Janabelle Taylor was born on 3 December 1920 in St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota, the oldest of three children. She attended local schools, graduating from Central High School in 1939, and then moved on to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, graduating in 1944 with a degree in physical education. Following college she worked 1944-45 at the Hallie Q Brown Center, an African American, nonprofit social service agency in St. Paul, founded in 1929.

During the war years 1941-45, Janabelle lived at home with her family in the Hamline Midway neighborhood of St. Paul, and like many families dealt with the effects of shortages and rationing. A brother, John, was in military service during the war, stationed stateside.

In 1945 Janabelle took a position as a social worker in Asbury Park, New Jersey, organizing athletic programs for girls. She remained here until 1947, when she moved to a similar position in Peoria, Illinois. In 1949 Janabelle returned to St. Paul and a position at the Hallie Q Brown Center, and she remained a part of this organization until her retirement.

Janabelle married James Taylor in 1949, and the couple raised three sons at their home on Thomas Avenue in St. Paul. Janabelle remained very active with community service and her church, Pilgrim Baptist of St. Paul.

Janabelle provides recollections of wartime life in St. Paul, from the perspective of a young African American woman, very involved in her community.
Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is January 2003 and this is our interview with Janabelle Taylor. First Miss Taylor, on the record, thanks very much for taking time to speak to me.

J: You're very welcome.

T: Well, as we look out on a not very wintry day...

J: But dull.

T: Yes. And gray skies. We've been talking for a little bit and here's some of what I already know. You were born on 3 December 1920 right here in St. Paul. In fact, your folks were living in this very house, 1354 Thomas Avenue.

J: That's right.

T: You attended local schools, including Central High School here in St. Paul, class of 1939. You had two brothers and no sisters; you were the oldest. You attended the University of Minnesota after that, and graduated with a degree in physical education in 1944. You worked after that like you had been working, at the Hallie Q. Brown Center here in St. Paul. I think you described your job as the “girl’s worker.” Today we might use different words to describe that job, but you were in charge of athletics and clubs and meetings, these kinds of things.

Before the war ended you took a big trip out East and ended up in Asbury Park, New Jersey, doing similar kind of work, I think, for a couple of years. After that spent a year or two in Peoria, Illinois, again doing similar kind of work, before returning to St. Paul around 1949. That’s the year I believe you said that you were married. Husband James Taylor, since deceased, and three sons. You worked at Hallie Q. Brown, and your job title changed over the years. Finally I think you were called social worker, and that’s where you retired. You continued to live here in St. Paul, in the same home. It’s a very interesting life history. And you have some memories of growing up in St. Paul in the 1930s in this Hamline-Midway area, don’t you?

J: Yes.

T: On the whole, a good time for you?
J: Yes. I guess it’s because I’m kind of a leader in a sense, more like a boss.

T: And does that come from being the oldest at home?

J: Possibly, but I acquired it mostly as my own personality. I seem to need to be the head of the household, and it doesn’t make any difference whether it’s the household to which I have relatives, or a club, president of the clubs, I just seem to be in that leadership role. I hope I have learned, however, through all of that, that there are other people that can help you become the leader if you’re good in recognizing their abilities.

T: Now, what local grade school did you attend?

J: Galtier Elementary.

(1, A, 61)

T: Galtier. Right up here on Edmund. Actually my daughter went there.

J: Oh, really?

T: Yes. Now when you were at Galtier, there was an older school building there at that time, wasn’t there?

J: Yes.

T: Not the new one. What are your memories of grade school?

J: Well, I can’t say I have any bad memories. I know once or twice I had to convince somebody that the term for my race is Negro.

T: As opposed to...

J: Nigger. And soon after a black eye or some other way, I convinced them.

T: I see. Growing up as an African-American here in the Hamline-Midway neighborhood, what was the racial makeup of the neighborhood?

J: White.

T: Mostly white when you were growing up?

J: It is still.

T: Has the percentage of African-Americans increased since you were growing up, or decreased do you think?
J: No, I'd have to say increased, because there were not too many of us between Hamline and Snelling, University and Minnehaha.

T: How about Galtier Elementary School? Mostly white kids in school with you?

J: Yes.

T: How soon did you notice, or were you made to notice, that you were black and they were white? Was this a focus of other kids in class?

J: I can’t blame that on the school, because the neighborhood in which I lived, the neighborhood which my father and mother married and moved into, has always been white. There’ve been always just a few blacks, black families. Over on Sherburne I think there were three. There was a family over on Blair. Then you can also go west, across Snelling, and find one or two families, but we were always kind of scattered. The eastern way, across Lexington, you’d find one or two families. So most of my association with individuals was with whites. To become a part of the race into which I was born I would to walk quite a few blocks. Down to the Rondo neighborhood, in that area.

T: You went to Central High School, graduated in 1939. What memories do you have of high school?

J: Good ones. I was mostly involved in sports. Mostly in sports. But I also was the kind of person that couldn’t stay still in one area, and so I knew practically everybody in my class whether they were in the same classes with me. We were all at the same graduate level.

T: Did you work at all when you were in high school? Any jobs outside of high school?

J: Towards the end of high school I worked. I used to work at housework on weekends. My mother had a friend who was an operator in the St. Paul Hotel Beauty Shop, and so she came into contact with a number of ladies who had money, and so periodically I would get a job. I lasted on most of them, but I do remember one lady who wanted some things pressed. So she said that. I said, “I don’t iron.” To me there was a difference between pressing and ironing. “I don’t iron, but I will press anything.” I guess she thought she was playing with a dummy, and an evil dummy. She slipped in some white shirts with the press order and I’m sure she’s sorry today that she did that, because I came up with some nicely scorched white shirts.

T: Was that your personality?
J: Yes. You insist that I do certain things that I tell you I don’t do or don’t do well, then you’re stuck with the consequences. Mother was upset that I would take that route, but I never felt like I was going to be a servant to be walked on by anybody.

T: Did you get encouragement from your parents, your mom and dad, to go to college after high school?

**[1, A, 139]**

J: Definitely.

T: How did you think about going to college and what you wanted to do after high school?

J: There was no way I could think about anything but college, because I always was an athletic type person and it was obvious that you’re not going to make anything out of just being an athlete.

T: Not as a woman in the 1930s.

J: You have to do something beyond that, and so my goal was always to become a physical education teacher.

T: Would you say you started college with the idea that that’s what you wanted to be?

J: I went into physical education.

T: And you finished that program. You were in college at the University of Minnesota, and you were living at home during college?

J: Yes.

T: So you traveled streetcar or bus?

J: Streetcar.

T: How was that? Could you walk down here, walk down Hamline to University and get a streetcar there?

J: Yes. Four blocks. That’s all.

T: Did that go right to campus then?

J: If you paid both fares.
T: I think you mentioned earlier you had to pay a St. Paul fare and then a Minneapolis fare.

J: At the city limits the conductor would collect then for there. So you either get off and walk, or you pay. Many is the day I walked.

T: And it was too far to walk, obviously, all the way from your home to school, but you could take the streetcar part of the way.

J: I always took the streetcar to the city limits and then walked from there.

T: That's not such a long walk that you couldn't do it.

J: Yes.

T: You were in college, living at home, when the US got involved in the war in 1941. You were twenty-one years old. The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941—I'm wondering if you remember what you were doing when you first heard the news about Pearl Harbor?

J: I'm not sure whether it was Pearl Harbor or later, but I think I had been off, and I was in the car. It was in mom and dad's car. Mom had taught me how to drive when I was around twelve, thirteen. When you satisfied her, you had to be a very good driver (chuckles). Anyhow, I had access to an automobile. I don't remember where I had been, but I was in the automobile. I remember hearing on the radio that we were in the war.

T: So you heard this on the radio first.

J: Yes.

T: Let me ask you, how did you react when you heard the news, or when it began to sink in what was going on?

J: I guess it's very hard for me to even explain how I felt, because I immediately thought about my friends. It's going to hit most of us. But I was just kind of, is this really necessary? Isn't there another way we can get...? I can't say I never was one that was in a fight, because I was always fighting. But war seemed so big. I was fighting when I had to because of the name calling mostly. Even in this particular neighborhood. But a war! You know, immediately I began to envision World War I.

(1, A, 201)

T: So you had images of World War I perhaps repeating itself. Now your brother, John or Bud, was he old enough to go into service?
J: Bud was only; he was eighteen months younger than I.

T: Now was he drafted into service or did he volunteer?

J: I think he volunteered, but I’m not sure.

T: But he did serve.

J: Yes.

T: How about your folks? You had some concerns. Your folks had you, they had a son who was of military age. Do you remember how your folks responded or talked about the US being at war now?

J: Don’t remember them even talking about it.

T: So no outward displays of concern by your mother or your father with regards to the country, or your brother, or you.

J: I’m sure there was concern, but it wasn’t made visible to us.

T: Let me as an aside here ask, what line of work was your dad in?

J: Post Office.

T: He worked for the Post Office?

J: Yes.

T: And what did he do?

J: He was a postal clerk.

T: So he was employed even during the time of the Depression?

J: Yes.

T: Did your mom work outside the home?

J: Not after marriage.

T: So she was at home. Once the war came, things began to change in the country. I’m wondering, as you were in school, you were at the University before the war started and also after the war started, I’m wondering if you noticed anything different about the University? The appearance of men in uniform or just things that indicated to you as a student that things have changed.
J: That’s a hard question for me to answer really, because I toyed with the idea of becoming a member of the WACS myself.

T: Did you?

J: Yes.

T: What made you think about that?

J: One of mom and dad’s dear friends, Dad and Sam were buddies at the Post Office, and Sam was a hard-nosed ex-soldier. There was something about the way he would talk about service. Although he was not too much in favor of the females being in it. But still it was an inkling there that, yes, you know, maybe... And Jane, you’re a physical education teacher. That’s what you’re going to become, and that would be a good spot. He was all in favor of my signing up.

T: Did he put the idea your mind or did you already have the idea and he encouraged you?

J: No, I had the idea.

T: What was attractive about the Army for you?

J: Being a boss.

T: You do have that in you, don’t you?

J: Yes (both laugh).

T: Did you have other women that you knew, either in the neighborhood or at school, who had joined, who sort of you saw as an example?

J: No.

T: Well, you didn’t join and what, if you can identify it, what held you back?

J: I don’t really know. My folks were not too in favor of it, but then they never talked in terms of, I said you can’t. If this was something you insist upon doing, they would go along with it, but they were not too much in favor of it.

T: So they would have supported you had you said, I’m going to do this.

J: Yes.
T: You were twenty-one by that time, so you could have signed for yourself. You stayed in school. How did life around the University change? Were there posters on walls, political meetings or people in uniform around, things like this that you recall?

J: I don’t recall that much. I mean you did see people in uniform. Females. They looked good, I thought.

(1, A, 255)

T: You did think about this for a while.

J: Yes.

T: How about men? Were there fewer men around the University, or did guys start disappearing from your classes?

J: Not that much as far as guys that I would even pay that much attention to, because there weren’t that many black kids on campus.

T: So, as far as race went, you were a distinct minority at the University like you were in your neighborhood, like you were through elementary school.

J: Yes.

T: Was that difficult or was that something you just got used to?

J: I don’t think it was difficult for me because I’m a bossy type. Always was.

T: You learned to take care of yourself, so to speak.

J: Yes.

T: But the way you describe it, you were constantly one of just a few blacks.

J: Yes. Because there were just a few on campus.

T: We were talking about school, and you said you didn’t notice much change around the campus when you were there. Now you continued at this time to live at home with your folks, is that right?

J: Yes.

T: Were both your brothers at home too?

J: No. I’m the oldest, but the older son, no.
T: He was in the service.

J: Yes.

T: So there was your mom and your dad and your youngest brother and you.

J: Dad died then. We were in the war... I can't remember the date that dad died.

T: Did he die when you were in college?

J: I'm trying to think. Go out to the cemetery every summer, but I can't remember. Let's see if Dick remembers the date.

T: You were living at home as we mentioned, and for part of this time your dad was, too. Your dad passed away before you went to Asbury Park, New Jersey, in 1945. Let me talk about home life here a little bit. When you were home in high school and then in college, who did most of the housework, the cooking, the shopping, that kind of stuff?

J: Mom.

T: How involved were you with work around the house or cooking or shopping, these kind of things?

J: I had my share of duties. When they had holidays I generally was the cook. My grandfather had taught me at the age of eight how to make cakes.

T: So you were not all thumbs in the kitchen.

J: No.

T: Once the war started in 1941, when you were in college, you were twenty-one years old, certain things were in short supply. Other things were rationed. Families, individuals, only got so much of certain things. I'm wondering how you remember your family being impacted by shortages of certain things or the rationing of other things.

J: I can't remember being impacted by it. We always had enough food for any one of the meals, and of course dad was a postal employee. Until he died. Apparently he left mom well enough off, so...

T: When he passed away did your mother work outside the home then?

J: During the war she worked at New Brighton, up at the arsenal.
T: That’s interesting. Was that the first time that you recall that she had worked outside the home?

J: Yes.

T: What kind of an adjustment was that for your family? Your mom was now gone part of the time during the day.

J: I don’t recall it affecting us in any way other than the same kind of family we always had. We had certain responsibilities, but we always had certain responsibilities. The only one that didn’t have too much was Dick, the youngest, because there’s an eight year difference him and myself and a whole lot as far as personality is concerned because I’m the boss.

T: How about things like the cooking of meals? If your mom was working could she still do all the cooking?

J: Yes. If there was something that she wanted... Because her day was from seven to maybe three at the arsenal. If she needed something or dessert, if she wanted dessert, then I would cook.

T: So not only were you a college student but you became a part time in charge of the household person.

J: But I was that anyway. Even before college.

T: How about your brother? Your youngest brother was still in school when your mom was working. Did he have to get himself up?

J: I did. He used to call me “Ma.”

T: So you really were in charge!

(both laugh)

T: So you don’t remember any shortages of meat or sugar or coffee or this kind of stuff that suggested oh, we used to have more of this available?

J: No, but I think that’s because mom was a thrifty person anyway, and she just didn’t let us be gluttons.

T: So because she was maybe used to stretching, that having some kind of rationed goods didn’t impact her.

J: No. She was the daughter of a cook who was on the railroad. My grandfather was a railroad cook and I think that part of the training that she had while she was at
home as a youngster just kind of... Grandpa was such a person that you had to take care of everything. If you had something that was too much on your plate you might have gotten it the next meal if you didn't eat it then. He wasn't the throw away kind. I mean, there wasn't a lot of garbage.

T: So when you were growing up you took decent size portions and you ate what you took.

J: That's right.

T: So maybe there wasn't so much change with the shortages.

J: Yes.

T: Do you remember going shopping yourself and seeing a change in what was on the shelf? Less of this or more expensive prices, stuff like that when you wanted to pick something up at the shops.

J: I can't say that I did. During the war we kind of, Ma and I kind of together... I'm trying to think when did Dad die? The date won't come to me. But Ma and I were the ones who did the cooking and the planning and all, because she started me out, well, my grandfather started me out. At the age of eight I was making cakes.

T: So you had some experience working as a person in the home.

J: Yes.

T: Now being in charge, that was not a bad thing because your mom was working. Did she talk much about her job, about what she was doing up there? Did she like working, do you think?

J: I don't think she particularly liked the kind of job she had. She had been a worker all the way. After she and dad married she retired but she had been a worker in the railroad office of the, I think it was the Omaha Railroad.

T: Was that here in St. Paul?

J: Yes. She was born in St. Paul.

T: So she had worked until your folks were married. Then she took time off, a long time off it sounds like, and then went back to a job that wasn't office work anymore.

J: No. She was out in New Brighton in the plant out there when Dad died.

T: He died before you left to go to Asbury Park, in 1945.
J: Yes.

T: And he was still alive when you graduated from high school?

J: Yes.

T: So sometime between ‘39 and ‘45 your dad died, sometime during the war.

J: Yes.

T: What do you think prompted your mom to go up there and look for a job?

J: I never even gave that any thought, so I can’t really say that I can answer that. Knowing mom, there was a need I think. Prices had gone up.

T: So dollars weren’t going quite as far.

J: Right.

T: And the jobs were certainly available. Did she have a friend or something that worked there that kind of convinced her to go up there and put an application in?

J: I have no idea.

T: But she was a regular forty hour a week person, taking her dinner pail and going off to work.

J: Yes.

T: How did that make you feel? Seeing your mom as a working member of society, kind of getting on her overalls and going to work.

J: It really didn’t bother me. In fact, I think I felt proud of the fact that she was willing to do what she could relative to the situation.

T: Is that the same emotions you had when your brother was in service? Did you feel proud of him in service or ambivalent about it?

J: I think I was probably ambivalent about it. Bud and I were only eighteen months apart as far as age is concerned. I kind of think maybe I was kind of glad he was going to be gone (laughs). Because I was such a bossy one and he was so hard to boss.

T: Did you have much contact with him when he was in the service? Did you write back and forth?
J: Oh, yes.

T: When you got letters from him what kind of things did he say?

J: Not too much. Just not very much about what he was doing in the service at all.

T: How about you? What did you find to tell him when you wrote to him?

J: Just what was going on around the neighborhood because, see, actually I wanted to be a WAC.

T: And you never took that step.

J: No, because I felt that it was unfair to mom.

T: Had you gone into the service it would have been your mom and your youngest brother, Richard, at home. And that would have been it.

J: Yes. And I was Richard’s, I was Dick’s boss. Still am. [Janabelle and Richard share the house at the time of this interview]

T: Did you feel you were needed around the house?

J: Yes.

T: Did that make you feel frustrated at all or upset that you really couldn't take a step that you wanted to take?

J: No. Because I don't think at that point there was any particular step I wanted to take.

T: So joining the service was something you thought about but it wasn't something you were settled on.

J: Yes.

T: You finished college in ‘44. It took you one year longer than a four year program might take in the best case scenario. Did you work at all yourself other than going to college during this period?

J: Oh, yes.

T: What kind of jobs did you have?
J: I worked in the beauty shop after the ladies, all the customers, were gone, cleaning it. I used to do household work. I worked for a lady up on Summit. I'll never forget. Because I told her up front that I don’t do shirts. I’m not good at all in ironing shirts.

T: So you were doing other housework, cleaning and this kind of stuff.

J: Yes. But I was doing some ironing. More press work. I’m ashamed of myself.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 384.

J: She kept slipping white shirts in. Now I’d already told her that I didn’t do shirts, especially white shirts. So I went ahead. I’m not proud of myself but each shirt had some scorch marks on it.

T: Was it easy to get jobs like that? I mean you’re in college now. You’re a college student and you’re trying to pick up some money on the side too.

J: No, my mother had a friend who worked down at the St. Paul Hotel as a beautician, and so she was contact for some of the jobs that I got.

T: So you had your hands full. You were sort of helping to manage the household, you were going to college and you were trying to hold down some part time jobs. Did you have time for a social life of any kind?

J: Oh, yes.

T: You didn’t sleep much, did you?

J: (laughs) Still don’t.

T: How about your social life when you were a college student? How did you occupy yourself?

J: Coffman Memorial Union. There was a corner up there that we all would gather together and had our fun and games or whatever you wanted to call it. It was mostly gossip.

T: Did the war and what was going on, was that a topic of conversation that came up?

J: During our discussions that we had on campus?

T: Yes. Is that something that came up as a topic?

J: I can’t really remember. When some of the fellows would go in to the service there would be discussion but not a whole lot. Not a whole lot. I had volunteered to
do some things during the service. I can't even remember exactly what it was but it wasn't because of campus, it was because of where I was in the community and taking part. As I say, we had that one corner up there on the balcony that we did all our discussions and any time any of the fellows if they happened to be in town or something in uniform of course we really gave them. “Wow! Don't you look good!”

(1, B, 420)

T: So a fellow being in service and having a uniform was a kind of a status symbol?

J: Yes.

T: Were you dating anyone at that time?

J: No, not particularly. In fact I wanted to be in service myself, and it's just because of Mom's, well, she had the ability, but it just looked like it was putting a lot of weight on her.

T: It would have been just your mom and your brother then.

J: Yes.

T: How about your church? You've been a member of Pilgrim Baptist Church here in St. Paul all your life. Did your church sponsor any kind of volunteer programs that were part of the war effort? Collecting food drives or clothing drives…

J: They still do. It's something they were doing, and they're still doing that.

T: So that's something that you can recall during the time of the war that they were involved in.

J: And also Africa, but that's after the war. We still send clothing and that sort of thing to Africa.

T: So your church has been involved in things for decades, as long as you can remember.

J: Yes.

T: Were you part of buying war bonds or a blood drive at the Red Cross, rolling bandages anywhere, any kind of activities that you can recall participating in?

J: All of them actually, at some point. Not on a regular basis. I did my donation as far as the blood drive was concerned. If I was an active member of Hallie Q. Brown, I wasn't a staff member, but we'd have drives there.
T: How long has the Hallie Q. Brown Center been around?

J: I was a kid when I joined up. Let's see. I was born in 1920. I've been part of their activities there since about 1927 or 1928.

T: So they've been around for, my gosh, eighty years or so.

J: They've been around a long time.

T: Same location?

J: No. First, before Hallie Q. Brown, there was a Chapter of the YWCA, and it was located on Central, just west of Dale Street [in St. Paul]. Then, I can't remember the name of it, first it was across the street from... then they moved to the downtown area. Then Hallie Q. Brown moved into that building that they had on Central and after a couple of years or so, I don't remember the exact number of years but, Hallie then moved over to the center that they have on Aurora and Kent. Just off of University Avenue [in St. Paul].

T: That's where they are now, right?

J: No. It's on Kent, but they took the other end now. It's at Iglehart and Kent now, and it was at Aurora and Kent.

T: While you were in college, were you active with the Hallie Q. Brown Center?

J: Yes.

(1, B, 480)

T: As a participant in activities, or were you helping to run some things?

J: I was a volunteer and then I became, before I got out of college, I became a part time staff person.

T: What kind of work were you doing for them?

J: Mostly gym. Working with the girls. I was phy. ed. See, so it was doing me some good too.

T: That's right. What kind of programs did you organize for the girls?

J: I don't know that I organized any, but when I was down there myself I was on the basketball team as a kid growing up. I've always lived here in this neighborhood but I never became a person who couldn't still deal with people who were of my color. And sometimes it would be to walk to Hallie, down near Kent from here.
T: That’s quite a hike.

J: That’s a nice hike *(laughs)*. I will always remember I had a pin, a hatpin, about this long *(holds index fingers about twelve inches apart)*.

T: About a foot long.

J: From my dad’s mother. When the old fashioned hats, they had hatpins. Always take that pin with me. Always my hatpin. That was my weapon *(laughs)*. Dad used to say, if you need to use it, you use it and run. Don’t stay around.

T: Now were there a lot of activities down there at the Hallie Q. Brown Center during the war years when you were in college that you were helping out with?

J: Yes. Girl’s teams. And club groups. Hallie had activities from the five year old up, but I dealt with the kids who were in grade school and high school.

T: So six to eighteen year old group.

J: Yes.

T: When you think in a larger sense about your family, now your mom was working during the war part of the time, but your dad passed away.

J: He passed, yes.

T: Your brothers, one of your brothers went into service and your younger brother, was he working when he was here at home?

J: No. After he got older, but not during those days.

T: And you were in college, working part time, sometimes more than others I suppose.

J: Yes.

T: When you think about the financial situation of your family would you say that your family, did you perceive your family to be better off financially, worse off financially, or about the same?

J: About the same.

*(1, B, 529)*
T: So the tradeoff between your dad dying and maybe a settlement and mom working, you working, your brother was he sending some money home from service?

J: No, because Bud was married.

T: He was married, so he was really out of the picture.

J: Yes.

T: So all these things from your perspective kind of made for a tradeoff financially that you weren’t doing any better, but you weren’t any worse.

J: Right.

T: Let’s move specifically now to after college. You finished college in 1944. Do you remember your graduation from the University?

J: Sure. Walking across the stage with that cap and gown.

T: Was that a big moment for you or kind of an anticlimax?

J: I think it was more anticlimax.

T: Because you had the degree by that time?

J: Yes.

T: Were you thinking as you, even before you graduated, were you thinking about what you wanted to do and where you wanted to go when you were done?

J: Yes. I knew what I wanted to do, and that was that I was going to stay here at Hallie or I was going to go. There was a gentleman… how did that happen? He came from New York, in that area. I can’t remember why he came, but I was working at Hallie and he became a friend of the fellow who was in charge of the gym at Hallie. He talked about the possibility of a female employee, and asked this fellow if he had any ideas. He had received the idea prior to asking the fellow about me. He asked another one of the staff members. She gave him, I guess, whatever information he needed answers to, so he, when he got back East, he wrote me a letter with an application in it. But I never got it. Until the fellow who was running the gym program interceded.

T: He didn’t want you to go?

J: No. He wanted the job for himself. So I didn’t hear from Mr. Heinz, and I thought that was strange. He had said that he was going to send me this information. He
then, I contacted him and he said he had sent the information and where he had sent it. Then I knew Porter had probably gotten it. Surely that’s what happened. The fellow that was in the gym interceded and responded to Mr. Heinz’s request.

T: But he didn’t get the job, and ultimately you did get the job.

J: I did get the job. Mr. Heinz was looking for a female, not a male.

T: Now at this time during college, you were concerned with your mom, your brother. Was this a big step for you to suddenly, to finally say, I am going to go? And how did you come to the decision to leave your mom and your brother and go to New Jersey which is far away?

J: Mom wanted me to get ahead, if that’s what I wanted to do.

T: Did she encourage you to go?

J: Yes.

T: How did you process all this? Because your mom’s still working, I guess, at the arsenal and your brother... How did you process this whole decision and come to the conclusion to go?

J: Somebody would say you were probably selfish in thinking about yourself, but I felt that I could do more for her by getting a better job.

T: A better job in New Jersey?

J: Better in the sense that I had higher position, and there would be new responsibilities that I would be learning.

T: More money too?

J: Not necessarily. I don’t remember getting any additional money. I think we paid pretty good around the Twin Cities area.

T: The job responsibility, then.

J: Yes. The opportunity I guess to be my own boss, more or less. I would be setting up programs, and at Hallie I was following along with programs that had been set up from when I was a kid.

T: Sure. That’s a natural next step, isn’t it, to want more responsibility?

(1, B, 591)
J: Yes.

T: Was it hard now, even that said, to finally pack your stuff and leave home?

J: Yes, because it meant that I was leaving Mom, and it wasn’t my attachment to Mom as much as it was to helping her with the household. Bud was already in the service.

T: So he was married by that time too, I think you said. And your younger brother, had he finished high school by this time? Richard.

J: In a sense yes, but he was never able to do that much. Dick [b. 1928], when he was in school, wasn’t like his sister nor his brother. Because he wasn’t athletically inclined, so he was kind of a stumblebum you might say. His teacher in school, he was in a kind of a trade school situation, and his teacher, although he to go to the same type classes that you always have in a regular school system, but he was doing some trade work too. The teacher in the gym insisted that he get on the parallel bars, and he was afraid of the parallel bars. He was afraid of anything that he had to take his feet off the floor. The teacher said, I’ll be there. I’ll help you. Get on the parallel bars. He did. He fell off the parallel bars, and he was moved by the gym teacher with the help of some of the kids to the nurse’s office. By the time that we got information about it he was unable to move. He suffered an injury at the base of his neck all the way down his spine. They called the ambulance of course when he couldn’t move, and took him to Bethesda Hospital.

T: Did he suffer permanent damage from that?

J: Oh, he sure did. He’s still suffering.

T: And that happened decades back.

J: He was in the hospital about three months. We used to go every day and move his toes and try to help as much as they would ask that we do.

(1, B, 628)

T: Were you in college when this happened?

J: Yes.

T: So your mom was really dealing with quite a few things. Your dad died, your brother was seriously injured, your other brother was in service. No wonder you didn’t want to leave home. Nonetheless, you say you feel your family came through this okay. Moving out to New Jersey in 1945, how did you deal with being out East? Here’s a young woman, twenty-four years old, moving out East. How much different from your perspective was it?
J: The kids called me an old woman.

T: I bet that made you feel fine.

J: I’m a bossy old woman. It was a good experience for me. The only part of it that I really had some misgivings about was that boy’s basketball tournament. Glen, my boss, could not help. He was not going. But the men’s group just did not want to take anything that any female had to say.

T: From your perspective, as you think about it, was it because you were a female or because you were an African-American female?

J: No. Because the men’s group was an African-American group.

T: So it was nothing to do with… we’re not talking about race. It’s a gender question here.

J: Yes. Definitely a gender question.

T: But you managed to have your way.

J: I told them--it’s a wonder I didn’t get fired--I told them that if you can’t support me in what I’m doing and I am going to continue to do it, so if you want the tournament to run on, you better let me do it. But if you can’t support me on that, I can write a resignation. I’d be happy to do so. I didn’t mean it, though.

T: You were in a tight spot it sounds like.

J: And actually I did, I did when I got back. I got back to the Center. I did write to the, what was that group called? It was a black group. It was in New York. I can’t think of the name of it now. But I did write to them and ask for information on positions that I might be able to fulfill in other areas and I also told them I prefer not to remain on the East Coast. So it wasn’t too long after that, I stayed another, I think I stayed another almost full year, and then I got a request from Peoria, Illinois.

T: So in the way we looked at the chronology, that was around 1947. Let me stick with the years to 1945, before we move to Peoria. In April of 1945 President Franklin Roosevelt died. April 12, 1945. I’m wondering how you reacted when you heard the news that the president had died?

J: I was in tears like everybody else. And I guess I selfishly thought wow, there goes our opportunity as a race. But then I guess I just didn’t let that get me down so much so that I couldn’t continue to work as I always had done for recognition. In spite of my skin color. And sometimes still do. I have to in my own neighborhood here.
T: Let me ask you whether it’s in college or working out in New Jersey or working in Peoria or here in St. Paul, would you say you had more trouble as a woman trying to accomplish something, or as an African-American?

J: I think I had it both ways. I think as an African-American woman, but I think as a woman I still would have had some difficulty but other colored got in the way too. And besides that sometimes I think the experiences that I had were good.

(1, B, 680)

T: As far as building yourself, building character?

J: Yes.

T: Being in New Jersey or Illinois, how did those jobs change you? By the time you got back to St. Paul you were almost thirty years old. How were you a different person?

J: I can’t say that I was that much different, because I always was bossy.

T: Wiser perhaps, from experience?

J: I can’t really say that either. Because I had a very wise father and mother and grew up in this neighborhood which is predominantly white. So putting those things all together they made for my experiences to be pretty wholesome.

T: It sounds like from what you’re saying you learned to battle from a young age.

J: Yes.

T: And if you wanted something, you had to get it yourself.

J: Mama used to always say, when I would come home crying from being left out of something, Mama would say, “How many eyes do you have? What about your nose? You got a mouth? How about your ears? How tall are you? How do you walk? What about that girl that won’t speak to you? What has she got that you don’t have? Doesn’t she have eyes? Nose? Mouth? Which you have too. Can’t she walk? Talk?” So in making that kind of a comparison, I’m just as good as anybody else.

T: That’s a good story. Speaking of your mom, was she upset by President Roosevelt’s death, that you recall?

J: I think members of the black community were very upset. I can’t say that anyone was any less than anybody else, because he kind of was a liberator.
T: You were working at Hallie Q. Brown when the president died, or were you out in Jersey?

J: No, I was here in St. Paul.

T: The end of the war happened not long after that. The war against Germany ended in May of 1945, and the war against Japan in August of 1945. I'm wondering what you remember about the time when the war ended.

J: I was frustrated some, because at one point I wanted to be a pilot. One of Mom's real good friends said, "Jane, you're needed at home more than you're needed to become a WAC." That's what they were called in those days.

T: So the war ending sort of took that decision away. As you remember, at work or home, was there any kind of a celebration or a discussion about the war ending and what that was going to mean?

J: I don't recall any. There wasn't too many different kinds of discussion groups both at that time and in others. I don't recall really anything any different.

T: Was your brother out of the service when the war ended or was he still in?

J: He was in the service.

T: Do you remember thinking about him, about what this was going to mean for him now that the war was over?

J: I can't honestly say that I did.

T: When you think about the end of the war and your own life, how do you think the end of the war impacted you? Were you surprised, were you happy, or didn't it make much of an impact on you at all?

J: I can't really say that it made any outstanding impact on me. I was glad that it was over. I really can't say that I was so glad that I threw up a hat and said, whoopee.

T: One of the reasons the war ended in August of 1945 as rapidly as it did, was the use by the United States Government of atomic weapons, that is specifically the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945.

J: That bothered me.

T: In what way?

J: I guess I just couldn't see. It bothered me that they just dropped bombs. What it was doing to humanity. But the whole war actually bothered me. Even though I had
expressed an interest in joining the WACS, it was because I was a physical education person and thought I could do something that way, but not in the sense of the war with its shooting... That bothered me, so that when the war had ended, I mean I was one of the ones who said, it’s all over, thank god.

T: After 1945 you worked in Asbury Park and Peoria as a social worker, and you returned late 1940s to St. Paul. What do you think when you think about the post-war? You were married in 1949. Your husband by the way, James Taylor, was he a St. Paul boy?

J: No.

T: Where was he from?

J: He was born in Illinois, but he was raised in Georgia or Alabama.

T: How did you meet him?

J: Railroad.

T: Married in St. Paul. Your mom continued to live in the same house here on Thomas?

J: Yes.

T: When you think about the war, I mean you were a college student, you worked for a while, you had a brother in service, things like this. What did the war mean for you personally at the time? What was that experience all about from your perspective?

J: I wanted to be a WAC.

T: I’m hearing frustration in a sense that you couldn’t participate as fully as you might have wanted.

J: The gentleman who was a very close friend of my father, worked in the Post Office together, was a die-hard Army man.

T: This is the fellow you talked about earlier, I think. He encouraged you, but you felt yourself kind of committed to, or responsible for, your mom and your family.

J: Yes.

T: How about this? What do you think is the most important way that the war years or the war experience changed your life? The course of your life or how your life ended up working out.
J: I can’t really tie anything together relative to my years and the war itself.

T: What you’re saying is, it wasn’t a direct or a major impact. Do you think the war brought increased opportunities for you as an African-American woman?

J: I guess I should say yes, but I can’t really say that I wouldn’t have done the same things had the war not taken place.

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: In other words, your life path, you went to college to do a certain thing and you ended up doing just that. So in a sense, it sounds like that the war didn’t impact your career decision or career path directly.

J: Not really.

T: How about your brother who was in service? In what ways was he different from before he went in the service and when he got out?

J: He contracted that, I don’t know if I can say it again, that casadeo mycosis which was a desert disease, so he was kind of... he wasn’t the same kind of jovial person. But I can’t say it was because of the war, except that through the war he got this disease. But I think it’s because he was handicapped and it was just because he was feeling so bad all the time from the disease itself.

T: Another question: How did St. Paul change do you think as a result of the war years?

J: Better jobs. I think in my estimation it was better for blacks, but I don’t think the war had anything to do with it. I think it was the leadership that we had here in St. Paul.

(2, A, 72)

T: Was the black community growing in size in the late ’40s and ’50s?

J: Oh, yes.

T: So that seemed to be transforming, but you wouldn’t say it was because of the war experience.

J: Well, it might be because of the war experience that brought the persons to St. Paul to take a good leadership role that they had. The Urban League became a stronger, I think, institution than it was before the war. Employment was important. I think the war helped tremendously as far as those of us who had been here all of
our lives. To the newcomers. I know some folks they disagree with me, but that’s all right because they want to take the claim but I think some of those newcomers that they got into the Urban League and some other programs that involved us put us ahead.

T: So you think it’s less directly the war experience, but perhaps those who came here and economically maybe more opportunities, better jobs.

J: Fought for them.

T: That’s the last question I had. I wanted to ask if there’s anything you wanted to add to the interview before we conclude.

J: No, I think you’ve taken me over the ropes. Put me on the other side. I’m still here.

T: Well, then, on the record let me thank you very much.

J: I want to thank you too because I’m hoping I haven’t discouraged anybody or encouraged anybody to do something differently. I don’t know that the members of the black community would go along with everything I said, but that’s part of life.

T: That’s why we ask lots of different people their perspective, because multiple perspectives makes for a much more balanced story, and yours is certainly an important part of it.

END OF INTERVIEW