



GREENSBORO DURING WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEWEES: Eula Whitley & Rosa Vines

INTERVIEWER: Meg Breeden (Guilford College)

DATE: February 24, 1983

[Begin Tape #1] ¹

MB: Okay, what I thought I could do, I have the tape recorder on now. I thought the best thing to do is ask you a few questions or ask you one and then you talk a little bit and then you answer if you want to about the same question. So that we can separate it a little bit so when I listen to the tape I won't get confused as who's speaking. And I think at the same time I will take a few notes so I won't get confused too. But the main thing, to start as an introduction I'm going to say, "I'm going to interview Rose Vines right now who was here during WWII." and if you, Rose, could tell me a little bit about the atmosphere around here during the war period. How did it change with the influx of all these soldiers at ORD, and how that influenced your life and what you were doing at that time?

RV: It was a busy time for Greensboro because we having the ORD base right here in Greensboro. It made quite a bit of work. Everyone was very concerned about that and the soldiers being in town, it made everybody alert. And one of the things that bothered most of the people here for quite a while, the soldiers, especially the black soldiers, had nowhere to meet, to go for entertainment purposes. And they were trying to meet to see if they could find a place for them. It seems that every building that they inspected, the planning boards for that, decided that they weren't equipped for that purpose.

¹ This transcript is from the Alex Stoesen Papers, Mss.Coll.#133, at the Greensboro Historical Museum. It is based on a typed manuscript copy in the collection that was completed by Nicola (a Guilford College student, last name not known), and not by the interviewer, Meg Breeden. The original transcript was taken from two separate cassette tapes, which also exist in the collection. Since the original tapes are in poor condition, the decision was made not to generate a new transcript based on the original recording, but rather to use the original transcript prepared by Nicola. However, this *Textiles, Teachers, and Troops* version has been edited for spelling mistakes (mainly personal and place names), and mistakes resulting from unfamiliarity with Greensboro place names. No other corrections have been made in the original text.

MB: The people at City Hall decided ...

RV: Right. The people on that committee to work out a place for the soldiers. At that time they were not integrated.

MB: I wanted to talk a little bit about that with both of y'all. Do you think their problem to find the building was race related? Were they trying to prohibit a black USO at all?

RV: They were not trying to prohibit it. They just wanted it separate. At that particular time black and white were not together as far as relationship. They wanted to make sure the blacks had a place of their own.

EW: I think the whites already had a place.

RV: The whites had a place on North Elm and this created a problem with a lot of the soldiers that came here. They were used to being among both black and white. And some of them that was here, they sort of resented this because we had one or two run-ins with seating purpose on the bus at that time. And they were really trying to find a place so that there would be peace and harmony and that the soldiers would have a place to go rather than on the street because it created a lot of crimes.

EW: But we did have a lot of dances here at ORD in which a lot of girls from the city went out there and that was the only place that they had to go. I have some pictures of the girls that went out there to dance. That was really the only time the black soldiers were entertained -- when we would get a group of girls to go out and dance with them.

RV: They would have the bus to come in ...

EW: The bus came to pick up the girls.

MB: Who was organizing this? Was it the women?

EW: No it was coming from the headquarters at RDU.

MB: The headquarters was organizing this.

EW: Yes to coordinate the city, you know to get these girls to go out there.

RV: Headquarters had a man, his name was Bell. Here to work with the USO.

EW: Harold Bell. That was sent

RV: Uh huh. These people would get together to supply entertainment for the soldiers. But there were a lot of them that didn't particularly care about dancing. You know some of them had their wives here.²

² Manuscript marginalia note here, by Prof. Stoesen: "Good pt. some were married."

MB: The soldiers you mean?

RV: The soldiers that would come in. Because this was the base they would stay here before they'd get shipped out, and their wives would spend weeks or two with them. And they wanted a place where they could go. So this is one of the reasons why they were trying to get this USO. So they would not have to go up to the other one. They couldn't go up at that particular time.

MB: They couldn't go up to North Elm at that time?

RV: No they weren't permitted at that time. And then in August of 1944 it was opened. Do you remember when it was started?

EW: It was about a year from the time that it was planned because there were a lot of meetings. And you had to get the approval from the city for the plans of it. Then they had to get the government to say they would release the building.

MB: So 1945?

RV: No, it was August 1944 that it was opened.

MB: So you started in 1943, it was then that it was announced.

EW: And the young man that was the director, his name was Harold Taylor, and they did have a board, you know a committee. They had a beautiful board.

MB: I guess one question before we move on a bit. I was going to ask you Mrs. Vines, now what happened when these black soldiers resisted on the buses, now was that a big issue?

RV: No they just took the bus and took it back to camp.

EW: We had the trolleys that ran all the way to ORD. Those were the ones that had electrical wiring.

MB: They still have those tracks in Richmond.

EW: Oh yes, in Norfolk Va. they had them there too when I was there. See in the summertime of '44, '45 and '46 I used to go to Norfolk Va. in the summer and worked. I worked at the USO at the navy department in Norfolk. It was divided by the water.

MB: So that's what you used to do in the summertime? You'd go and work at those USOs up there.

EW: It was a permanent USO on the navy base and that's where I worked, only in the summer, when I got out of high school. Yeah, I worked '44, '45 and '46.

RV: It was a little disturbing on the bus, but soldiers got tired of having to wait. There were many of soldiers and whenever they had to go back to camp, they always had a curfew, there would be so many trying to get on the bus, and sometimes the bus would be very crowded. And most times when the bus would start on the square and pick up the white fellows, by the time it got down on East Market Street near the USO, there were no seats. And they just had problems. And someone spoke to some of the fellows like they didn't like it. And that night they just decided to let them know that they were going to have some seats. So they just decided to take the bus and sit where they wanted to and they just drove on back to camp. There was no () or anything like that because they just took on and went back to camp.

MB: Okay, I just wanted to clear that up a little bit before we went on. Another way to go about asking questions, I want to know what both of you were involved in at that time period. You know what I mean? Like a little bit about your school background, what you were doing? Like you know you were saying you were going up to that USO in Norfolk during the summers. Maybe what you saw the role of women particularly at that time. Maybe their volunteer services their work in the USO or at the Red Cross. I just want to know about your own background. I wanted to ask you two a little bit more about the building of the USO. And how you and was that you and your husband, John that was just here. And some of the experiences you had trying to get that whole thing going.

RV: Like I said, my home is in VA. I finished high school in VA at () High in 1934. And then I got married right after that and we came to Greensboro and we lived on Market Street until we built the Vines building on the corner of Market and Dudley Street. We built the first section for a dry cleaner. So after the war came, my husband and I got a place on the coast where we could pick up a pick up stand for dry cleaning. That was the only thing that really kept him out of the army because they needed the service for dry cleaning.

MB: For all those uniforms?

RV: Uniforms and as I said, this was an outpost where the soldiers would come in and maybe they'd be here 24 hours or not, and they'd be shipped right out overseas and you'd have to be able to get the clothes done in say a few hours. At that time we had, I done forgot how many kids we had, okay, we had three kids and we had two () one of the boys lived with us. He lived upstairs over the building. And we had the dry cleaners. We had the day shift and the night shift. My job was to check in, do repair, and I would go back and forward to the post to pick up the clothes. Go twice a day, pick them up, clean them and take them back. And then we went into trying to get the loan to put up the building because we only had land there. And we had to get a loan and it had to be approved. And the architect to build the building according to the specification of the army as to how it was to be built for them. My husband was concerned with that and I was concerned with trying to help them run the cleaners and take care of the kids. I was always real busy. After we built the building they had the USO, we called the cafe downstairs rented so the soldiers would have some place to get something to eat. They had a shower room on the bottom floor. Upstairs was the recreation hall. They had table tennis and bowling and things like that. And they had a

grocery store down there where they could come in and get things like that. And they had the women who came in and volunteered for them.

MB: And kind of run the whole building?

RV: Yeah. We just put up the building and rented to the government. And then as far as tht was concerned we were out of that part of it. As long as they leased the building for that. But our main interest was dry cleaning and seeing that the their ()

MB: So the cleaner was right next to this building.

RV: Right beside it, all under the same roof.

MB: They had a shower room down there too if they wanted to take a shower during the day. Now was the USO open mainly all day.

EW: Well, it was open up until about 12:00 or 1:00 wasn't it? It wasn't open all night.

RV: It was open until about 11:00.

EW: And it was coordinated. I used to be a volunteer there.

MB: Was this during high school too?

EW: Yes. And we used to go up there in groups. And then they would have refreshments and we'd play cards and dance and play games and just sort of talk to the soldiers and all that. So this committee. Robert Hays he was head of the committee of the building and the maintenance. And Mrs. Brown was in charge of the refreshments. Some of these people are still living.

MB: Yes, I'm going to write these names down.

RV: ... they had to go to Fort Bragg for some instructions on it.

MB: About the USO because at Fort Bragg they already had theirs established. Did they have it during WWI at Fort Bragg.

RV: I'm sure they had it ever since they were there because the government had to supply entertainment for the soldiers.

MB: Because that was an established camp.

EW: And you might note in there that they had a lot of entertainment out on the ORD base too. They had lots of big bands.

RV: Wives, they made a committee to go out there with them for a few hours at night to see them before they'd leave and then a lot of times I would have to stop work and go over and get them. I remember some of the ladies would come and their husbands would

always be on the train. I think I have something one of the soldiers gave me. And when she got here her husband was on the train to be shipped out, and she knew he was going overseas. And the lady she was living with asked me we had an old beat station wagon, if I would try to help her find him. And we got to the post gate, ORD #2 gate, they said he was on the train and I would have to drive to all the stops to try to find him. And when we got just about to the railroad station, and every time the train would pass we would holler for him and see if she could find him sitting near the window. So when we got to the last stop which was up here at the station, we found him and he came out and she was able to see him before he left and he was from Alabama. And he pulled the chain off his neck, he had a little lock on it and he said, "This is for your service, it's all I have." He gave that to me. And I did go to Alabama to visit his parents to tell them about that since then. But a lot of the women, and we've visited since then, that we got there and they would write us and my husband and I have been to visit a lot of the soldiers. One of the MPs still lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. We've visited him several times. They would remember how we would get messages to our parents, or their wives. They would say, "My wife is coming in, I won't be able to see her." A lot of times they didn't have any money, or no place to stay and we would try to get rooms for them and tell them what their husbands said.

MB: That was probably a real trying time to juggle everything to take care of your children and your business in addition to take on all these other people's responsibilities and trying to help them out.

RV: One fellow lived in what they called Pensacola, Alabama. He wrote us from Birmingham and he said, "Please try to get in touch with my mother." And my sister and I went to Birmingham to be with another soldier's parents because his wife had invited us. And I asked her if she knew where this place was, and she said yes that we would have to catch the train. And we rode all day long down, down, down, down, down to a little coal mining town and finally when we got off the train we walked and found his parents and told them that he had asked us to come and tell them he was alright and that he was going overseas. They couldn't read or write you see.

MB: So that's why somebody had to explain to them. So that was in what place? Birmingham?

[End Tape #1] ³

[Begin Tape #2]

MB: ... Married a local girl.

³ At the end of the transcription is a marginalia note by Professor Stoesen: "Whites had hotels & the support of the local paper, etc. Blacks formed a network to take care of mothers, wives – put them up etc. Lasting friendships were formed."

RV: Well I don't know if she was local or not, but anyway he's been married to the same girl ever since.

MB: And that is unusual -- now I didn't catch that because I was changing the tape -- now he was at ORD -- he was stationed here.

RV: Yeah, they had the article of one of the 5-10 surviving couples in Hollywood and he was one of them. ⁴

MB: Oh, I see so that's how it came out, well that's interesting.

EW: Now what's the name () that used to be down on Market St? He was stationed here in Greensboro, this white fellow was right down here where ()

RV: Oh, oh, you're talking about Ralph Johns.

EW: He came here during the 40s.

RV: Yeah, because my husband -- he ran a clothing store downtown and my husband used to buy from him sometimes. And he was an actor too.

MB: Ralph Johns?

RV: Mmm. I was reading a beautiful article in one of those papers about him.

MB: Now Eula -- will you tell me a little bit about your high school background? Now you were at Emmanuel.

EW: Well I finished Dudley high school in '46. My home is in Pinnacle, SC. Then I graduated from [Immanuel](#) [Lutheran College] in 1949. Then I married in 1953. So I've been married 32 years -- but I'm still young.

MB: I was just looking at that and thinking, "That's a long time to be married."

EW: Yeah, but I didn't marry until I was 27.

RV: Now I've been married since 1935.

MB: That's a long time to be with someone and still be happy. Now Eula, I was going to ask you more. Now in the summers you went to Norfolk. And you also said you volunteered some at the USO here.

⁴ Mrs. Vines is most likely referring to actor Charlton Heston, who married Lydia Clarke (not a local resident) at Grace Methodist Church on March 17, 1944, while he was stationed at O.R.D.

- EW: Yes, at night. And also we had a drug store up here called Morrow, M-O-R-R-O-W and I worked there from 1942 to about 1948 after school. You know, not in the summer, but () and we had the Palace Theatre.
- MB: Where is that? Is that down where Carolina Theatre is?
- EW: No, no that was down on E. Market St. It was right in front of the Main Post Office. And we also had a black hotel called the Grand Hotel.⁵ And they also had a hotel listed on Martin St. called the Plaza. And the reason I'm mentioning the hotel is because all of the beds and the furniture was bought from the base from ORD -- the metal beds and everything that they had. They had a little ad in the telephone book that said, "We have running hot and cold water." Which means that the rooms, they don't have bathrooms inside, but they have the showers separate, and they have the men and the ladies bathroom separate. So whenever you leave the rooms to go to the bathroom you have to go down the hall and they have the showers -- maybe 4-5 in each one. And that's interesting because they have all the furniture still in there. You know Mr. Edwards.
- RV: Right, and I believe one or two of those barracks buildings still stand out in the ORD section. They have been converted into other things like down there in [Pilard ??] line, maybe some construction company, but they are the original ORD barracks where the soldiers used to live. You can go down there and see them and snap the pictures.
- EW: And down there on E. Market St. they had the couples. They had families living down there on E. Market St. where the [Lorillard ?] Company is and most of them were young couples, families just starting out and a lot of them worked and their husbands were at A&T.
- RV: Apartments for their students and married couples.
- EW: And then Emmanuel had some of the barracks too. That's where I was schooled.
- MB: Now this was a little bit later on they used those ...
- RV & EW: Yeah, after the war.
- MB: Yoland [?] explained that on Sundays they could see the soldiers by the fence because they wanted to talk to some of the students and they shied away from that because they weren't comfortable.
- EW: They were being a religious school ...
- RV: Try to keep the soldiers -- they had certain times for them to come out and

⁵ Marginalia note reads: 511 Martin St. 274-3074

naturally they were a little skeptical. Because once, I think when they first began to talk about putting the base out there, I think they mentioned that it would () and you know by bringing the soldiers in, they didn't know what effect it would have on the neighborhood and the college being right there.

EW: Right. Well you see, they had A&T on one side and Emmanuel [Lutheran College]. Emmanuel was a private school and we did have lots of girls there. And we had a high school then, we had a junior college and Seminary.

MB: So they were originally concerned. Now when were these people talking about all these kinds of effects in the early 40s?

RV & EW: When it first started. When it first began.

RV: If they were going to have a camp or anything then naturally they would try to iron out these things: what effect will it have on this area, this neighborhood, like that you know. But as I say, by going back and forth on the post the MPs – there were MPs and they were good MPs. Just because they would walk their beats and all like that and if they saw the girls down there, not that they would stop them from talking or anything, they just want to make you aware that there were a lot of soldiers down there and they didn't know all of them.

EW: Now the Palace Theatre [905 E. Market] like we said and the Morrow [?] Drug Store and restaurant that was really the only place that we had to go with the exception of the USO. And then on the main ORD base they did have lots of entertainment but that was only for the soldiers.

MB: Soldiers and maybe their wives and dates, could they have dates?

RV: Oh yes, and the girls would go over, in fact my sister they had a little old club where they used to go. You know some of those girls got married during that time, had children settled and left.

MB: Now on the base, they had about 25,000 total soldiers here, then there were at one time the maximum. Was it about 6,000 black soldiers?

RV & EW: I don't know.

MB: But what I was going to ask you, when they had the entertainment on the base was that segregated too?

RV: Oh no, they all were together.

MB: Were the barracks segregated?

RV: Yes

MB: But for the social functions, that wasn't segregated.

RV: Yeah, because they had one large place.

EW: There were no white soldiers in the USO, there were only blacks downtown in the USO.

MB: I was talking about the entertainment. Also I was going to ask you two about the time period you were in Greensboro during the war time. I just want to hear your reflections on women's roles in all of this, and their volunteer efforts. Do you think that the women that volunteered were recognized for their service? Did they feel like they had to do it? Or did they have support from their family to devote time to this kind of service, or was it expected? How did it arrive that women were going to do this? Was it because some of them weren't in paid employment?

EW: You mean the volunteers?

MB: Yes, or even Red Cross, all the effort that was keeping Greensboro going on to keep the home front on the war.

EW: Frankly I think most of the women and the people were concerned because they had relatives and people going away to the service and they wanted to know that the people, some of them young boys were away from home the first time. And nobody had to force them. They did it out of their hearts. Because maybe if I take care of this person's son, maybe someone will take care of mine there. I don't think they were really recognized for service they did.

RV: We gave certificates, all kinds of things for the service but it wasn't pressured and the women got recognized for the service that you did.

MB: Was there more emphasis on women volunteering?

RV: No, because we had just as many ministers and prominent people at the USO helping out.

EW: The only thing they were all concerned, men and women to get them somewhere where they could be off the streets. You see if we had no place for them to go then they would be out there fighting and cursing and doing like this and as long as we gave them a place to go and give them entertainment, we didn't have to worry about this. And the women are always the first. It is thought of as the men are the first, but even in the church or wherever you go, usually the women are the ones that take the leading roles and she pushes the men. A lot of times people think it's the men, but it's not the men, it's the women who are pushing because they can see the need of it.

MB: Right -- they might be perceptive enough to see that it needs to be done to help. Another thing I was thinking about. Who were the black leaders in the

community? Were they reverends or business people that helped get the USO going, or that helped rally support?

EW: We had the committee here and Rosa will tell me if I'm right on this -- they had Professor W.O. Jones, he was the principal at Lincoln High School. And we had a Rev. A.S. Peeler, he was a minister. His son is still here, you might want to talk to him too. His name is A.H. Peeler, he lives on S. [Benbow ?] Rd. He's a friend of mine. We had W.S. Davis, he's still living and Robert Hays, he's out of town. Dr. W[averlyn] N. Rice, he lives on [Gorrell St.]), might could tell you a mess of stuff, oooh, he's a wizard. And Rev. B.G. Stellar -- he lives in Detroit, he was here not too long ago. Mrs. Florence Norwood, she's deceased. Mrs. F. W. Bluford, she's deceased. Mrs. David E. Jones whose husband was President at Bennett College, she's still living, Mrs. Grace Brower, she's still living, and Dean J.C. McLaughlin, he's good, and Rev. H. C. Miller, he's deceased. And then all of them were in categories on this committee.

RV: There were plenty of others in the background.

MB: She was talking about the committee. But there were other people. How was support rallied? Was it through the churches? Was there a meeting place for people to get together?

RV & EW: St. Matthew, or the Y. [Hayes Taylor]

MB: So they would meet at different places and a couple of places would have community gatherings...

EW: Well, as they do now, most times if there was something concerning the community or the wellbeing they would meet -- maybe at one church this time Providence Baptist Church or St. Matthews [Methodist], or Shiloh [Baptist].

RV: It says here that the YMCA was housing the USO Office for such a long time until they go the building ready.

MB: That was taking care of the offices.

RV: And then it says much of the credit for keeping the USO alive was the community. You know, people in general, the citizens of Greensboro.

MB: Did most people keep up with the war through the newspapers and radio, was it a daily thing people would talk about? Or did they talk about it every week?

RV: They had to keep talking about it because they were coming in contact with soldiers. This place was just running over with soldiers.

EW: And then another thing, four of my brothers were in the service in the 1940s. They

went in in 1940-1941. If we had this one out here, my brothers were overseas.

RV: Many people who were living here in Greensboro had children that were going in service sometimes all of them.

EW: All four of my brothers were drafted at the same time. And very few of them did not go in because of poor eyesight or physical ailments.

MB: Did you feel you got to understand a little bit more about Europe because of that? Did people start paying attention to cities and countries?

EW: My brothers would send me gifts from overseas, beautiful things, jewelry...

MB: Because they found out more about it because they were right there. How do you think you had to take care of all these uniforms -- so that helped your business?

RV: Yeah, it helped all of the businesses, not just mine. At that particular time a suit was costing you \$.35 for two pieces. But money then was going a lot farther than it is now. But all business, whether it was in the cafe or clothing store, business was booming because the soldiers would spend and their wives would spend and they would -- you know, when you go to another town you want to send gifts home. So everybody at that time was flourishing.

EW: It was growing the rate of the economy in Greensboro back then and after that it looks like the economy has dropped downtown. A lot of the older people that would spend money probably don't have transportation just don't like malls, they just love downtown.

MB: I know, malls, a lot of people are against that kind of atmosphere. They feel all closed in and it's so slicked up, too fancy.

RV: This was during the time that gas was rationed and sugar and coffee and you were trying to get gas enough to take a person this place or the other place. But by running the cleaners we got a little more gas so we could help some of the others out.

MB: Where would they ration the coffee and the sugar?

RV &
EW: At the grocery store.

MB: So you would take in your tickets and you would get your certain amount.

RV &
EW: Uh huh.

MB: Did you have any friends that were working in paid employment at the time who were either teachers or sales clerks or maybe even a waitress at the cafe or people

working in domestic types of situations and were they affected by the war?
Teachers at high schools, where some of the boys would have been drafted?

RV: Now three of my classmates have been in the service for 29 years. We just celebrated out 35th year of high school and we had three that stayed in 29 years.

EW: Everybody was more concerned to get the war over. That was their main interest at that particular time. The young men that were drafted they were taking some out of high school. Some dropped out of college who weren't working. And the men were very concerned because they didn't know if "I'm going to be next." And a lot of them had families. But everybody was concerned, and we had a war. We were trying to cook and send boxes and you know, there was a lot to do to keep your mind off of a lot of things.

RV: And also the women were trying to keep the home fires burning and you know, a lot of our women, we had to do domestic work you see. And most of the black women either worked in cafes or they had to work in laundries. We had that one big laundry here, what was the name, Dick's Laundry. And a lot of our women had to work domestic work.

EW: And they had to care for the sick you know, and things like that, so they really didn't have time to worry about it. And this one would have a son in and maybe he'd gotten killed and we're trying to console her. Or we're trying to help this lady, she's got maybe 8 or 9 children and it was just something going on.

RV: And I guess the only professions we had, we had ministers and doctors and we had a few lawyers and we had nurses. We didn't have a lot of registered nurses...

[End of tape 2]

[Begin Tape 3]

MB: And you know the problem is that these teenage kids go hang out there now -- and I don't know what they do. They cluster and sometimes they steal in stores or vandalize.

RV: The other day somebody stole something -- all of them got into it.

MB: It's crazy.

RV: Crazy kids.

MB: What I was thinking too, with all these women, some of these people that were in domestic work or whatever, did they have time to work at the USO?

RV &
EW: Oh yeah -- they made their time.

EW: They would volunteer for the hospital now, this one would go this hour and this one would go In that hour, and some would to work and they'd get off at night. Yeah, you found time to what you had to do.

MB: So even though they were working in paid employment during the day and taking care of family too, they were also trying to make time for volunteering.

EW: And also they did hire a lot of people at ORD. The Red Cross and the Canteen or PX or whatever you call it, that was a very flourishing thing.

MB: So they were going to need other workers.

EW: A lot of people from the cities.

MB: Were they mostly women?

EW: Women and men.

MB: It wasn't really segregated?

F: No, they worked together.

MB: And do you know, Yolanda had mentioned that there was a plant or some kind of factory and they didn't know what was made there during the war -- or maybe that was in Winston.

EW: Yes, 'cause she is from Winston.

MB: I think it was Winston, she was saying that.

EW: The only plants that I remember here, that was here, there was Bates Night Wear, and they had the Greensboro manufacturing company -- both of those are still here and they have been there for years.

MB: Now that's another thing that people write about in books and things about women's history that during the war-time since men were away from the factories that they hired additional women to take their place -- do you think that happened here?

EW: Oh yes, oh yes, they did it definitely. Greensboro Manufacturing and Bates.

MB: Did you know some people? How do you think they went about getting these women employed in these places?

EW: Well, I don't know. Rosa and I have a good worked at Greensboro Manufacturing for

years. Her name is Leanna Wiley.

MB: Is she still alive now?

EW: Oh yeah, uh huh. And I have another friend -- she lives on Isabelle St. her name is Jessie Pinson, you might want to call her -- she's a good friend of mine. She worked at Greensboro Manufacturing for a long time. She lives on Isabelle Street.

MB: How did these companies go about getting these women to work there? Did they just put an ad in the paper and say ...

EW: Probably -- or by word of mouth.

MB: By word of mouth -- because they were having problems.

EW: It was just a shortage of men.

MB: So they needed someone to work. Now were they able to continue that work after the war?

EW: Oh yeah, some of them have been there for years. And some of them are still there. I saw just the other day that a woman died at work at Greensboro Manufacturing that was 90 years old! So they probably still have ...and Jessie, my friend, is about 63 or 4, might be 64 now.

MB: So she worked there during the war and then a long time after that. That was another thing that I was going to tell you about that I've read -- that sometimes some of these companies would hire these women during the war and then when the men returned, they kind of dissolved these positions.

EW: Well, the only thing about the men coming back from the war -- they had first priority over jobs because they'd been in to serve the country. And also a lot of the men are still in reserve and the government. The guys that work at the Post Office and different places, they let them on during the summer in an honorary then that you can ... they just have first priority over the jobs -- say if you was in the service and come back and apply for a job -- you could get it.

MB: How do you think people felt about that? Do you think some of these women were upset about that?

EW: No, no, they just accepted it -- because there were other jobs open for women anyway and so as the years went by they had other jobs anyway, so it didn't matter about that particular one, I'm sure.

MB: Yeah, they might not even have wanted to stay there because sometimes some of those jobs might have been more manual labor than they wanted to do.

EW: But now, you see it's different. The women are doing the heavy work.

RV: Oh yeah, I see 'em all up on the telegraph poles. Yeah, you see we have four bus drivers now and you wouldn't dream of a lady bus driver back then in the 40s.

MB: How do y'all feel about that?

EW & RV: I think it's great.

MB: Well, during the time when it wasn't like that do you think that the women felt the restrictions on them?

EW: Oh no. It's just that women's place in the 40s was in the home, and not out doing manual labor. It just hadn't reached that point.

MB: They hadn't moved into the evolution of people and time. Well how do you feel about the fact that, some of the things I've read -- some people have written that Greensboro really took off after WWII even though like you said, the economy probably dropped somewhat because all the soldiers weren't here. But it had grown a little bit more, become a little more organized. It wasn't just a small country town -- well not country town, it wasn't just a town in North Carolina. It had grown -- it had gotten some fame...

RV: Well. I think one thing that helped the economy too, when the boys came back from the service they could get their education free. That meant that the colleges were full of the men. Because my husband was in the service. That's how he came to A & T you see. And then the boys, they could get their education free, that meant that the economy was good, they had money to spend too. Then after that they started adding more buildings and more economy to people, and then they would have a lot of babies born - - they said war babies ... baby boom.

MB: And that would be more in the 50s.

RV: Well, probably. Well, let's see ... well, the war was about 40 41, 42, and it ended in 45? There were a lot of babies born.

MB: Because the men came back.

RV: Because the men came back and the started their families up again. Then overseas, some of them had children there and whatever.

MB: Yeah, I was just wondering to see how you might have thought about how Greensboro had changed during that time.

RV: Yeah, well it did change. And I really think, like I said, that when the young men came back that Greensboro changed because a lot of people came back to Greensboro to go to school. And they could come back free.

MB: So naturally they wanted to come back to their home. They might not want to locate

somewhere else. Let me think, there was ...

RV: Then, another thing that I noticed it in there -- about the large factories. Greensboro had some of the largest factories in the world. Like Burlington and Cone Mill and we have, what is it? Blue Bell and also Dillard -- that's high paying. And we have some of the best hospitals ~round here anywhere I think. And we have some of the best churches anywhere, beautiful churches, and the colleges are just, there's just no end to the school.

MB: So there were a lot of appealing factors in this area.

RV: See we had Gilbarco, a lot of their employees here from the North. Then we have Western Electric -- that's very high in employment. So they wondered why they decided to lay off 1000.

MB: I know it. It's really changing now...I'd like to ask you a little bit more about -- you know as you can probably tell -- when I grew up I wasn't in the midst of all the segregation problems with the buses and everything. The only things I can really remember are some things about Martin Luther King and some things in the mid to late 60s. And I was just wondering how do you feel about the changes as far as segregation and how was it like during the war and when did it start to change? Do you know what I'm trying to say? I just want to get a little bit about that because I think that's a really important thing to think about especially in the South because there have been lots of problems.

RV: Well, I think the basic change is that we had to sit down really in '61. It was gradually coming on because we had a lot of integrated marriages. And at schools -- say you and I were at Guilford we'd become friends you know and it spread. So I think it was coming along gradually and I think the sit-down had a lot to do with it. And I think mainly because of the older people did not fight, and somebody had to get out there, like the boys said, and start the ball rolling. So then when they did it ...

MB: It was like a catalyst.

EW: Now, I lived in VA and I lived in Oregon. To me, Greensboro in itself, I'm not speaking about the whole state because in some places it's rougher than it is here. But Greensboro has never been -- to me -- real bad. Now all the movies was separated -- we were upstairs and...

MB: What about the water fountains and buses?

EW: They were separated, but as far as you going your way and tending to your business. You know a lot of places you couldn't go in certain areas, but Greensboro to me wasn't like that. But it eventually began to get better -- you could go in the stores -- and well, the people just got to the place where they could just walk on in to do what they wanted to do.

RV: And they used to have signs -- water, and the bathrooms were white and black.

MB: Did y'all ever go against that yourselves?

RV: When we did we just did it for fun -- just to see if it was black water or white water or black bathroom ...

MB: Would anybody do anything to you?

EW: We had a couple of girls -- a white girl started right bad but she was in there by herself and after we got through with her...

MB: She probably wouldn't say anything any more after that.

RV: And I worked at JP Stevens. I was the only black girl that worked there. I worked in the commissary but they had black men working in maintenance. They told me I was the only one working in commissary.

EW: Sometimes they acted a little snooty. But the thing that really got it, most of the stores hired their clerks on commission and you had to make the sales to make the money. So naturally where they used to -- some of the stores who made a little straight help on straight time, they would kind of stand back and wait on you after they got through with everybody else. But the stores, the better stores that had the clerks like Meyer's at that time had their help on commission, and they were running to get any customer they can and they knew that a lot of the blacks spent good money as far as clothing was concerned see, so they were ...

MB: So it was more of economics.

RV: Then we had a Charles store -- we had one black lady stayed there 30 years. She was ... we had Brandts and Kress -- there was one black lady in there who finally became a salesperson instead of a stock girl.

E : We had Meyer's and Ellis Stone instead of Thalhimers, he was (Ellis Stone) and they had, maybe the blacks would start out running the elevator, maybe first they were just maids and then they'd work up to elevators and then they just moved on up.

RV: And also an interesting thing -- the Jefferson Standard building had a Jefferson food restaurant and my brother worked up there as a cook and he was married the time he was there. And that was really something they say to go up there and look on out. You've heard of that. I never did get to see -- to really go in person, but I've seen pictures of it and that was very interesting because they used a lot of blacks up there. All the pastry and everything and then we had the Mayfair Cafeteria. They had blacks in there, but the blacks couldn't eat in there.

MB: So they worked there but they could not eat there.

RV: Oh yeah. Because I was offered a job there but I just refused to take it. And so Boyd Morris, if you ever go to the K & W out there, he's host out there. He's a blonde headed

heavy man. He goes around, I think it's five days a week and talks to the people -- he's a host out there. He would not allow, his excuse was, the government did not -- it was something about some law of segregation that the Greensboro or the state was not ready for integrating the ... something like that.

EW: L. Richardson -- you could work there but you couldn't be a patient there.

MB: That doesn't make sense.

RV: You could not eat in a restaurant or cafeteria, but you could cook the food.

EW: Right

RV: In some places they charge you now -- I think at the K&W they charge. But if I worked in a kitchen and I'm around food I'd feel they wouldn't have to charge me girl, I tell you, I'd be full when I leave there. I'd be FULL! I'd have some of everything!

[End Tape/Interview]