecy, shadow factories  
DATE: October 21, 1991

SMITH: This is an interview with Mrs. Hilda Barbuto for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Homefronts During World War II Project by Rebecca Smith, at 1512 Etruria St., East Liverpool, Ohio on October 22, 1991, at 6:30 p.m.

Okay, Mrs. Barbuto, would you give me a little background about your life in England? Where were you born? Your father's occupation, your schooling?

BARBUTO: Well, I was born in Bromley-By-Bow. That's the east end of London. I'm therefore called a Cockney, originally, because I was born within the sound of Bow Bells on Parnell Road. It's still there right along side the old Roman road.

What did my father do? He was a boxer. When he was in the army, he was the champion middle weight, I do believe. He got what they called a black belt for that. He was also the barber of the unit. Do you want to hear this?

S: Sure.

B: It was a special honor because the general died . . . of Middlesex regiment. I need to look this up myself in the archives. My father was given special honor,

because he shaved and dressed the general for the funeral. That was 1914 to 1918. He had a special medal. In fact, the English government doesn't do like the American government does--give to the soldiers. British soldiers in World War I and II did not get a great amount of money for the time they have served, but my father could have taken advantage of the special honor the government might have bestowed upon him. They give them just a little pay after they're mustered out and stuff. They were going to establish him in a barber shop because of this honor. I think he was also like sort of a hero. How he met my mother [was] he rescued her brother during the war. They were snipers. This is the World War I, I'm talking about.

S: Okay.

B: Yes. Snipers had to go ahead and look ahead, climb up trees, et cetera. One had to be very brave to be a sniper because you went beyond the front line in order to try to find out what was happening. The enemy did the same. Therefore, soldiers frequently killed each other on these sniping expeditions. How my parents eventually met was because my mother's brother George served in the same battalion as my father. My uncle was entangled in barbed wire. My father crawled out and rescued him. They became friends, and after the war, my uncle brought my father home to visit, because they were bosom buddies. That's what happened. He met my mother, and they got married after the war because of meeting through her brother. So therefore, he could have had a barber shop, [but] my father did not accept this award. The government would have helped him to establish because of the honors bestowed upon him. But he didn't because, in those times, the barber shops used to be down below. You had to go down steps into cellars. Every home doesn't have a cellar in England, but these around London did. You know the barber poles that go around?

S: Yes.

B: Why do you think they have them?

S: I have no idea.

B: Because barber shops were not above the ground. They put them there, so you knew a barber shop was down the steps.

S: Oh, okay.

B: Then lots of people got lung trouble and things. My mother didn't want my father to be a barber, therefore he didn't accept that. He was sort of working with a

contractor business building, fixing roads, and things like that. That's what he did for a living as far as I can remember.

S: Do you have any childhood memories that stand out especially?

B: About what?

S: Just about growing up.

B: I can remember this uncle that I'll mention later . . . . He used to live in Middlesex. We lived in Essex. He'd ride his bicycle all around the outskirts of London--urban areas, you called them. He had a dog who would trot along beside him. He had a beautiful baritone voice, and he loved Gilbert and Sullivan operas. We'd hear him. There weren't lots of cars in those days. We'd be outside playing usually. We'd hear him from two blocks away. The children we were playing with would say, "Here comes your uncle George." And sure enough, everybody would get quiet, because they wanted to hear him sing. That's an early memory.

I also remember that my father used to mend our shoes, cut our hair, cut our neighbors' hair. . . .

S: How many were in your family?

B: Five children.

S: So, how old were you when World War II broke out?

B: I was born in 1925, and the war broke out in 1938. I was 13. Do you want to know when I was first aware of what was going on in Germany?

S: Yes.

B: When I was ten, this same uncle had an argument with my mother. Now, about this time, we were supposed to be migrating . . . going to Australia. There was a thing going on in England that if you had certain skills--necessary skills like the ones I've mentioned with my father. . . . My brothers were sort of handy, too. Anyway, they paid your way to migrate . . . to go over to Australia. I'm not quite sure if the argument was about what they called the Brownshirts who were the Nazis. The Blackshirts in Germany, the Brownshirts in London. Whether the argument was about that, or whether it was about going to Australia--which we didn't, of course, do--that's why I have a memory of this uncle George. It was about . . . they'd talk politics. My mother . . . her mother had been a suffragette. My

mother sort of followed along those lines, and therefore, was into politics and things.

Another interesting thing to hear about when I was a child was your father's mother . . . his mother or grandmother was a wonderful woman. They knew my grandparents. I used to hear what was so wonderful about her. I never did really find out. Except, when I came out to America, I was reading a book. The name Cannon came up. There was a Mrs. Cannon who was what they called a wet nurse to the king. I think it was Edward's children. I do know that if a person did anything like that, they were established in business by royalty or even [made] a duke, duchess, or whatever, for these certain things when you were done with your service to them. I do know that the grandmother had a grocery store, which her sons later dissipated . . . lost everything. But, I still didn't know what was so wonderful until I came to America and read that little piece. Still, I said maybe I'll write a book, which may never happen, because it may not be so.

S: So you think this may have been your grandmother?

B: Yes. And that's why she's so wonderful.

S: Oh, I see.

B: Do you know what a wet nurse is?

S: Yes, but you might want to explain it for the tape.

B: A wet nurse is . . . royalty didn't breastfeed their own children, so they called in women who already had children who were still feeding their children; and they would also nurse those children. They were called wet nurses. They didn't have to be royalty to do this for the rich people. These are just things I heard in my childhood.

S: That's very interesting. Now, you did mention that Brownshirts were in London. So, there were Nazis in London?

B: Well, they were followers of the Blackshirts who were the beginnings of the Nazis . . . the Hitlerites coming up. We'd see in the newspaper how strong they were getting and knew they were getting strong in their own way.

S: You were 14 when the war broke out, or approximately that age?

B: Again, when I was about 10 years of age, I became aware of what was going on in Germany.

S: At 10 years old, that must have created some fears in your mind with you hearing this.

B: Well, not so much fear, but wondering. Like, I still wonder why the good people don't put the bad people down. It seems that they are allowed to get so strong before anything is ever done. It seems to me they should be squashed, more or less, or put out of business, when people see that what they're doing is wrong.

S: Had you heard Hitler on the radio before?

B: Yes, I'd say when I was about 12, I heard him ranting and raving, and really, that's the expression for it.

S: That was your impression of him?

B: You'd better believe it. We used to go to--pictures, it was called then. They're movies here. The news was very good. Of course, we were not very far from the picture places. Of course, they were trying to encourage English people to go to the movies and see for ourselves what was happening in Germany, et cetera, for we would see the News movies whenever we saw a storymovie. Anyway, the news coverage was very good, and the screens were very big; so we'd see all what was going on. I would say that I was very much aware by the time that I was 12 or 13, and saw what he was doing to the Jewish people then. Some of the first movies we saw was when they were harassing the Jews. I saw where they were harassing and ill-treating the Jewish people. It was very shocking. I suppose the pictures we saw of the particular happening were horrifying to us. It is now what they call the night of blood, or something. . . .

S: Oh, Kristelnacht. The night of shattered glass.

B: Yes. But there was other things previous to that. I saw that they made them scrub the streets . . . and rounding them up. This was before there was any war or anything.

S: You were aware of all this?

B: Oh yes. I knew they were wrong.

S: So how did the outbreak directly affect your family?

B: Well, we had just moved to a new house. I was 13. I was still going to school. By the way, the school I went to is in Dagenham, Essex. It was called Campbell School. There was a Campbell who was a car racing



sportsman. He met the Indians when he came to America. The Indian may have been the son of Buffalo Bill's Indian friend. He came to visit once to talk, because the school was named after him. He also brought along with him this Indian. I can't think of the Indian's name. [The Indian] was with Buffalo Bill. This is 1932, maybe. He was his friend. He met him when he was over here. Whether it was him or his son, I don't know. It may come to me later. He was the Indian chief who was with Buffalo Bill's troupe, okay? There's also another question here. Buffalo Bill met him when he was out West. His son also did, so maybe it was the sons of both the Indian chief and Buffalo Bill. I'm not sure about dates, so the time would have been 1932 . . . around about there.

S: So you saw this Indian?

B: Yes. By this time, I was going to another school. We graduated at the age of 14, but if you won a scholarship, you went on to a higher school, but you had to pay a certain amount. I won the scholarship, but wasn't able to go because my parents weren't able to afford to pay all the extra money for clothes, et cetera. Anyway, the war began.

In any event, my brother got called up--my oldest brother. It was 1938, so he had to go. Previous to that, and I'm not going to make names here, but it was Chamberlain. Many people called him a coward, et cetera. But at that time, it was a dreadful fear, because Hitler had become very powerful. We saw what he was doing. He was building up his military might. I thought at the time that the British were, basically, wanting peace--which they were. They weren't prepared in the first place. They were devastated from the World War I. Germany was also, but the one thing Hitler was doing [was] he was getting funny enough . . . not really funny. But it seems like when things are peaceful, the economy sometimes goes down. Somehow or another, if you build up military might, you're able to get the country going again. Whether it's [by] making uniforms, making military weapons, getting the people to be doing something, even if it's joining the armies. Anyway, they were becoming strong. In 1937, I think it would be, is when Chamberlain called the Pacifier. At the same time, we were not ready. The people on the street and the people I knew were glad and happy, because of this dreadful fear you have that somebody's going to come and take you from your home and do all kinds of dreadful things. After seeing all the movies and seeing what they're doing to the Jews. . . .

S: Oh yes, I imagine.

B: Anyway, my brother got called up, and he was in the Royal Artillery. My father was away, also, at the time. He used to work wherever he was needed with construction, mending and making roads, and things like munitions factories, et cetera. I found out later that one place he helped construct was the factory that I rolled cordite in. I'm not exactly sure. He used to drive what they called a compressor, which would pump something out of the ground. So, he was needed wherever they did these things. They were, at the time, even though they were starting to make different air ports and things . . . . I now know that. I didn't know at the time. They were very secretive. You know, you didn't talk to people about these works. I'll tell you after about [a] secret. . . .

Well, my father was away, and then, my brother went. Of course, that was the beginning. That was in 1938 after Chamberlain had gained peace for us--gave us time even to call people up to go to basic training and things like that. So, whatever they say about him, I know [that] as a child, it was a wonderful relief knowing we were not going to war. What was the thinking, "Oh, you know they are going to do something to stop Hitler? He's going to realize that what he's doing is not right," and things like that. Of course, that didn't happen. Then, he took over Czechoslovakia. Then, he was taking more and more. We knew that he wouldn't stop. Even then, he had to be controlled. He wanted England. He wanted the world. I mean, you just had to hear. Yes, you'd hear [it] on the radio, but that was the beginning. You asked me about the beginning in 1938.

S: Your parents apparently talked a lot about this. I'm really interested in the fact that you were aware, as a 12 or 13 year old, of the harassment of the Jews.

B: Well, they used to read the newspaper a lot--the news of the world--and they would discuss it. I would talk and listen. We'd listen to the radio. There was no television . . . not in our houses, as yet. We listened to the news, especially after 1937 with Chamberlain. We were on edge after that, even though it was peace. So therefore, we were watching the news carefully to see. [It was] just across the English Channel. It's only a few miles.

S: Well, what do you remember about the Battle of Dunkirk?

B: I lived in Dagenham on a street called the Heathway. It went as far as . . . I suppose going maybe two miles or a mile and a half long. It's a very wide street. I suppose one might . . . it was like a 4 lane road. But, not as wide as American 4 lanes. Houses are

smaller, cars were smaller. It was quite a busy thoroughfare, with cars and double-decker buses. The buses were quite big. [They were] double-decker. We lived in one house among a row of houses. My bedroom was in the front room facing the busy street at this time in 1938. We had moved [there] in 1936 or 1937. The front garden may have been 4 yards long to the gate and then the sidewalk was probably 4 yards wide on our side of the street. Across the street, the sidewalk was about 10 yards wide. All the workers from the factory would walk down from the railway station on this sidewalk to get to Ford's factory.

My bedroom looked out on the front street. My bedroom would be looking out the street, here. There was a little garden, and there was a sidewalk. So, suppose this is the window of my bedroom. Over there would start the street. It's a pretty big highway street. Not as wide as out here, but it's decent size.

I can't remember the exact month, but it was quite a while before Dunkirk. For two to three weeks, soldiers, tanks, guns and artillery were going by in the trucks filled with soldiers morning, noon, and night. It never stopped. Most of those got killed, but that's later. Wherever they were going. . . . There was a Ford factory. It made cars. It was converted then to war machines and things. They had a dock. We lived by the River Thames. Following London through the east end and going down through Dagenham, Essex it goes around. (Referring to a map.) Here's London, and it goes around like this. Then you get here, and there's the North Sea, and here's Dagenham here along the River Thames. From my bedroom also, I could look a mile. There had been a farm beyond there. There was a highway in between called Ripple Road, come to think of it, as I looked at my bedroom window. But beyond that was the River Thames. Not as close as I can see the [Ohio River], here. That's part of the reason we moved here. So what's happening now is another story.

What am I talking about? Oh you asked me about the military before Dunkirk. Morning, noon, and night . . . the soldiers never stopped.

S: Okay, now that's before Dunkirk.

B: Well, we never saw them coming back. The stuff all got left over there. They just rescued the soldiers.

S: Do you remember that rescue?

B: Yes. That was dreadful, too.

S: Tell me about that.

B: Well of course, like I said, I had watched them for three weeks. Then to realize that all of these men were being killed and taken prisoner. . . . We saw in the movies, the news where the boats, just any kind of little boat, were being taken over there to rescue. Of course, big boats were taken over there, too, to get them out. But, yes it was a dreadful loss. The soldiers sang this song, "We're going to hang our washing out on the Siegfried Line. Have you and duty and washing, mother dear." It was to help booster their morale. Of course, the French thought that their Maginot Line was impenetrable. Nobody really realized how very powerful was Hitler's was machine. So, you listen to all that, you think, "Oh, he'll never get past them." But he did. Picture that. He's only got twenty more miles to come across, and there we've had it. I didn't know until after the war that he wanted to save London and all those buildings. That's why he didn't bomb them.

S: He wanted to save the buildings?

B: Yes. He really admired them. He wanted to own all of the things. Keep them intact, in other words. Plus they were also historical and landmarks. The pilots also used them as ground guides. The Germans used to use various old historical buildings as landmarks to give them direction as they dropped bombs. They were bombing St. Paul's Cathedral. That was what the pilots of both countries called a sighting that they could look for, the dome of St. Paul's. The English pilots also used these to guide themselves home. Actually, we used to think we, the English, were infallible. I'll tell you this . . . the Germans used St. Paul's as a point to drop bombs around the East End while leaving St. Paul's intact. The East End was really becoming slums. The English could always come up with a joke, a little bit light hearted, even in the middle of dreadful things. The Londoners always have a sense of humor to carry themselves through thick and thin times. They would say that Hitler was doing them a favor by knocking down all the old East End buildings. Actually, they had really been talking about doing everything there to improve it before the war. That was to be a project for [the time] before the war.

S: Now, was your brother in the army during the Battle of Dunkirk?

B: Yes, but he didn't go over there. He had already been sent to Africa and places like that. The Middle East. I don't remember names and places, right now. He was with Montgomery. El Alamein comes to mind, but that

was later; but that's where he was going. He didn't go to Dunkirk. I had another brother that was called up later. My older brother George. Not the uncle George. My brother George. He was the first one to be called up. He's seven years older than I am. We were very close as a family.

S: He was the one in Africa?

B: He's the one who went to Africa. Did I say El Alamain?

S: Yes.

B: My other brother got called up later. He's only two years older than I am. So you see, he had to wait until he was like 17 or 18. He got called up then. So, my brother George would have been five years older than my brother Arthur. He would have been 18 when he went, so it would have been another four or five years before my other brother Arthur got called up. He was in the Engineers [Corps]. He ended up going over to France after Dunkirk, but that was after things were getting a little better. We were winning then, when he went over to France as an engineer. He was building bridges and things, so he would have been in the groups that were rebuilding.

S: After the Battle of Dunkirk, England began to prepare for a possible invasion.

B: Yes, I was going to tell you.

S: Go ahead.

B: I mentioned something about not talking, didn't I?

S: No, I don't think you did.

B: About how we didn't say things previously . . . even before the war. We became secretive. We weren't allowed to tell anybody anything. Because Germany was so close, there were lots of spies around. If you said one thing, it would get back; so the English became very secretive. You didn't tell anybody anything. They took down all road signs and what the names of the streets were. They took down all directions. That's why the Americans all got lost. There weren't that many cars that we had. I did have some friends with cars, and that was unusual. We just got on buses. We knew it was going to a certain area. Actually, they would have numbers on the buses and the people would know by the number the general direction of the bus's route. They put the sign up for a while. [They said], "This bus goes to so and so." Then, they'd cover the sign up. They'd roll it around so that people wouldn't

know the destination; or there would be just a number on the bus. This was just for spies, so they wouldn't know where they were. You didn't know the names of villages or anything. I laugh about it now, but. . . .

You asked me. . . . How did we come up about this? You want to know how it was in preparing. They were making airports for the airmen. You never said anything about there being an airport near you, even the name of it. In fact, I worked at one called Strubby. You didn't mention it. You went out there to work in Lincolnshire, for instance, because then they'd know that they were preparing. In fact, they were saboteurs. I won't name the people, but there was some sabotage. They came over to work for us, because they weren't being called up certainly to leave. We won't mention which country or people it was. They sabotaged as they were helping us to build pipelines and things.

The Englishmen were being called up in the army. Actually, you know, all able men were conscripted up to the age of 50, I think. It didn't matter if you were married and had children. All were called. The very old and the very young were left. They were the homefront. Even the old men were called up. They were called Homeguard. I can't think what they were. The homefront. They were preparing to protect the people, because all of the younger men were being called away. If you were physically fit, you went. It wasn't like now. Some of the wars we've had were wrong since then, but at that time when Europe was expecting invasion, the first thing you wanted to do is protect your own, no matter what. In fact, there was a time. . . .

We prepared in another way. We had dug outs. We lived in the urban area. So, the government issued to everybody these steel things, air raid shelters. They were corrugated rippled curved sheets of steel that we made bases for in the dugouts and made steps down to below 8 feet. We made steps to go down. The entrance was about here to here.

S: About half way up the door?

B: Yes. Just enough to get in. You had a little ladder to make the steps down. You made your own one entry on the inside. They were like . . . corrugated steel is what I'm trying to think of they were. You put that framework there, then you covered it all over with dirt; so when there were air raids, you went into the air raid shelter you had made. The depth, width and length of these shelters was about 12 feet by 8 feet, maybe. The entrance into the shelter was about 2 feet wide and 4 feet high. Over the entrance to the shelter, we piled all the earth that we had removed from

the hole we dug out. The little ladder was inside the entrance against the wall. [There was] not much room. [You had to be] flat against the dug-out wall in order to descend into the shelter. Even if you did get bombed that close, the flack parts of exploding molotov baskets and material from exploding bombs would fall all about. You would see the fireworks if you were above ground, and [you'd] hear, "ping, ping," of falling flack on roofs and streets. If you got a direct hit, they said you didn't hear it. You [would] hear sirens and the ground shook. You thought, "That was close!" They say, if you ever got a direct hit, which never happened to our family, you wouldn't hear it for some reason. To be in your shelter was protection against all that flack, which was the bombs that would fly and scatter. Even if you didn't get direct hits, you could get injured that way. So, you went down into your dug out whenever there was an air raid warning, which was another dreadful sound. The air raid warnings . . . the closest thing I could describe for you to hear is when you have the warnings that sound here sometimes for air pollution or something, or in case there's a . . .

S: Tornado warnings?

B: It's worse. It's dreadful. I can't explain to you. It's a feeling I wouldn't want my own children or anybody else to have. It's a feeling that . . . you just go cold, and your heart sinks. There's no happiness within you. It's just dread.

There was one time that we all decided, if the Germans did come over and invade, that we were going to get some pills that we would take rather than surrender or be taken prisoner by the Germans. We actually decided to do that.

S: Cyanide pills?

B: My mother never actually said what they were. They were just some pills that would make us go to sleep. We did discuss that and decided to do that. But, of course, it didn't happen. That was in the event that this would come to pass.

The war, for us, was eight years. My eldest brother was in the army for eight years before he came back. So, from 1938 to 1945--that would be seven years, wouldn't it? When I say eight, he began. . . . Then, my brother got called up in between 1937 and 1938. What am I talking about?

S: We're talking about preparing for the invasion.

- B: What did I call it? The underground shelter.
- S: You talked about the underground shelters. Every home had one or was it. . . ?
- B: In the urban areas that we lived. But, in London, they went into the underground railways. Some of them didn't have gardens in the east end of London and the middle of London, so they used to go to the underground. I lived, at that time, in Dagenham, Essex, an urban area. We all had our gardens.
- They also issued us with gas masks.
- S: Oh really?
- B: This last thing they had with Iran . . . Iraq. You saw the people with gas masks and everything, but they're horrible things. So much so that I said that I would rather die than be wearing this thing. It used to gag me just to put the thing on. This is thick rubber with an odor . . . unless they've improved on the rubber. Maybe they have now. I don't know. But, the odor then of rubber was not very pleasant. They're awful. But, still, you carried them in this little box everywhere you went.
- S: Everywhere you went?
- B: Yes, everywhere you went, just in case. The only thing that would have made me put one on was I would think [I had] to survive in order to get back to the family. I had a younger brother that I was crazy about, Brian. He was about 3.

One time, I came home . . . I must have been working at the time. I went to work when I was 14. I said, "Where's Brian?" Well, he was never really allowed to go anywhere. My mother used to work at the same time, too. But Brian had a little girlfriend who was like about 3 years old . . . 3 1/2, or around 4, maybe. I'm not quite sure. She lived five doors up from us. The houses were rows of houses. There were four in a row, and then there was a side street. He went up there to play with the little girl. Well, I go up to see right away to bring him home, in fact! They said, "Oh he just went around the corner to the sweet shop." That's the candy store, and it was like around the block. [It was] two houses, and then down the street. I see them walking along together. Then here came. . . . I know now why I was so scared. There was an air raid warning while they were out. It was the middle of the day. They would come down strafing, and they were actually. . . . I don't know why they did that. Sometimes, if there was [a] shopping place and



they saw people, they would come down and strafe them--if they were particularly angry or something or other. So this one was doing that, and here's my brother and his little girlfriend walking down the street. So I run, and I get to them. We had porches, rounded porches like this oval. There were two doorways. One was ours, and one was the neighbor's. There were many of those. The closest one . . . I just happened to get to them and pull the children to the porch of this house, because the German plane was coming down and strafing.

B: A 3 year old?

S: Well, he wasn't strafing them in particular. There were other people on the streets. There was a shopping street, and the children were coming up a side street, just merrily chewing their candy. I just dragged them into the porchway until it was safe to leave. It was pretty scary. As I think about this, it was something the Germans had taken to doing when they saw a lot of people. Around it's next corner was a busy shopping area. It was like their last effort before they flew back over the channel. [In the] central hall [on the Heathway, which runs parallel to the shopping street,] some people stayed here for awhile--refugees brought from Holland. There is some story that among them was a diamond merchant that we rescued from Hitler. He was not wanted them to escape. Some of the people stayed at my friend's house. Her father was a diplomat. I heard about some of these refugees, because they were a surprise to us.

S: What about blackouts then?

B: Yes, you couldn't show a chink of light. Air raid wardens--that's what they elderly men did. They became air raid wardens. They would go around checking if there was a chink of light. There was no light showing. Nobody ever did. You were fined if you did, but you didn't want to, because a little chink of light. . . . When you did go out anywhere, a little chink of light from somebody's house would shine . . . you won't believe how far. Especially, when there is no other lights. If you were up above on a plane and if somebody didn't have their blinds drawn. . . . We had blankets issued. Well, we just got them, and every window was covered up with these blankets and black material that had been made to put up there. That's why it was called black out. You put black material over your windows. They could see if anybody didn't put their blackout curtain up. Of course, everybody would be after them. In the event that one left their window open and a light on, an airplane up there could see that and drop their bombs. It's very true.

But, there's a lighter side of it. I told you I lived near Ford Motorworks. Well, there was a time there that they were dropping--molotov baskets [is what] they were called. A molotov baskets is where they came down in a basket sort of thing, and then they would explode and scatter. That's where you would get the flack. I had been known to walk through. I would go to the show, because they weren't always bombing. It was like a year or so before, or nine months, or six months, and nothing would be happening. Then, there would be some bombing and stuff like that. It got to be a little lighter, shall we say, or you got used to it. So, you thought you could go to the show. Coming out, I stayed too long, and it was dark. Well, now that was tough, because you couldn't see. I would just remember where certain railings and hedges were. If it was a starry night and a moonlit night, of course, it was beautiful.

S: Oh, I bet.

B: There were times that it was beautiful. There were no lights, but you could see the beautiful stars and the gorgeous moon, especially when. . . . This [was] when I was very young. Later on . . . I'll tell you in a minute. We moved up to the East Coast, and I was really able to appreciate the North Sea and the moonlit nights. So, there was a time that I was going to shows . . . a couple of times it happened. I'm walking home amidst flack, and it keeps going ping, ping, ping. But I was very brave by that time.

S: You must have been! My goodness, I'd be scared to death, I think!

B: But you had to get home, because the family. . . . Nobody went out much, late at night. Over the time, I was getting braver.

S: What did your family do?

B: They were just glad I got home. What was the question?

S: Well, we [were] talking about, and you've answered very well, preparing for an invasion. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about preparing? We've talked about the air raids, the black outs. . . .

B: Well yes. Around London, they had the Barrage Balloons--I can't think of what they were called--so that when the planes came down, they would probably get entangled with them. We had a barrage of balloons all around London and elsewhere. The idea was that the planes could not come down so low to bomb or strafe people and give the artillery gunners more of a chance

to shoot them down when they came so low. So, they were not able to zoom down so much. It was a morale thing really. They were to hold up your morale, because these balloons were all around as [a] sort of protection from them coming down and strafing us.

S: Did they work very well?

B: I expect they must have worked to a certain extent, but as I said, they were really more for people's morale. They had them out in the River Thames, all around London. . . .

Both of my brothers were older than me. This story is about my brother, Arthur, the younger of my two elder brothers. He used to work in the east end of London, from Dagenham where we lived. He used to ride his bicycle. They're great for riding bicycles back and forth to work. He used to follow the railroad track from London out to Dagenham, back and forth. There was a time . . . it was when he decided to join up. I don't think he was called up. Every day he would go to work, and he would see. . . . He'd tell us one side of the track was all bombed. It was the railroad track. He couldn't understand how they never bombed the railroad track. The other side was bombed right along. All the way down the track into London, they bombed from side to side. The surrounding areas of course. This is when they bombed all the East End, too.

S: Do you know now why they didn't bomb the railroad track?

B: No. I haven't thought about it until right now. Probably because they wanted to use them themselves if they took over. I just thought of that. All I had in my mind was my brother becoming sick and how my mother used to tell him, "Swallow a raw egg." I think she just told him that because it will give you strength. I suppose it will [give you] stamina for riding a bicycle. I just think of that. Take a raw egg--that's going to be a problem to stay down with an upset stomach.

S: I would think so.

B: But, I just remember him saying, "Take it with a pinch of salt." Really, we just took everything with a pinch of salt. Oh yes. It got to the point they bombed this side, bombed that side. [We were] sort of accepting it. There was nothing we could do to stop it. Keep on going. There were good times. Even so, later on, we kept on living and going to work. We could go to dances later on.

S: Did you really?

B: Oh, yes. People like to dance in England. You had to have a way of brightening up your life a little. We would have socials. As the time of the bombing of London was over and quieting down, and even during . . . like I said, I went to the movies.

S: The government had to expect that London would be bombed. Again, going back to add to the Battle of Dunkirk. I remember Hitler . . . not Hitler, but Churchill's speech about preparing.

B: That goes on with the air raid shelters and preparing the people, for instance, the farmers. They were all in groups when the airmen came down. There was a story, which is quite true, how these farmers nearly killed an English airman. It was not too far. It was around our area. They thought he was German. They got carried away. Apart from that, they were all older men. The Homeguard is what they were called. They were all preparing to do their part, that is to say, to become soldiers. They were soldiers, anyway. None of [them] were really in the Armed Forces. I mentioned that bit we had talked about taking pills, but apart from that, we were all very strong in the fact that we would protect England and our families. We were all very strong on that.

S: What about the children around that area that you knew was going to be bombed? Were children moved out?

B: Yes. Evacuated.

S: At what age?

B: I think this is before Dunkirk.

S: Oh, before?

B: I evacuated once. In fact, they announced it on the radio. This Ford Company . . . they provided us with their boats. So, the day came. It was announced on the radio that all children were to be gathered at certain spots. We were told at school where, previous to that. Then, we would walk down to the docks and get onto the boats. We would be evacuated. I must have been about 13 or 13 1/2. Something like that. My sister and I were to go. My sister is two years younger than I. I had a younger brother. There were three brothers. His name was Brian. He must have been 2 [years old]. My sister Vera is 4 years older. He would have been about 1 1/2, or something like that. I was 9 when he was born. I don't know. The ages are

getting mixed up. But, he was about 2. No more than 2, I don't think, at this time. I remember saying to my mother, "I'm not going without Brian." My mother used to send her laundry out, because she used to work in the mornings. It was a laundry bag. You know, like duffle bags . . .

S: Yes.

B: . . . that the soldiers had? Only it was white. She crammed such an incredible amount of laundry in that bag. I said, "I'll cut a couple of holes for Brian to breathe, and I'll carry him on my back. They'll think it's just our clothes." I was going to take my brother with me. There was no way I was going to leave my brother to get killed along with my mother. I couldn't make my mother go. She, of course, wouldn't let me take him. After the bombing. . . .

S: She wouldn't?

B: Yes, well, I was saying that I would do that. . . . Then during the night about 4 o'clock--of course, we listened continually--it came on the radio that all mothers with preschool children could go. We'd be going and taking the children with them. So, therefore, I didn't have to put him in a laundry bag. In the middle of the night . . . we didn't know where my father was. He was, as I said, stationed away somewhere on the work he did. He didn't know we were going, because you didn't hear all the radio stations within a certain area. He was on the other side of London at the time. So, we all had to get up early in the morning at 4 o'clock. We left and went to the Ford Motorworks boat dock by the River Thames. When we were there, we were separated. But I, of course, stuck with my sister. She was with me. . . .

(tape cuts off here)

S: Okay, you were in the process of being evacuated.

B: We went down to the boat dock. They separated us all. Mothers with preschool children were to go to another area. We were put on the same boat, though. I remember getting dreadfully seasick, even though I used to like to swim. When we got to our destination, Lowestoft in Suffolk. . . . I know where we went like I know the back of my hand. I can't think of it right now. There's a pottery place on the East Coast. It'll come to me, and I'll tell you later, maybe. When we got to our destination, we were separated. Mothers and children went one place, and we went another. Actually, I ended up in Leighston-Suffolk. Which happens to be. . . . What's this school we have where we are

allowed to do anything . . . it begins with an "M"? You're allowed to do anything that you want? They have some around here. "M" something.

S: Montessori school?

B: No. It's a permissive type of school. It's in Summerhill, which I've now got the book on it. But, at that time, I'm going ahead of myself. I ended up in Leighston with my sister. I didn't know where my mother was. I still don't know where she'd been, come to think of it. I can't remember. But, she didn't know where we were. Nobody knew where anybody was. My oldest brother was in the army, and the other one just joined up. My mother had been separated, but she had my younger brother with her. We didn't know where they were. My father didn't know where we were, because he was stationed working somewhere. It took about two months before they found out . . . through letters being . . . finally getting together. My father went and got my mother and brought her home from where she was. Then, he came and got us from Leighston and took us home. By that time, it wasn't as bad as they thought it would be. It seems that Hitler, or the Germans, were supposed to be bombing our area a great deal because of the Motorworks and other things around there. There was an airport not too far from there. So, that's the evacuation, but gradually, we all came back. But that was another story. I know what it's like to evacuate. It's like, if you want me to describe it. . . .

S: Oh, please do.

B: It doesn't matter what you have. You just get up, and you go. It's a matter of survival. It doesn't matter. My mother had some beautiful oil paintings that disappeared. We never did find them. All of this stuff, if you had the most beautiful house, which we didn't have. But if you did, you just leave it. You may see where people evacuate now and just go. Well, it's a matter of survival. For me, it's a matter of protecting my younger sister, my younger brother, [and] my mother. You go. You just feel like you're protecting them. So, you're not fearful about that. You want to go. There's no second thought. It's not a very good feeling, mind you, but you do it. You don't say, "I'm going to stay here and protect this stuff." Who cares? So, even to this day, I can get up and leave at any time. After I've been through that, it wouldn't matter to me even now.

Back to being secretive . . . you never told anybody anything, because a spy could be asking you something and giving a direction. You never did that. You never

gave directions. So, when I came over here. . . . I still do not trust people. From the age of 10, you don't trust people.

S: I guess not.

B: What was the first letter I got from America? I had an uncle over here that I didn't get to see. He writes, and he tells me, "There are very strange people in America, Hilda." I have the letter somewhere. [He said], "Don't trust anybody." Well, that's a good start. Since I never did, to this day, I don't. It's not that I'm distrustful of people, but I'm leery of them. That's because of that.

S: So, I'm assuming now, that you were not in London during that blitz.

B: No. What happened there was we came back from evacuation, and there was a peaceful sort of time. Nothing was happening. My brother . . . I think I'm getting my times confused here. My brother hadn't gone to Africa immediately. He was in some sort of basic training area a year later, which was in a village called Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire. It was on the East Coast by the North Sea. Now this was a seaside resort, but a very small sleepy village. But, people had cottages. Now, the army confiscated all of these cottages, or most of them, anyway. But some people, if they were able to rent them out, didn't get them confiscated, because some people lived there. They were allowed, at that time, for some wives, to go and live within the area.

By the way, if you were in a certain area, Mablethorpe on the coast, you were not allowed to go beyond a certain area without permission . . . certain villages. If you were to go beyond that, you were to get a work permit to say that's where you were going. Especially from the coast, because all of these basic training places were all along the coast . . . and airports.

Well, my brother was stationed there for basic training, and he got a bungalow house. He rented a place for my mother, so she went there with my younger sister. My younger sister evacuated twice. She was still in school. I was through school, but they evacuated again. There was another scare. There were different scares. I went and got her this one time. She was in. . . . She was in the middle of England somewhere. I should've been able to write these things down before you came, but. . . .

S: Oh, that's alright.

B: All I remember is the accent they had, which is different from ours. But, I brought her back from that place. She was evacuated to. . . . She went with my mother evacuating again, but privately. You could evacuate privately if you got permission. She went there to Mablethorpe, but I stayed in London for a while, because I was working. Then after a while, I joined my mother. My other brother, by that time, had gone into the army. My father was working away, and I was the only one left in the house. So, I went to my mother.

S: Your mother was living in . . .

B: In Mablethorpe in Lincolnshire.

S: . . . up in Mablethorpe.

B: So the rest of my time in England was spent there, excepting that I volunteered to do munitions work when I was 17.

S: You were called up?

B: It was like you went into the army or the navy, or you could go on to munitions work. But, they sort of took a survey of you--what you could do, what you couldn't do. So I was called up. At that time, they were needing things for Brenn guns, aircraft guns, because we were starting to attack them more by then. Figure out what year it is by knowing that I was 17 at the time. I volunteered. That was it. You could take a choice. You either waited until you were 18 and got called up and would be in the land army as they chose, [or] if you volunteered, you had a choice. Well, I volunteered because I could go into munitions in more of the center of England. Grantham, it was inland from Mablethorpe. It was inland. There's England, and I was inland at Grantham. So, that's how I got into munitions work, because that way I would be able to go home and see my mother. I was very protective. I was the oldest girl. I always helped my mother. I guess I was more aware of what was going on, and therefore more protective. Even my brother who is two years older than me, I was very protective of him.

S: What was it like working in the munitions plant?

B: Well, I didn't earn much money. I was only 17. I became a machinist. I was working on this machine that would smooth out the inside of a 20 millimeter Brenn guns. It was a big machine. We used to work morning, noon and night. We had one day off. It was more like twelve hours, but we used to work like ten hours because we would start work at 8 a.m. and would be done



at 8 o'clock at night. We would get home at that time. It was 8 [a.m.] to 8 [p.m.] from leaving the house. I used to live in what we called a hostel, which was like army barracks. But, they weren't army barracks. They were more civilian barracks. They had a fence around them and a guard there simply to protect the girls. We were all women. So, we'd get on a bus, go to the factory and work, then we were brought back from the factory to the hostel where we stayed. We could live in private houses, which I did in the first instance when I first went out there, but the people were too protective and controlling of me. I was 14 when I went to work. I was very independent and had to be very strong for the family, therefore, I didn't want other people to control me. Though, I know now that they were trying to protect me. I had no freedom with working, going there, and then the people running my life for me, even there. It was too stressful. So anyway, I went to the hostel, and that's how it was. We had one day . . . we must have had weekends off too, later on, because I was able to go home by bus and come back one day and come back the next day. I must have got two days off. Anyway, sometimes, it was like there was no time off. You had two weeks of days and two weeks of nights shifted.

S: Did you have to worry about sabotage?

B: Yes. You never said where you worked. I'll tell you about the other place after. So, anyway, I was making the gun barrels, but I didn't get full pay until I was 18. They needed these gun barrels. There were lots of dog fights at that time. We were losing lots of men and planes. They really needed them, so I kept working to get as many out as you could. So, the gun barrels were not cooled down, and I had to go outside the factory. They were still up on racks, stacked to cool. They got steps. It wasn't because I wanted the money, because I was only getting two-thirds of what the other people got. No matter how much I did or what I did. It was needed. I went and got this barrel that was cooling off before I could put it onto the machine I was going to use. It fell. I dropped it, because I went up [the] steps. No, one rolled down. I got the one I was going to take . . . it weighed 50 or a 100 pounds, I think. My shoulders are strong. The one fell down off the rack and hit my toe. So, I wasn't able . . . that was just when I was becoming 18 when I would have gotten full pay. So, I was off work for awhile. We were in what was called a shadow factory. I still don't know where it was, because it was a shadow factory.

There were lots of trees. I could take my lunch out on the grounds with daffodils and trees. It was lovely. That was that work.

Then, we were winning the war slightly. We weren't needing so many Brenn guns. There weren't so many gunfights. We were apparently winning the war in the air. But they needed rockets. It was the time of Leningrad. So, that was towards the run down of the war. This was about 1945 or 1944.

I used to get full of oil. We used to wear these overalls, and they were just full of oil. And they said, "If you come to work for us, you'll be able to eat off the floor. That's how clean it is." Then I thought, "That's marvelous. I'll go there." What it was, was making cordite.

S: What was that for?

B: That was for the rockets. I rolled cordite to make rockets to save the city of Leningrad. Not all my effort, but that's what I did.

When I worked there, I had a special badge to wear or to show. If there was a line, which there always was, of buses and I'd gone home and had to get on a bus, I went to the front of the line. I was what was called a front line worker. Let me tell you about this. This factory was underground. I found out many years later that it was one of the places my father had helped to build. Anyway, of course it was clean. Any speck of dirt was dangerous. There you are . . . there's a door like any door. There was a passageway with about 10 little rooms maybe 10 by 10 feet. You'd be [in one], and in this room was a big rolling machine, all steel. I rolled cordite on it. It was a big steel wheel, like an old-fashioned washer ringer. In a tray, I would break up the pieces of what looked like board and throw it into the rollers. It came in the form of like beaver board type stuff that you could crinkle up and break. You got boards of it, and you broke it up. You threw it up through this roller, and it came down out. It would come out in a long sheet which we would fold over and under then over, turn it sideways in order to let air out and run it through 3 times. The finished product was a glossy goldish color. However, they packed it into the rockets. I don't know. [There] had to be another . . . to roll it into tubes. If you folded it over, over, over, it would explode, because no way could the air get out. It would form bubbles and explode.

So, while you were sitting there, you had your hand on a chain. If you heard anything, you pulled that chain

and water would come down. These factories were underneath the ground. The only thing that could be seen was if the chain was pulled, up would come the flaps to let the fire out. The water would come down. My partner said, "That's why you were sitting there. You were my partner." Other than that, it was electric eyes. If they saw a spark, the same thing would happen. That's why there were partners. It was called cordite. When the finished product was there, it was like a golden color and clear. That was the finished product. It was cordite. It was simply rolled up and shoved into containers. Did you ever see it on television? There's one, two, three of them, and they make that noise [like a] whoosh [sound]. There'd be a flame going out. If you ever see pictures of Leningrad and stuff . . . that's actually what saved the city.

S: Do you remember hearing Lord Ha Ha on the radio? Tell me about the traitor.

B: Lord Haww Haww.

S: Right.

B: There may have been a little humor in that. H-A-W-W. What I remember is that he had been called a traitor, and he had gone over [to] Hitler in Germany and used a broadcast. He was trying to persuade certain elements that Hitler was right. He said that at that time things were very bad, and he was going to take over England anyway; and that we should comply. He was going over to try to make various arrangements and try to converse with various people. He did come over in an airplane and parachuted down. But, they did capture him. It was the only way he could get into England. They weren't going to say, "Yes, you could come over, and we'll talk." He was broadcasting and making it out like he was the good guy. He was supposed to be paving the way for Hitler. We'd read all about that in the newspapers, but I don't recall actually. . . . The radio stations may have played something just for us to hear, some of what he was saying. That's all I remember about him, though. He was a traitor. They got him, and they were going to have them up for trial as a traitor. In fact, he was convicted, wasn't he?

S: Was he executed or just went to prison?

B: I can't remember that. I think he was imprisoned.

S: I also wanted to know what was the English reaction to Americans coming to England?

B: You know we didn't learn too much that was derogatory in our English schools about America. We thought we

were like cousins. Many English people had relatives over in America. Anyway, you spoke English and we liked President Roosevelt. They were our heroes. They were saving us, because we were in dire need at that time. We'd lost a lot of men, and we needed America to be on our side. They seemed like they were our only friends we had left by then. All of the other countries in Europe had been taken over by Germany, so we needed America. We couldn't understand at the time why they were holding off for so long. We really couldn't. We knew that Hitler wanted America, too. He wanted the whole world. We couldn't understand why, for the longest time, you [the United States] didn't join in and help the English. I guess we thought there were many English people in America, even though there were many more nationalities. There was an affiliation with the English, we thought, as well as Canada being close in proximity. We couldn't understand that. But, when they finally did come, everything was going to be fine. They were going to help us, and this was the help that we needed. Our hearts were lifted. That was the beginning of the feeling of starting to feel better about things and not having that dread with us all of the time.

S: This was the time that you met your husband?

B: Yes. What year was that? It must have been 1943 or 1944. He was over there two years, and then, gone two years.

S: Tell me how you met him.

B: Well, I told you about how I had the gun barrel fall on my foot. I had it in a cast. Well, they were needing ammunition and stuff because of what was going on in Africa. So, I volunteered to go back and work on the assembly line in the town. The factory was not a shadow factory. It was in town. It belonged to a man by the name of Kendall. Even though I still had the cast on, I was able to sit at a bench and gauge bullets. I've gone to confession about all that since. While I was there, by the way, Margaret Thatcher . . . I'm not quite sure about this, but I believe she worked in an office. I believe I knew her.

S: Wow! Very interesting.

B: In England, office workers were sort of upper class. They didn't converse and become very friendly with the general workers. But, she used to come through. She was a gorgeous blond. I used to admire her. She used to speak and talk with me. It didn't matter to me what position you were, but the others were a bit, "Oh, she's talking to her. She's an office worker." This

is how things were, you know, in England. For instance, Paul was friendly with his captain. In the British Army, you can be friendly with them but not close like his captain was with him. Paul wanted to be a football player, which he did do when he came back over and went to West Virginia Wesleyan where Jud Hodges was football coach.

S: So, you had a cast on your leg?

B: Yes, the cast was taken off, and my friends I worked with on the assembly line said, "We're going to take you out tonight. We're going to go to the show and stop for a refreshment in a hotel before we go home to celebrate this." The same thing after Paul talked to me, after we met, happened with his friends. I don't know whether he had gotten a "Dear John" letter or not. No, he still had the girlfriend. He just didn't go out anywhere. Her name was Glorianna. I thought the name was beautiful. So, his friends took him out. We were in this room, and there's a crowd of Americans there. He was quite tall. All of the others weren't too tall. My friends went to get the refreshments and I stayed in the corner. There was no seats available. They were all coming at me [saying], "Honey this, and Honey that." I don't know what they were saying. I must have looked scared. He was on the side and pushes his way and gets through. He said, "Leave her alone," as he was walking over. He got this far from me and said, "Leave her alone. She 's my girl. Aren't you?" I said, "Yes." He walked me home that night.

Then, we used to date for nearly two years. He had this girlfriend. I used to go shopping with him to pick out gifts for his girlfriend. He'd say, "Would you like something, too?" I'd say, "Oh, no thank you." Boy, I should have said, "Yes. I'll take this. I'll take that. I'll take. . . ." Then, he got a "Dear John" letter or something during that time, and I sympathized with him. But, anyway, we fell in love. We were planning to get married, but he got shipped out. His captain shipped him out. You've missed all that story. I'll have to tell you.

S: You got back together, didn't you?

B: Yes, over two years later. By the way, I met Joseph Kennedy. He was ambassador then. He came and spoke to the people that were going to America. He asked me, "Are you sure you want to do this?" I said, "Yeah." He was questioning me about who I was marrying and stuff like that.

S: What do you remember about V.E. Day? Victory every Europe.

B: I don't remember. . . . See, living in the small town . . . I was back living in Mablethorpe at the time. They were just quiet country-folk, and they didn't go around making big fusses. I think we had quite a few dances locally at the time, which you would enjoy and celebrate like that. I was quite a dancer in those days. In those days, it was acceptable to go without a partner or with a girlfriend. Young men who were coming home from the army. . . . There were some Polish, and my brother George came home one time. The Polish airmen were around, and they would come and celebrate. It was quite acceptable to dance with them. There was nothing wrong with that. You weren't dating. You were just having a fine time. If you wanted to dance and they asked you to dance, that was it. You'd go over. So, we would celebrate in that way. Of course, we'd go to movies, hear the news, and see how they were celebrating in the big towns.

In order to celebrate, I made this big banner type thing out of wood, mind you. I hung it on top of our door. [It said], "Welcome Home Desert Rats." They were called desert rats. He was tall, and our doorways are smaller in England than they are here. The first thing he did was he hit his head on this board, and it came crashing down. My mother used to work with me at the time. We worked at a place downtown . . . in the village. We heard this singing. We heard somebody singing "Quante quale pose bella." He'd been stationed in Italy coming back through Africa. He came back that way. He stayed there for awhile, and he learned Italian songs. We could hear him clear down the street. That was my brother George. So then, we celebrated with him. But there was no big hullabaloo like you see in movies and on television. Mind you, we had television right before the war. In store windows, we would see it.

S: So, all of your brothers came home?

B: My brother Arthur didn't come back until about a year later. But, George came home first in 1946.

S: Was your father. . . ?

B: My father had been working around London. Yes, we all came back home. Apparently . . . I guess my father had kept the house going, even though he had to leave home. That was his main place of getting back to, and [he] must have kept paying the rent. It wasn't a mortgage. In those times, in the urban areas, they built all these new houses, but they were rented to you. Not like renting here. Paul and I, after we were married in America, were buying a double house next to my in-

laws. When we rented the one side, I found to my utter amazement that people who rented didn't seem to care about looking after the property as if it was their own home, like in England as it was then. They wouldn't replace anything. We were renting to them. In England, you rented, and it was like your house. You looked after it all. You would not be put out at all, as long as you paid your rent.

S: When did you leave England for America?

B: [In] 1947. January 17th, I believe.

S: That must have been hard to leave your family. You were so close.

B: It was hard, but I had fallen in love, you see. Yes, because I was like the mainstay of my family. My brothers and my sister. . . . Another thing is I had relations, here. I had aunts and cousins in New Jersey. They met me on the boat when I came over. I spent, I think, a week with them, then I came out. They saw me on a train to come out to Pittsburgh. I went to visit them, maybe, a year later, or a couple of times. But then, I haven't been back for a long time, now. The relation was my mother's step-sister. They had the same mother, but a different father. This uncle who lived in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania . . . I did not get to meet him. He used to be my mother's favorite brother. So, we would talk about this at home, and I really didn't feel exactly that I was going out all alone. I felt I had these cousins. Don't forget, we were thinking of going to Australia, so this was sort of in the blood there a little bit. But I fell in love, and I had a commitment--which we talk about nowadays. But that was really a commitment.

S: It certainly was. Today, how do you feel about the reunification of Germany?

B: Well, I think it's better that we have it now, because they're not under control of Russia and the Communists. I didn't like their political ways at all. If they can become more like democratic ways now and have more freedom than they ever had, I'm glad. I don't see how . . . it's another thing.

Remember I talked way back about how people should stop people when they know things are wrong? When they first built that wall . . . they should have never let them build that in the first place. I couldn't see, right after having a war and fighting for everything like that, that groups of people couldn't have just torn those walls down, there and then. I never could

understand that, because they ended up tearing them down didn't they?

S: Yes they did. Well, what about the Nazi war criminals?

B: They deserve all they get. The way the Israelis still chase after them . . . I condone that.

S: Do you really?

B: Yes. What they did was terrible. Of course, throughout history, I've learned now that there have been many things, but not so much as the way Hitler did with the Jewish people. It wasn't just Jews either. It was political prisoners. Extermination? How terrible. I knew all of the stories, not just Anne Frank stories. There are millions and millions more. The problem is that young people don't even believe it. They think it's some sort of movie. I saw three days after the end of the war, and there were British people going over there. A captain came into the hotel where I worked, and he had pictures. I don't know how he got these. He must have been a reporter of some sort, too. He had smuggled out. He was a bombastic type of a person, and he just wanted people to know. I don't know how he got these pictures out. They were pictures that he had taken of the deathcamps and everything, and the people that had survived.

So, I saw some of the first pictures that were ever shown. How they looked like skeletons . . . before it was the news, even. I know that this captain had just gone over there. There was no way for him to have gotten these pictures any other way, because his family lived in Mablethorpe. He was stationed at the airport not too far away. He had been stationed locally. He hadn't gone over to Germany at all until that given time. He came and brought these pictures back, I think, because he wanted the people to see and know the truth. Plus, before the war began, I told you we knew already of the scandalous things he did. You just don't go rounding people up like animals. The only other thing that shocked me as much was what we did to the slaves here, and that was British, too. But, I didn't know about it then.

S: We're just about done here. Is there anything else that you can think of that we have not talked about that you'd like to add?

B: You asked me earlier about [the] preparation the army did. All around England, they put barricades and mines. I lived by the seashore then. We weren't allowed there. So, for all those years, we weren't allowed near the seashore at all, because of the mines



and the barricades that they put up . . . and barbed wire. [There were] tons of barbed wire all around England, and in particular where we lived in Mablethorpe, all along that coast. [It was there] because of the threat of invasion. There was an invasion attempt. Bodies were washed up. I just wanted to tell you that bit. It just came to my mind.

S: Okay, you've given me a lot of information here. I thank you much for it. This concludes my interview with Hilda Barbuto on The Homefront during World War II.

B: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW