

**Interviewee: Elaine Bunde Gerber**

**Interviewer: Thomas Saylor**

**Date of interview: 15 November 2001**

**Location: living room of the Gerber home in St. Paul, MN**

**Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, October 2002**

**Edited by: Thomas Saylor, February 2003**

Elaine was born 13 March 1925 in St. Paul, and grew up on Western Avenue. She attended local schools, and graduated from St. Paul Washington High School in 1943. After graduating, Elaine worked for First National Bank in the mailroom, and later in bookkeeping.

In 1946, Elaine married Warren Gerber of St. Paul. Warren was a US Army veteran who had fought in Europe and been wounded. Elaine and Warren had dated prior to his leaving for the military. In this interview, Elaine talks about getting news that Warren had been badly wounded, and how she dealt with that. She also talks here about civilian life in wartime St. Paul: shortages, rationing, transportation, and war bonds.

After the war, Elaine and Warren made their home in St. Paul, for many years in a home on Iowa Avenue, and raised two children.

At the time of this interview (2002), Warren and Elaine lived in St. Paul.

**Interview Key:**

**T = Thomas Saylor**

**G = Elaine Gerber**

**Warren = Warren Gerber, Elaine's husband**

**[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation**

**(\*\*\*) = words or phrase unclear**

**NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity**

**Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.**

T: Today is the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2001 and this is the interview with Elaine Gerber. First, Elaine, I want to thank you publicly for taking some time and sitting down for a conversation. Thanks very much.

G: You're very welcome.

T: You make good cookies, too. [Mrs Gerber made cookies and shared these before the interview started.]

G: Thank you.

T: Can you tell us when and where you were born?

G: I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on March 13, 1925.

T: If I remember correctly you come from a family of more than a couple kids.

G: Seven of us. I'm the sixth one of the seven. I'm the second to the last. I have an older sister and four brothers in between. Then myself and my younger sister.

T: Your folks were from St. Paul too, weren't they?

G: Yes. My dad was born in St. Paul. My mother was born in Owatonna [Minnesota], but they moved to St. Paul.

T: Did she grow up here, then?

G: Yes.

T: And your dad was born in St. Paul?

G: Yes, he was born in St. Paul.

T: Where did you go to high school?

G: I went to Washington High School which was only four blocks from where I lived, so I could walk back and forth which was really the fun time. It was really nice. We always had a bunch of kids that would be walking down the street together.

T: Neighborhood school.

G: Yes.

T: You finished high school in what year?

G: In 1943.

T: By that time we were...

G: Were already in the war.

T: Was your one brother in the service when you graduated from high school?

G: Yes. Herb went in, in 1942 at Fort Snelling [in Minneapolis]. He was in the Army, but then he went into the Air Force in 1943.

T: So he was already gone close to a year when you finished high school?

G: Yes.

T: The 7<sup>th</sup> of December, 1941, when the US was attacked by the Japanese and we entered the war, do you remember what you were doing when you first heard that news?

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G: I know it was a Sunday morning. I don't remember if we heard this before we went to church or after. We heard about it. We couldn't believe it. I think it was President Roosevelt that came over the radio, that's all you had of course, radio, to tell us that we were being bombed by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. It was quite a shock when you're thinking you're doing fine. Everything was going well. And then, after a while when you start thinking about it, then you think, "Well, I have four brothers that are all of age to go." They were all older than I was. It was kind of scary when you think about it. We were a close family and everybody was living at home yet, except for my two oldest brothers.

T: How did your folks react to this?

G: They were very stable people, and they didn't talk about it to us. I'm sure they didn't like it. My mother, of course, was a little upset with it, having children that would probably be going in the service. Actually my father, during the First World

War, he was getting ready to go in and he already had four children, but then the war ended so he didn't have to go. But it was scary for my mother, with four children and no husband around.

T: Now facing the same thing, potentially, again twenty years later.

G: With her own children.

T: Did any of your brothers go out to enlist in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor?

G: No. I think they were drafted in '42, my brother Herb must have been drafted. Then my brother Bob, who was already married and had a boy, a child, I think he was drafted too, but then he didn't go in until '44.

T: You were in high school until June of '43? What did you do after you left high school?

G: I got a job right away. The school had requests from the First National Bank that they could use some women because a lot of the men were gone already. So I worked at the First National Bank, until 1950, before our son was born.

T: In high school, part of your junior year and your senior year, you had the war clouds. In what ways did life at school change as a result of the US getting involved in the war?

G: I think everybody was real conscious of it and a lot of them went in the service. In fact, I think a lot of them went already when they were seniors if they were eighteen, or probably at seventeen even. I think they were going in and doing their part. It was really different, because a lot of the people you really went around with, they were quieter. They'd gone to work even to help out at home after school and things like that.

T: Were there posters on the walls or any kind of collection drives that your school got involved in?

G: Yes. There were signs about the war, "We want you!" US Army recruiting posters. They had bond drives for the E Bonds. You could buy ten cent stamps and they had little folders that you could paste them in until you got eighteen [dollars and] seventy-five [cents]. Then it was worth a twenty-five dollar bond when it matured. I think it was twenty years. Then you would get your twenty-five dollars, or you could leave it in and get more interest.

T: Were those things that were sold at school?

G: Yes.

T: How did this work? Were there like tables set up or was there an office?

G: There was an office and I think they had certain days that you would buy the stamps. You could come and buy a dollar's worth or something, which was ten of them.

T: Was there a student campaign to kind of drum up interest in this?

G: Sure. We had the Student Council that would do things like that. They worked at that.

T: How did they do it specifically? Do you remember?

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G: Not exactly, but you'd have notes going around, or little flyers, to the kids. Or they'd say, "It's bond day today," or something to that effect, and then you'd know that you should be doing that, that you could buy stamps or bonds if you had the money.

T: Was there social pressure to be part of these drives?

G: Yes. I think everybody wanted to buy. Of course, it was a way of earning money eventually, so people always wanted to get in on a deal, so to speak.

T: How about you personally?

G: Yes. We just saved until we got it. We didn't always buy it, but then I got some from Warren, who at the time was my boyfriend. I got little corsages with the stamps and that made up a pretty little corsage, which had nine stamps so I suppose that cost a dollar. I don't know what it cost to get it.

T: Were military recruiters ever on campus?

G: That I don't recall, but I'm sure they were around. There were offices all over. I think there was one down on Rice Street that was close to school for enlisting and that sort of thing.

T: How about in the classroom? What was taught in things like history classes or politics classes or geography? Did that change at all?

G: They didn't really get off to much from the books that we had, you know the geography book and your history book, because a lot of times it was the old history, ancient history or something that you were studying. You did have to have extra curriculum or something where you could have a special on certain things, newspaper items or something for getting an extra mark or something.

T: Like an extra credit thing?

G: Yes.

T: So you don't recall a specific class where the war effort came up or was discussed openly?

G: No, not to my knowledge. I don't remember that. Maybe it was more with some of the boys that were in it, that things were talked about more--like the ones that were in athletics and stuff. Maybe something like that was brought up. Washington had a lot of good football players and good teams. So maybe things were said in there. I was going with him [Warren]. He was at a different school. He knew a lot of them because he went to grade school with a lot of them. Some of them went to Mechanic Arts and the other ones went to Washington.

T: Were you in any clubs or organizations when you were in high school?

G: Let me think... I'm trying to think of the one I was in... I should have gotten my annual out to look at the pictures.

T: Because they list their social clubs and stuff in there, don't they?

G: Yes.

T: It's hard to remember after all these years.

G: Yes.

T: Let's move to home. Your mom was taking care of a household with a lot of people. I imagine you were helping.

G: Oh, yes. We helped. We had our chores, especially the older ones. We were working. My oldest sister was working already.

T: Outside the home?

G: Yes.

T: What was she doing?

G: She was a receptionist at the St. Paul Hotel, at the beauty shop.

T: So she was getting out and working. Pretty many hours a week?

G: Yes. She worked every day, or rather six days a week. Come home about six o'clock at night, after a streetcar ride home from downtown St. Paul. My oldest brother, Ches, and my next oldest brother, Bob, both worked at the Consumers Milk Company. Well, Bob was married already in 1937, so he was working. And all the boys were out of school, because my brother is four years older than I am. He was out of high school when I started high school.

T: How many of your brothers and sisters were still living at home when you were there?

G: All were at home, two sisters and four brothers, until Bob got married in 1937 and Ches got married in 1938. I think I was the third one to get married. In 1946 Warren and I got married. So there were still five of us at home, to answer your original question. I got married before any of the rest, before my other two brothers and my sister, who married in later years. My older sister didn't get married until after both our parents died.

T: Was that the 1960s then?

G: They died in 1963 and 1966, so it was after 1966. She was married, I think, in 1967. She married a boyfriend that she went with when we were little kids, and took nickels on Sunday to go down to the candy store.

T: When you were home, did you sometimes help your mom with the shopping?

G: Sure. Of course we had a store that was just a block away. We could just walk to the grocery store and get the stuff that we needed.

T: How did the war impact what was available to you?

G: Of course, you had all those ration cards back then. Fortunately, having as many in the family, you had a little bit more, but then you still bought carefully, meat especially. I remember sugar and flour were rationed. My mother baked, of course, all our bread and sweets all the time.

T: Was that a way of reducing the cost?

G: Saving. Sure.

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G: She had ways of making things out of nothing.

T: Can you think of an example there?

G: Warren knows. My mother made bread pudding, and he liked it with lemon sauce like his mother made. So my mother made it out of oranges (*laughs*). It was fine. It was an orange sauce. She thought she was doing him a favor, but he likes lemon sauce on his bread pudding to this day. But she could make anything. My dad was a hunter and so were my brothers, so anything you could hunt or fish, that's what we lived on.

T: Especially that replaced the meat?

G: Yes. She would even can pheasant, can them. You'd eat fish in summer and winter. We always had fish. Mud hens and duck, and I think we had squirrel. We had rabbit--anything you could hunt.

T: Did your mom can all this stuff, then?

G: No. That we ate; but she could make it taste so good. She was a good cook. You had to be with all of the kids.

T: Did your mom can more once the war started than she used to?

G: No. I think she canned all the time. She made peaches. We had a little cherry tree. She would have jams and jellies. We had a garden.

T: It didn't change so much?

G: No.

T: What do you remember your mom complaining about or worrying about most during these four years?

G: She never really complained about anything, but she worried about her kids all the time. I mean, it was that the kids were always okay and had everything they needed and wanted. She'd give everything she had so the kids could have it. That's the way it was. Her family, and to my dad, too, the family was it. I can remember when Jim was born and he came and said, "Oh, the first thing I ever looked at, the fingers were okay and the toes were all there." That was when he saw Jim. He was perfect. We had a lot of trouble. My older sister had smallpox and my brother had a mastoid ear. I remember her saying she didn't go to bed for three nights straight, never took her clothes off, because one was upstairs with smallpox and somebody else had a mastoid ear. And my older brother, of all things, he was older, he went down on the streetcar and had his tonsils taken out. Then came home on the streetcar. I can remember that part, because, boy oh boy, he could have bled to death. He was the oldest. He was the tough one.

T: Living in St. Paul here, you lived in the same area the whole time, '41 to '45.



G: Yes, until we got married. And then not too far away, because even when we got married his folks lived at 469 University Avenue. My oldest brother and his wife lived at 749 University, and they had a duplex. After the war it was hard to find a place to live. Well, then he separated. They had five and a half rooms upstairs where they lived. They divided it, and we got two rooms and an alcove where we had our bed, and a living room and the dining room turned into our kitchen.

T: So you remember how difficult it was to find a place to live?

G: Yes.

T: You two were married in 1946 and it was still difficult to find a place.

G: Yes. We didn't have a kitchen sink or anything, but there was the hallway and across was the bathroom. Of course, I was working all day, so to cook I had to get water from the bathroom and use it to do the dishes. It worked out fine.

T: But you were happy to have that as far as finding a place?

G: Yes. Our furniture was my mother's old davenport and we had an old refrigerator from his aunt. We got a new living room chair that we still have. It's been recovered three times. A rug from Warren's grandpa, I think. And we got a new kitchen set. My sister worked at Farrell, Osmon, and Kirk, which was a furniture store where she worked, and she got that for us. We had a few wedding presents that filled in.

T: Did you look for an apartment before you took this solution?

G: I think we thought about it, but then they offered it to us. Of course we didn't have the money because Warren was still working at the Omaha Railroad, but he didn't like it. Then we moved downstairs. The people downstairs got a divorce and moved out. Then we got five rooms and we stayed there until Jim was born in 1950. In 1953 we moved to a home of our own.

T: So four or five years?

G: Yes. We had a nice place. Got a second-hand dining room set.

T: That was close to where your folks were too, so it was nice to stay in the neighborhood.

G: Sure. And his folks were just down the street. I could walk down there with Jim in the stroller and visit. It worked out fine.

T: This community you lived in, this part of St. Paul or St. Paul in general, how do you perceive life changed as a result of the war? In a larger sense.

G: I think people valued their lives more. The war was over and things were back to a little bit of normalcy.

T: How about during the war itself? How did life in your neighborhood, or in St. Paul, seem to change once we were at war?

G: Of course, when I was at home before we were married, when my brother went into the service, there were a lot of neighbors that had boys, and they were friends of my brother. In fact, they all went in the service. One was in Africa. He came home at the end of the war. He was one of the few. I had a cousin that went in, but he was killed. It was really different not having any of the men that were in the neighborhood around, the boys we called them at that time. It was a big change when there was just the women around. You had to do more things, because the guys weren't there to do it. You walked or you rode a bike. That was about it.

**(1, A, 309)**

T: As far as transportation.

G: Yes. My dad had a car, and I did drive since I was sixteen. I could drive when you had the gas.

T: Now gas was rationed, right?

G: Yes.

T: And you felt that your family got enough gas for its needs?

G: Yes, because my dad took the streetcar to work, so he didn't use it for that. It was mostly to go to church. A lot of their friends lived in the neighborhood, so that's where you went back and forth. Even relatives lived not too far away, so if you had to drive, it was just maybe a mile or so. Friends of yours were closer. You didn't go miles like you do now. We used to have a theater just down on Rice Street, called the Bluebird Theater, which was seven blocks. You could walk to that, which we did as kids. We walked down to the theater.

T: You could actually live in your neighborhood.

G: Sure. And the stores. The grocery store. There were two of them just a block away or so.

T: Did you go to the movies much during the war years?

G: Yes, because it was ten cents or fifteen cents.

T: Cheap entertainment?

G: Yes. You didn't have a lot of things, really, to do. We did go out to Como a lot. They had community singing out at the park and we could walk up Front Street all the way to Como. It was a walk, but you're walking with three or four people. You didn't worry about walking in those days. If you went down Front Street, down to Rice Street, there were taverns on the corner. Nobody bothered you as you walked by them. Nobody bothered you. You could do most anything.

T: Things change, don't they?

G: Yes.

T: Do you feel that war helped to bring the community together?

G: Yes, I do. I really do, because everybody was concerned about your neighbor's children or husband. How everybody was getting along. If you needed anything.

T: Did people ask about people?

G: Oh, yes. All the time. Real concerned. When my brother was first missing in action, we didn't know where he was, if he was killed or not, and they came with a telegram. They delivered that personally. They didn't call you up or anything. And of course, then the next time they came, then you really thought, "Oh, oh. Here comes the word."

T: Were you home when the telegram was delivered?

G: Yes.

T: Do you remember that incident?

G: I can remember them walking. We had a driveway that the garage was way in the back. I can remember them walking up the driveway. We wondered, "Now what?" Naturally you think the worst.

T: Who was home when they came?

G: My mother of course. She was always home. So when they said that he was a prisoner, well we were happy because at least we knew he was alive. I think he thought, "What's the matter with these people?" But he didn't realize that the first we'd heard was that he was missing in action. Then later, after that, that's when we heard that Warren was shot, and didn't know exactly how bad that was.

T: Did you get a telegram first that said Warren was wounded?

G: I don't know. I'll ask Warren. *(to Warren)* Did your folks...?

Warren Gerber: Yes, they got a telegram saying I was seriously wounded in action. Luckily I got a chance to write home.

G: So a telegram.

T: So you were notified. You got a notification from Warren's folks that Warren had been wounded.

G: Right. I would go over to his folks' house maybe once a week, and I'd call his mother almost every day, because she had to know if I got a letter and what Warren had to say. If they didn't get a letter, then I'd tell them what I knew.

T: What was that like, waiting?

G: Well, you know. Then when he was injured, was shot, we didn't get any letters, but I still wrote every day hoping that he was getting a letter. Not until he was in England did he get the whole bag of mail with all my letters in it. Then my sister-in-law was living at our house, with our little nephew. So we both wrote at night. She wrote to her husband, Bob, and I wrote to Warren. He was good about writing. He couldn't write every day, but as often as he could. Then when he was in the hospital I heard from him all the time.

T: Was it difficult, the uncertainty about hearing someone is wounded, and not knowing what's going on?

G: Yes. Especially when he said he was just "nicked" in the side.

T: That's what he said?

G: Yes, that's what he said. And then later we found it really wasn't a little "nick." It was a big "nick."

**(1, A, 355)**

T: How did you handle having to wait and not knowing?

G: You think about it and, sure, you worry about it, but you hope that the Lord's going to bring him home, which He did. I think you have to have faith. That helps. Of course, everybody in the church knows him and knew he had been wounded, and there were so many other ones that were gone, too.

T: From your congregation?

G: Yes. So every Sunday there was usually a prayer for the service people, servicemen. It helps when there's more in the same situation that you're in. This is

what was going on, because somebody always had somebody that was wounded. Some of them had been shot and were killed. Everybody kind of came to each other's help.

T: Community, or especially the congregation?

G: The congregation and in the neighborhood.

T: Let me ask about your church. For the record, what church did you belong to? And do you belong to now?

G: Trinity Lutheran. Right now it's on Rice and Aurora. I have belonged there all my life. So has Warren.

T: You mentioned that there was a prayer every week for those who were not there. In what other ways did your church become involved in the war effort?

G: I know that they always had the names of all the soldiers that were in the service, and they had, I think there was even a plaque of some sort that had their names on it, or it was in the church bulletin. It would tell so-and-so was injured or something. Maybe a special prayer for them. So they were always helping out that way, as far as the parishioners and families.

T: From the pulpit, the ministers, did the message at church change, the sermons change during the war?

G: I think probably praying more and being diligent about praying. We tend to go off there when everything's going fine. You forget then.

### **End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 380**

T: Talking about your church again. You're right, it is easy to get away from things. Did the message become political at all? Support for our government or identifying an enemy, that you recall?

G: Well, they always tell you to support the government in what they do and say in our church. They don't really get too involved in politics because they don't feel, especially with our Synod, they don't especially feel that that's their job. It's to save souls and not the country, so to speak, but sure they prayed. We still have prayers on Sunday for the government and people in charge and that you should always feel well about the people that are in government, because that's what the Lord says. You pay unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. We aren't supposed to be complaining all the time about it, because that's the way it is. We tend to get away from that, too.

T: Do you remember any other types of activities that your church sponsored or participated in, things like rolling bandages or food drives or clothing drives or...?

G: I remember that people would bring sheets. They tore the sheets up for bandages and rolled them. I don't know if they went to the hospitals. I can recall that they did that. People would bring bedsheets that were still, you know, maybe had a tear or something, but then you could tear them up into bandages and they rolled them all up and then they would take those. They did whatever they could for the people. People that needed food and things they would help out there, especially on Thanksgiving. We always had a big collection of food. People brought food for that. A special offering. We still have a regular food shelf that we have in the back of the church every Sunday. Bring all the time, for the food shelf.

T: Let me ask about your family's financial situation. In general, do you think your family was better or worse off financially during the war?

G: I don't think it changed any really during the war. At that time my dad was working. So were the brothers. Everybody paid home. Not a big amount but what you could.

T: So you feel that the family was doing okay.

G: Yes. As far as we were concerned, we had whatever we needed. We weren't overrun with things, fancy things or anything, but you had the basics. We ate well. We did okay. We had an old car. It wasn't a new car, but it was a car. Other than that we did fine. I sewed a lot at home. My mother sewed a lot of things for us, clothes.

T: Much like growing up in the 1930s, or did that change?

G: No, actually she sewed from the time, I suppose from the time all of us were born. She made snowsuits for us and everything as we were growing up. Quilts. She made quilts all the time.

T: You mom didn't sleep much, did she? *(laughs)*

G: No *(laughs)*. She worked hard. She was a hard worker. And never complained. They were good parents. My dad was a lot of fun and every Sunday he'd sit at the dining room table. When Ruth and I, my sister and I, were kids he had curlers in his hair and we did everything to him. He didn't care. He just kept reading the paper.

T: Pretty stoic kind of a guy, wasn't he?

G: Yes.

T: Let me ask about your job a little bit. You went to work about the day after high school finished.

G: Yes.

**(1, B, 465)**

T: Was it hard to find a job at that time?

G: Not at that time, because we were told that they needed help at the [First National] bank [in St. Paul], and they asked if we wanted to go. They picked out about five of us girls that got a job down there. We all ended up in the bookkeeping division after a while. So, it worked out fine. We didn't make a lot of money.

T: Do you think you could have had another job had you wanted one? A different job?

G: You know, I never really gave it a thought. We never went to work while we were in school, because there was enough to do at home. We did babysit, but that's about it. I did some across the street from us and then next door when we were twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old. I guess I never gave it a thought, because it was just handed to us as far as a job. Mainly because all the men were gone. The war had been on already for two years. Most of the men were younger men at that bank, and the older ones were there yet. They'd been there for many years already.

T: Were you aware of the fact that your job used to be done by a man? In the bookkeeping division?

G: I'm sure it was, yes.

T: You worked in the bookkeeping office pretty long?

G: Yes.

T: Can you describe that job briefly?

G: It was the checking accounts that we took care of. The ones that had the checking accounts. You had a big ledger. For instance, I had the [letter] 'S's, and you would have to run them off on a statement. Then you had to run them off on just your ledger, so you had to do it twice actually. Then you had to balance the two sheets by the end of the day. You had to sort all the checks and put them all in order first. Then at the end of the month, when it was time for the statements to go out, you worked late. Sometimes it was seven o'clock at night. If you didn't balance, you still had to be there until it balanced. You had to run off a whole new ledger, because then you had to transfer your balance from the first ledger, that ended that month, to the new ledger. You had to do that, and that had to balance.

T: Were you hourly or salaried?

G: Salaried, by the month. I think I started at sixty dollars a month. We didn't have to punch a clock or anything. Once you got your work all done in the morning, which was when you run off your statements and your ledger, then you could go to lunch. Then they had what they called sorters, who had these big bins that sorted all incoming checks for all of the books. We had twenty or thirty-some different areas. Then there were country banks, too, that had accounts at the First National. Then when you came back from lunch, then you had to do all your sorting, and then you had to file away all the checks from the morning, because they had to be stamped "paid." You'd maybe get through, depending on how long it took you to do all this, when it was the end of the day. When the work was in from the proof department, then you could go home. So sometimes it was three thirty and sometimes later. End of the month it might get into seven o'clock.

T: How many people worked in this particular office that you were in?

G: In the bookkeeping office, we had the main boss and two other fellas there and another lady that was up at the desk in the front. But there must have been twenty or thirty people, or maybe a little more. It was a big room with all these bookkeeping machines.

T: You were the 'S's, someone else was the 'T's. How many people were women in this office?

G: All but three. The men were up in the front. The boss and two other ones. Then eventually, I even got the one job up in the front. One lady was on the country banks. But there were three men to start with.

**(1, A, 535)**

T: And were there ever any men working as bookkeepers, like yourself?

G: No, not when I was there. The men were in the proof department. That was where they did all the checks and ran it through. Then it came into our department; so they were out there using the adding machines and they would have to run those all through. There were a lot of men in there, but most of them were older men who had been there for a long time.

T: So you didn't see a lot of men, say in the twenty to forty age group?

G: No.

T: Had they been there before you started?



G: I'm sure they were. They went in the service.

T: Women or older men were taking their places.

G: Right. There were some older women in there, too, that were working downstairs. On the main banking floor were all men in the cages. The tellers.

T: How did the war impact your daily routine at work? Was there a way of knowing that the war was going on at work?

G: Yes, because people would ask. The older fellas knew if you had a boyfriend or someone, and they'd ask how you were doing and how they were. There was one older gentleman that was very nice. He would be the one, they'd have to come in and check the signatures on all the checks because they knew them well. I knew them, too, but they would have to give their approval on them. He was a real nice fella. In fact, his son used to live behind us. Kritchoff was his name. He would come in and he had flowers, and he knew that I liked flowers. Every so often he would bring a little flowers and put it on my desk. He was a real nice fella. He was older. He would always ask how Warren was, and what do you hear and all that. They were very nice, all of them, in that other office that we had to walk through to get to our department.

T: You mentioned the stamps and bonds at school. Were there similar things at your place of work?

G: You could buy your bonds in the bank. We never got a check, we were paid with a checking account. At the end of the month a deposit was put into our account. That's how we got paid. We didn't have to cash a check or do anything. You knew that your check was going to be in there. It saved the bank money not putting checks out.

T: Were you encouraged to participate in bond drives at work?

G: Oh, sure. They would talk it up. Everything helped, they said. "You should be buying these and putting it away." We did that. We had some. In fact, years ago we changed them to the H Bonds series because the E Bonds had matured. You didn't get any more interest after a certain number of years. So you could just transfer them over to an H Bond.

T: Did people seem to want to participate in these bond drives at work, or do you remember a sense of pressure to participate?

G: No, I think they wanted to. A lot of people gave them as gifts to your kids. I know the one neighbor up the street always gave them to their kids and still bought them after the war.

T: How did your job change during the war? Did your responsibilities change beyond the bookkeeping office, or did your job stay pretty much the same?

G: The main boss retired, because he was older. The second one moved to his desk and the third one moved to the other one. Then I got that job at the desk where you'd call if somebody was overdrawn on their accounts. I'd help to balance the accounts, if the bookkeepers had problems of any kind.

T: So it was a promotion for you?

G: Yes.

T: Were you accepted by your male supervisors as equal even though you were female?

G: Yes, they were great, those two guys. Hoffmann and Walter. They were fine. They didn't look down or anything that you were a woman. It was okay.

T: Elaine, how did you get to work?

G: The streetcar.

**(1, A, 604)**

T: Which streetcar line did you take?

G: From home on Western Avenue, we had what they called a dummy line, that only went from Lawson, a block north of where we lived, down to Como Avenue, which was about eight blocks. Then we got the Como-Harriet line, and that went right downtown. It came about every twenty minutes. It was no problem.

T: You had probably ridden that streetcar for a lot of years even before the war, right?

G: Yes.

T: Were the crowds heavier on the streetcar once the war started?

G: Yes, there were a lot of them on there. I think a lot of the women were getting rides. Then when we lived on University as well, I still rode the streetcar to work. It was fine. You could sit and relax. That's the same thing they're trying to do now. Here we've had the streetcar.

T: Yes, now putting them back in is being discussed.

G: Now people think streetcars are something new.

T: Biggest mistake we ever made, allowing them to be taken out in the 1950s.

G: That's right. That they took those off [was a mistake], because we went all the way to Wildwood. The streetcar ran out to White Bear [Lake, northeast of St. Paul]. It went all over. No problem, and not expensive, either.

T: Let me skip ahead a little bit. We talked a little bit about your church and an average day. Let me ask about your neighborhood. In what ways was your neighborhood different, let's say, in 1945 than in 1941?

G: A lot of the brothers were gone. Our neighbors had older boys that were gone and just the women home. Other than that, I don't think it changed that much. They were all concerned, of course. You were concerned about the brothers that were gone, how long they were going to be gone, and if they did come, it was nice to see them for a while and visit with them. Everybody was friendly in the neighborhood. There were about three of our families that all had a lot of kids, and one of them was across the street, not next door but the next street over. They had six or seven, and a block away there was another with seven of them. We all had somebody our age and everybody just did things together. If you were going to go out to Rice Street to go swimming or something, you had a car full and you took them.

T: When bad news came from overseas about someone's husband, or son, or brother, did the neighborhood respond as a neighborhood?

G: They would call, especially the closer friends that you had in the neighborhood. We had lots of friends that were real close with my folks. They'd play cards together and things like that, or they had the ladies that had the afternoon where they'd get together. They'd call and ask, and I think they would have to bring something over. They would bring things, food, different stuff. Always very concerned. Everybody was really concerned for everybody else.

T: A close-knit community it sounds like.

G: Yes, it was. It was very nice.

T: Did people put the gold stars in their windows? Did you ever see those?

G: Yes.

T: Let me jump ahead to 1945. Do you remember when President Roosevelt died in April of 1945?

G: I remember when it happened, but I don't remember exactly how I felt about it. My folks were Republicans, and at that time they were a little bit discouraged with

the president, so I wasn't taken aback that much. I was young enough, I was twenty at that time, that I wasn't thinking about it that much.

T: You couldn't vote until you were twenty-one, right?

G: No.

T: Your folks didn't seem to react one way or the other?

**(1, A, 658)**

G: No. I'm sure they felt bad to think a president would die. I know I had an aunt that really thought he was the greatest in the world. That was my mother's aunt that thought that. They thought, "Why does she think that? He's not doing so good," or something to that effect. That would come out every once in a while. I'm sure that they felt that it's too bad that somebody would have to die, a president especially.

T: Did you and your folks, because your brothers were in the service, did you follow the news of the war closely, or not so much?

G: They would have the radio on all the time, my folks. Very much so. I don't know why you would sit around it, because you'd think you were looking at it, but that's the way people would listen to the radio. They would listen to it all the time to get the news. And we got a paper.

T: And your dad read the paper, you said earlier.

G: Oh, yes.

T: Did your folks seem aware of the kind of progression of the war effort? What was going on in the Pacific and in Europe?

G: Yes, they pretty much did. With my brother being in there, that worried them, so they really watched. We did hear from him. We got V-mail. Many times there would be parts cut out of it. They would take pieces out of it, or you'd have a letter with several things cut out of it, so that you'd wonder what he did say. He wrote as much as he could while he was in. We wrote to him. I was writing to Warren. My sister, Ruth, would write to my brother because she didn't have a boyfriend at the time. She was writing to him all the time.

T: When your brother was shot down [over Germany] and missing in action, how long was it before you heard he was actually alive?

G: I don't remember for sure.

T: But some time went by between you heard he was missing and when he was a POW.

G: Yes. Missing in action was in 1944. We must have heard not too terribly long after, maybe a month or a little longer, because I remember being at Warren's mother's house, and at that time he was still missing. Then we heard about Warren after that.

T: When he was missing in action, who took this harder, your mom or your dad?

G: My mother. She and my sister had flown out to California when he got his wings. [They took the train out there.]

T: They went all the way out there?

G: Yes. Then I stayed home and cooked.

T: They were proud of him.

G: Oh, yes, very much so. All of the kids. They were always proud of everybody no matter what they did.

T: So your mom took it harder than your dad?

G: Yes, I think so.

T: How did she display that it was hard on her?

G: She tended to have nerve problems. She had a couple of nervous breakdowns. Not real serious, but I remember that my sister and I stayed home from school. We took every other day just for a short time, and then she was okay. Just to be with her, because my dad of course was working. It was really hard on her if anything happened to the kids. No matter what happened to us. It was hard on her.

**(1, B, 706)**

T: So this thing with your brother must have been especially hard. Not knowing.

G: Yes. "My kids are so good. I'm not good enough for them." That sort of thing she would say. It wasn't true, of course; she was a good mother. And [my dad was a] good father too. We had good folks.

T: Warren went overseas in 1944, right?

G: Yes.

T: And he was home in 1944 briefly, before he went overseas?

G: Yes.

T: And then you two were engaged.

G: Yes.

T: So you were writing pretty frequently to each other, I imagine?

G: Yes. All the time.

T: Who was the better letter writer?

Warren: Not me (*laughs*). Really.

G: I don't know. I wrote every day.

T: When you write every day, what kind of things do you write about?

G: You write about some of the things in the day, but you don't want to make him think that you're having a great time without him! (*laughs*)

T: How do you do that?

G: You want to let him know how much you miss him and how much you love him. That's what they wait for.

Warren Gerber: When you get a letter and you're supposed to respond to it, you do. But you can't tell them where you are. You can't tell them how the weather is. You can't tell what division you're in, and what it's like. There isn't too much you can say.

G: He wrote. I got letters from him. I never saved them. I can't remember what I did with them. I must have gotten rid of them. I always felt, don't save anything that you don't want anybody else to read. And that's the way I felt. I wouldn't say anything in them that I didn't think should be spread around. I would tell him, because he knew a lot of the girls at a work, what we did at work. What you did that day. It was just kind of like a diary. What you did in the daytime.

If I went to see his mother and dad, his dad always brought me home. It wasn't too far, but he'd drive me home then. I'd go there once a week, maybe, and visit with them, because Warren was an only child and there was nobody else around, other than his grandma and aunt that lived downstairs. She was always anxious. She had hurt her ankle or sprained it or did something, so for a while she was kind of laid up and couldn't get around too well. So I would go there after work. I would just take the University streetcar then. It was no big deal.

**(1, B, 740)**

T: Did you look forward to getting mail from Warren?

G: It was when I got home from work that it would be there. Then I'd call and talk to his mother almost every day from work, because I could go in the mailroom and use the phone. I would ask her if she had heard and then I'd find out if I had a letter when I got home, or I'd have to tell her what went on in the one I got from him the day before if I did, so that she would know what was going on. I didn't dare say I got too many, because she wouldn't like that.

T: You got more than she did?

G: (laughs) I got more than she did.

T: Politics enters into everything, doesn't it?

G: Oh, does it ever!

T: The first news you got from Warren that he had been wounded in action--that was a letter from him?

G: No. His mother and dad got it first, and then they told me.

T: Then his parents got the telegram from the military. How did you react to seeing the telegram from the military?

G: That was okay, because he'd already written. We had already heard. Then his dad, I don't know who he talked to, had found out more about how he was hurt or shot. His father was a policeman, and he knew somebody that was in the veterans, or I don't know what it was.

T: So you got some inside news.

G: We got some inside news somehow. He talked to someone and found out more about it.

T: Some inside connection got you more news that you might normally have.

G: Yes, more than what we got from the government itself. When he was in the hospital down in Iowa, in Clinton, Iowa, then his mother and I went to see him. *(pauses three seconds)* It would have been in, Warren came home in 1945, it was before he came home. He was still in the hospital down in Clinton, Iowa.

T: Was that early 1945, then?

G: I think it was.

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

T: You were talking about Warren being in the hospital. When did he arrive at Clinton, Iowa?

G: That I don't know for sure exactly. It had to be in 1945 some time, March or April. He was in a hospital in New York for a month first.

G: So then we took the train down.

T: Was that quite a journey?

G: Oh, all night long. We stopped at every little cow town there was. We sat up, of course, in the seat, so we didn't get to sleep. And then to try and get a hotel room down there was terrible. We had some big storage room, or something or other that we had.

T: Where is Clinton, Iowa?

G: I don't really know either.

Warren: I'll have to look at the map now. It's in the southern part of Iowa.

G: We were there just overnight. We visited Warren and then we came home on the train again, his mother and I.

T: That's the first time you'd seen Warren...

G: Since he was shot.

T: About a year, then?

G: Oh, yes.

T: Can you describe what it was like to see him again?

G: Great! *(laughs)*

T: I guess you were a little worried up until then?

G: By then he had written a little more to say what had happened but, you know, when somebody tells you they're shot through the back you have no idea how bad or what it looks like and what the hole on the side was like and stuff like that. We



were just happy to see him. I was real happy to see him. And his mother, of course, so I had to take the backseat for a little while so his mother took over.

T: There's politics again, right?

G: You've got to make an impression, you know *(both laugh)*.

T: Sure. What did you talk about after Warren had been through an experience like that? What did you find yourself talking about?

G: He didn't talk an awful lot about it. He never really did, other than to say that his back would hurt. He'd have to have the hotpad on or something. That was even after we were married. He never really wanted to talk too much about the service. It seems that a lot of the soldiers were like that. My brother didn't want to talk about anything.

T: Your pilot brother?

G: Yes. He didn't want to talk about it. He talked a little bit and then that would be it; he wouldn't say any more. Warren told me a lot of the things that went on, but it really wasn't until [our son] Jim said, "I want to know what happened and how you did it, and what you did." Then it finally came out. I think a lot of them want to wait years before they say anything, before they finally feel that they can talk about it. Because it isn't the nicest thing to be in a war, and killing and being shot at, and things like that. It's not an easy thing to talk about. So, I guess we didn't talk that much about it. We had plans by that time, thinking about getting married. He wanted to get married and his mother didn't really want us to get married that soon. So we had to at least wait a year, which we did, until the war was over. So we had to delay it [until 1946]. If he'd had his way, we'd have been married before that, because he says he's been married since he was seven anyway *(laughs)*.

T: So you stayed only a couple of days down there in Clinton, Iowa, wherever this place is.

G: It's kind of a cow town. I mean it's just a farm town, I think.

T: Was it a military hospital?

G: Yes. But I don't know if I even saw the hospital.

Warren: Yes, you came to the hospital.

G: To see you, to start with.

T: So you got back to St. Paul and it wasn't long after that the war in Europe ended. What do you remember about getting that news? May 8, 1945.

G: That was great to hear that they had signed all the papers and everything was over with. Germany first in May, and then Japan. That was really good news. Everybody was happy with that news.

T: I was going to ask you about a couple of places here. First, your place of work. How did people at your workplace respond to that news of the surrender?

G: Great. They thought that was great. A lot of the fellas came back, too. They came back to their jobs, but then they seemed to have better jobs than when they left because the gals had all the jobs now that were sort of mediocre.

T: Like the bookkeeping job, you mean?

G: Yes.

T: So the fellows didn't want those jobs back?

G: I don't think so. By that time, a lot of the older ones were probably going to retire from being tellers and stuff, so then they got some of those jobs.

T: Did some of the fellas come back to the bookkeeping office?

G: No, not that I remember. I don't remember any of them coming back into the bookkeeping, running any of the bookkeeping machines.

T: A couple of questions about your place of work. Were there any kind of parties or celebrations at work on the day of the German or Japanese surrender that you remember?

G: No. Not that I remember.

T: How did your place of work change 1945-46, as it became a peacetime economy again?

G: I don't think it changed. It changed, of course, as far as the people that were starting to work. Now they were getting more college graduates that probably didn't get into the service. And servicemen were coming back and taking jobs. Back before then they were probably like I was. I got to work before that, right out of school.

T: You went right out of high school.

G: Yes. So you didn't have to have a college degree. But now, pretty soon the college ones were getting through, some of them that didn't have to go in the service, because you could get deferred if you were in college.

T: Did your pay increase when the war ended? Did you notice an impact in your pocketbook?

G: It increased, but when I left in the '50s they were starting with what I was leaving with (*laughs*).

T: Really? So there was a definite change.

G: Yes. Like a \$140 or a \$160 a month then.

T: And you started at sixty you told me, right? That's a big change.

G: Yes. They were already going to make that kind of money to start.

**(2, A, 135)**

T: Let me ask about your neighborhood and how your neighborhood celebrated the end of the war in Europe or in Japan?

G: When the boys were coming home, that was big. You really enjoyed all of that. Happy to have them back home. Almost every one of them in the neighborhood did come back home. The friends of my brother, nobody had been shot or injured even. They all seemed to come back home in one piece.

T: That's fortunate.

G: I know the one fellow is still living and is a good friend. In fact, his sister is a very good friend of mine. We grew up together. I was in her wedding and she was in our wedding. Her brother was a good friend of my brother's. All of those boys came home. I think that Nordquist, the one that was in North Africa, he's died since then. They all came back home, which is kind of unusual.

T: It is if you just think of the numbers. The odds are that somebody would get hurt or killed. Was there any kind of an impromptu neighborhood celebration or a party that you remember on V-E Day or V-J Day?

G: No. I think everybody was just happy in their own self and their own family. Just to be back together again when they all came home. I know when Herb was coming home we were all waiting. We knew he was coming, but he didn't come in the door and you're waiting, waiting. Pretty soon he came in with his little satchel.

T: Do you remember when your brother came home?

G: Yes.

T: When was that? How soon after the war ended? Herb was the one in the prison camp, right?

G: Yes. I think he came home in 1945.

T: Can you describe the day? Did you know in advance he was coming on that day?

G: Yes. He said, either a letter or whatever it was, that he would be coming home that day. He was getting discharged and that he would be coming home. So we were just waiting for him to come up the steps.

T: Do you remember the way he actually arrived?

G: We all, the ones who were home, my mother and my dad and my sister, we all ran to grab him. He was awfully thin because he had really lost weight [in the POW camp]. He was happy to get home. He didn't have a girlfriend at the time because he didn't get married til later on. He had us all writing to him all the time. My sister especially wrote to him. It was nice to have him home.

T: Your mom must have been...

G: Oh, yes. She was pretty happy to get the whole family back.

**(2, A, 175)**

T: You had two brothers in the service. Was he the second one to come home or the first one?

G: He was the first one I think. Did Bob come home first? I can't remember. Bob was married and had his family.

T: He didn't leave the States, right?

G: No. Bob was in Ordinance, so he didn't go overseas. Herb did, of course, as a pilot and then a POW. He talked about how they had to melt the skating rink or something or other to drink the water and stuff like that. What kept him alive was the Red Cross packages. He said that's what kept them alive in the prison camp.

T: How long was he a POW?

G: Thirteen months. A prisoner.

T: One more question about St. Paul. Do you remember any kind of celebrations in downtown St. Paul that you went to?

G: I kind of thought that there was a parade or something after the war.

T: After some of the guys came back?

G: Yes. I thought there was sort of a parade. We always had the Winter Carnival Parade and they had a parade. I'm sure they had a parade that time after the war.

T: Winter 1945-46?

G: Yes.

T: Any parties or celebrations that you remember on V-E Day or on V-J Day?

G: No, I don't remember that we had any. Just that you could, by then some people had television, you could go and see television. I remember you could see the signing. They showed the picture when they signed the document.

T: Did shopping for your household, because you were still living at home, did that change or become easier with the war being over?

G: We didn't have ration books any more. That was over with, so you could at least go and buy what you wanted, or buy more gas and things. That was better. Meat was always kind of rationed at the time. And then, for a big family, although back then fifty cents worth of pork chops could feed a big family. With the butcher shop we had up the corner, you could get as much as you wanted then. So it changed as far as your groceries, or just about anything.

T: There was more availability?

G: Yes.

T: The US dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, on August 6<sup>th</sup> and August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945. At the time, did you feel that the US Government was correct to use atomic weapons against Japan?

G: At the time I thought it was okay. I really think it's still okay. At least it brought the war to an end. What they did to us in Pearl Harbor, they didn't really care either. I mean we always say, "You're killing innocent people," but they did the same thing. I guess war is war. Bombing I can go along with. I don't go along with the business of sending down biological weapons. That I can't see. Or the gases that they were afraid of World War I and II.

T: That crosses a certain line for you?

G: Right, because if a bomb is coming down, you're going to get killed. If you get gassed, you're going to have it the rest of your life where you're going to suffer. I don't think that that's right. I don't go along with that.

T: In conclusion, if you think about the war experience for you in high school and as a person in the working world, as a sister with two brothers and a boyfriend in the war, too, what did the war mean for you personally during those four years when it was going on?

G: I thought it was actually the right thing to be in because of what could have happened. It could have gotten a lot worse. You had to really defend your country and defend everything that was important to you in the long run. If you were to think of Hitler and the Japanese coming and taking away all your rights and privileges and your religion and all that sort of thing... It could have gone down the drain had you not defended it. I mean, it was a whole different ball of wax. Really, when you think about it, it had to be done.

T: How do you reflect on it now, fifty-seven years after it's over?

G: I think that it has changed the whole world really, that that happened. And certainly it was for the good of the country and for the people. I think it almost had to be done.

T: In a personal sense, in what ways did the war change or alter your life do you think?

G: I think being the way things turned out it, made you realize that there are very important things and very important people to you. You have to thank the Lord for a lot of things that happened. It really made you think about what you should be thankful for. And not being always material things. Material things come and go. Not important.

T: Good point. Nice way to end things. Anything else you want to add?

G: No, it was very enjoyable.

T: Thank you for the interview.

**END OF INTERVIEW**