

Interviewee: Velda Beck

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 15 September 2001

Location: living room of the Beck home, Cloquet, MN

Transcribed by: Kimberly Johnson, July 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, August 2002

Velda Beck was born 22 December 1925 on a farm in rural Hand County, South Dakota. She lived there with her parents and siblings until 1934, when the drought of the Dust Bowl years forced her parents to abandon the homestead and leave the area. For the next ten years, 1934-44, they rented farms in the Palisade, Minnesota, area, before purchasing a farm in Eagle Bend, Minnesota, in 1944. Velda attended school in South Dakota, then in Palisade, Minnesota; she graduated from high school there in 1943.

After high school, Velda moved to Duluth, Minnesota, and worked 1943-44 as a nurse's aide at a city hospital. By this time she had met James Beck, also of Palisade, then serving with the US Army in Italy. When Jim was posted stateside in early 1944, to Camp Wheeler, Georgia, Velda moved to Macon, Georgia, where the couple was married in July 1944.

Velda and Jim remained in Macon for one year, until Jim's discharge from the Army in July 1945. During this twelve month period Velda worked as an administrative assistant at Robinson Field (United States Army Air Force), and later for a local manufacturer.

From 1945-47 the Becks lived in Minneapolis; Velda did office work for Auto Service Industries, and Jim completed a course of study at Dunwoody Institute. The couple then lived and worked in several smaller Minnesota towns before settling in Cloquet in 1950. After this time Velda stayed home and raised two children, working only part-time. James Beck died in October 2001.

Velda has been active in the Auxiliary of VFW Post 3979, Cloquet, for more than fifty years, and has held several offices at both state and regional level. She is also active in her church, Zion Lutheran of Cloquet, and enjoys several hobbies.

Interview key:

V = Velda Beck

T = Thomas Saylor

[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 15th of September, 2001. This is side one of the interview with Velda Beck. First Ms. Beck, I want to thank you very much for taking time out of your day to sit down for the conversation. So, thank you very much.

V: Oh, glad to have you here.

T: Well, let's start with the question about where you were born and when.

V: Yes, I was born in Hand County, in South Dakota, on December 22, 1925.

T: Is that a farming region?

V: Yes, it is. Today they have big, huge farms and many of the small farms are disappearing and they're joining into other farmsteads. Buildings are standing, perfect buildings are standing idle, which is very sad in that area of South Dakota. We go back each year pheasant hunting and I'd see changes all the time.

T: Was that mostly wheat farming or cattle?

V: Well, it was corn and wheat and, of course, beef cattle. We did have some milk cows and hogs. My father lost everything during the drought. In 1934 we moved to Minnesota as an opportunity to get away from there. He lost all his cattle; they were starved, starving to death. It was dust storms, terrible, terrible dust storms.

T: Do you remember some of those?

V: Oh yes. My dad would come and get us with the horse and buckboard. He'd have to tie a cloth around his face and he'd get the horses over there and he'd cover us up. We'd get back home we'd be covered with dust. It was just like night.

T: Really, it was kind of dark outside?

V: Oh, it was. Yes, the dark. And my mother would be so unhappy because even with the windows closed, there would be about two or three inches of dust on all the windowsills that she'd have to clean off.

T: So fine particles of dust.

V: Right, and then it would just go up over the fences til an animal could walk right over the fence. It had built up just that firm.

T: Really, that deep it was. Wow. A number of people affected by the drought in North Dakota, South Dakota about then went west, and your folks decided not to, instead they actually came east a bit.

V: Well yes, some old friends--that were born in the same area where my parents were--they wanted to move to northern Minnesota. They lived in Alexandria, Minnesota, and my parents came as caretaker for the winter months until this family could move up. And we liked it so much, it was just like heaven to us, it was always green. The people who lived here thought it was very dry and brown, but to us here were all the green trees and it was just... I still love it. I still love Minnesota because I think it is a beautiful state.

T: Now that was in '34, '35, your folks came over here?

V: They came in 1934, in October 1934.

T: And did you have some siblings, too?

V: My older brother was four years older and then a little tagalong came thirteen years later, my younger brother.

T: Now this farm, it was near Palisade, Minnesota [a small town in north central Minnesota], right?

V: Right. Yes, we had started out with a small farm and my dad had to get a government loan so he could buy his cows and had a little bad luck. They all got Bangs disease [Brucellosis: causes premature calving and difficulty rebreeding] and he had to ship them away. Then he got another herd and then we were invited to, by an owner that lived in California, to move to another farm that was around 960 acres. My mother had around one thousand chickens and we sold a hatchery and the cows; I think we had forty milking cows, which was considered quite a bit at that time.

T: This was another farm but also in Palisade, Minnesota?

V: Right, it's not far from there.

T: And the owner of the farm you mentioned was pretty far away.

V: Yes. So he wanted all the heifer calves born and my dad could keep the bull calves. We were always afraid that it would be more bull calves born than heifers

because we could ship the bulls for they were, oh what do you call it, the meat that you get that is so expensive now?

T: The beef?

V: No, no.

T: Veal?

V: Veal, right, they would be veal calves, yeah. So we could feed them milk, excess milk, and then we shipped the cream.

T: How long did your folks rent farms in the Palisade, Minnesota, area?

V: They were there for ten years and eventually they ended up at Eagle Bend on a small farm. They purchased that farm and then my dad and mother both worked out [off the farm]. It was more like a hobby farm.

T: I see. So for about ten years they were renting farms.

V: Right, yes.

T: Did you move with them to Eagle Bend, Minnesota?

V: No, I didn't. By that time I was married. It was in 1944 that I had quit working. I worked at St. Luke's Hospital following graduation from high school. My husband and I were already engaged, but my folks wanted to go back to South Dakota for a little visit, and so I was going to go with them. And I did go. And then I got the letter from my husband saying, "Let's get married now," so I hopped on the train and ended up in Macon, Georgia!

T: *(laughs)* We've talked about Macon, Georgia, already!

V: *(laughing)* Yeah, two days and two nights and stood up for the first five hundred miles. There was no place to sit down.

T: Now, you mentioned graduating from high school. Did you graduate from high school in Palisade area?

V: In Aitkin [Minnesota].

T: That was where the high school was?

V: Right.

T: Did you take the bus there [to high school] every day?

V: Yes, the first two years, when we lived at this big farm, I had to work my room and board. Then we lived just a half mile out of Palisade and from there it was so nice, I could take the bus and I met long-lasting friends by riding the bus. I'd get on the bus at six o'clock and ride for two hours to get to Aitkin.

(1, A, 117)

T: Two hours? Picking up other kids on the way?

V: That's right.

T: Wow, and two hours back, obviously, after school?

V: Right.

T: That made for some long days.

V: Yes, and then you still had to help on the farm, too. Of course, not at six o'clock in the morning, I just usually got my parents breakfast set up and ready. But at night there was work to be done.

T: Yeah, sure. Sounds so different from the way kids live today.

V: Yes.

T: Yes. Well, let me get to the next question then: On the 7th of December, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was attacked, you were just about sixteen years of age.

V: Yes, right, yes.

T: Do you remember where you were when you heard the news?

V: Yes, I was sitting at the kitchen table doing my homework. [My folks] were out in the barn.

T: Did you have the radio on?

V: Yes, that's all we had, we had no television of course then at that time.

T: So you were doing your homework with the radio on?

V: *(laughs)* Yes! Well, you can do a lot of things, you know, all at once. Especially when you're a woman, you can have your mind a lot of places.

T: How did you react when you heard that bit of news?

V: Oh, I was really frightened and I ran and told my parents. The first thing in my mind was my brother who was four years older. I knew that he'd be going in the service. I wondered about my dad. As it was, my dad and my brother both went to the, what do you call it, the draft board, and registered. My dad I think was A-4, I think, was it A-4 that he rated? And my brother was A-1. So the day that my husband was marching in this parade, my brother and several others, I think there was about seventeen of them, were marching in the parade, and there were all going to go at the same time, and leave, and go to Fort Snelling [in Minneapolis].

T: Right. Did your brother go to the service then?

V: That's right.

T: What branch of the service did he join?

V: He was in the medical corps. And he never did get overseas. He was injured, oh I don't know, about six months after, about the time he probably would have been sent. And so he got a job, I think he was driving ambulance or something like that, I'm not sure just what, I forget what he did, but something in that line.

T: Okay, so your reaction was to worry about your brother and maybe even your dad.

V: Yes, right, and of course we had a lot of dear, dear friends that were a little older than me that we kept. From being in these different neighborhoods we met a lot of young men and I thought of them right away, and so, I wrote a lot of letters. I started writing letters and this one young, young man, I think I probably had a crush on him when I was about ten years old. His name was Whitey, and he always said, "You save a dance for me!" Then I get this letter saying, "I'm sorry, I won't be able to dance with you, because my legs were just all shot up."

T: So he was overseas

V: Yes, he was

T: And he was badly wounded. Did he come back to the area then?

V: Yeah, he did come back to that Palisade area, yep.

T: Now how did your folks react when you told them the news, or they heard it or read it?

V: Well, it was hard for them because they had been at a young age when they experienced World War I. My dad of course was eighteen at the time when the armistice was signed. He was on the train ready to take off for camp when the

armistice was signed, so he never did have to serve. But he would have been ready to go.

T: Would you describe your folks' reactions, your dad and mom, as angry, nervous, worried...?

V: I think nervous and worried; not angry, no. Of course they were angry, I suppose at the Germans and the way that they were taking over the countries. They had already knew about that. And my dad had said, I just bet you there's going to be war.

T: So he wasn't completely surprised you don't think?

V: No, no, no. They were, always kept up with the news and were on it, you know. They knew what was going on.

T: Now you were still in high school. When did you graduate from high school?

V: In 1943.

T: '43. Did you have, were you working also during high school, I mean off the farm, or just on the farm?

V: No, the only time I would have worked was when I was working for my room and board; when I had to live in Aitkin.

T: So you lived with another family then?

V: Right, I was like a maid. Very hard work; worked overtime a lot. I lived with a very prominent family and they did a lot of entertaining with many course and I had all this crystal to wash. I was young for my class, cause I started when I was five, so I was probably pretty immature to be doing that, but...

T: Because your birthday's in December, right?

V: Yes, I learned a lot from taking care of their needs.

T: How'd you end up in a position like that? How did you get this maid and room and board position?

V: I believe, if I remember right, I think my folks must have kind of paved the way that way. They must have gone to the high school and said, is there someplace where my daughter can work and still go to school? But, I really don't remember how I got that position. I didn't always like it because they didn't want to always let me go home, even on holidays.

T: They wanted you almost round the year?

V: Well, not in the summer months, but just during school year.

(1, A, 203)

T: That's still end of August to June there, right?

V: That's right.

T: So you worked for room and board there. Did you work before you went to school too, and then after when you were doing as a maid?

V: No, I just worked on the farm, 'cause we had the big farm and there's a lot of work to be done. Canning and gardening and all the things that a farm wife has to do... and gathering eggs from one thousand chickens, you got a lot of eggs.

T: By hand.

V: By hand! And then we had to candle the eggs; they had to be a certain quality or the pantry wouldn't take them.

T: When you finished high school in 1943, what were your thoughts, what were your plans then?

V: Well, I knew I had to get on my own. I could, I suppose, have stayed home like many young women did at that time; they just waited around to see if somebody would get... I guess in those days, the most opportunity was to get married, have a family, be a farm wife. I suppose it's what I would have been. But I thought I'd like to try my experience to go into nursing, so I went to St. Luke's Hospital and got a job in the operating room as an aide. Just to get the feel of what it would be like to be a nurse. But of course, after meeting my husband and corresponding with him, he came home on R&R long before I thought he was going to, and we got engaged. Well it just seemed like all my plans changed, my priorities changed.

(1, A, 224)

T: And your husband, Jim, was in the Army and had been in the Army since 1939, and he was home on furlough in 1943 when you graduated

V: In '42

T: In '42. You met him in '42, right.
Velda, where is St. Luke's Hospital?

V: That's in Duluth, Minnesota.

T: Were you living in Duluth then after high school?

V: I was, I was. I lived in a one-room and there was this lady needed the money and I ate all my meals at the hospital then.

T: So you were working full time at the hospital?

V: Oh yes, yes.

T: So you lived in Duluth for about a year?

V: Yes.

T: '43, middle '43 to mid '44. Okay. That time in Duluth, did you see your folks very much?

V: Oh, yes. I used to come home on the train or the bus. I'd haul my suitcase about twenty blocks to the train and then they'd meet me in Palisade. If I took the bus, then they'd meet me in McGregor [a town in northern Minnesota].

T: Living in Duluth during the war, could you tell from your daily life that the country was at war?

V: Oh, yes. See, we had the Coast Guard there too and we also had the USO. We'd go to a certain area where we'd dance with the fellas. I have a picture even of that.

T: Of you at the USO?

V: Yes.

T: Now, the USO, was that downtown Duluth?

V: Yes, it was. I think it was an Oddfellows Hall or someplace downtown. There was no drinking or anything like that; it was all clean. You were chaperoned and many of the nurses who were student nurses also went.

T: Was that a popular place to hang out?

V: Well, yes it was. I suppose you could say we were having fun while everyone else was having difficult times when they were overseas. And that was the way it was in the United States, you did what you could for the war effort. I always felt the morale of the troops was so important, too, writing letters and being [part of the USO]

T: On the subject of employment, you worked at the hospital for a year. Do you think you might have stayed with that career had you not met your husband?

V: I'm sure I would have. 'Cause I like working with people. I like what I can do to make them feel more comfortable, and I guess I have a feeling for people.

T: That's good. Now once you met Jim in '42, and you two were corresponding, there's also a story about some cookies that got sent, right?

V: Oh, yes.

T: Maybe you could share that with us?

V: Oh yes, course there was rationing in those days and we had very little sugar and so my mother could get Karo syrup and of course just a little bit of sugar. So we'd take just a little bit of the sugar out of a cup and put it in another container, a jar, and then when we got so much in there then we'd take that and bake something else with it. When my mother said, now Jimmy, him, he would like to have some cookies, I just know he would, so why don't you take that old recipe that was my great-grandmother's recipe and it's got ground-up raisins and it doesn't take much sugar and so we'll make them up and they should stay pretty fresh because they got the raisins in and send them over. And then. mean time. he was sent home from Anzio [Italy] beachhead and so they followed them home and when he got to Camp Wheeler here come the crumbled up stale cookies.

T: *(laughs)* They'd been overseas and back.

V: Yes, they'd been overseas and back.

T: But the crumbs were still in the box.

V: I think he ate them, I don't know. *(turning to husband Jim, in next room)* Did you eat them?

Jim Beck: No, they were so stale.

(laughter from all)

T: The truth is out about the cookies. Once you moved, you and Jim decided to get married and you were married in 1944.

V: Right

T: in Macon, Georgia, by Camp Wheeler, and you also worked during the time you were in Georgia, too. Now what was the first job you had there?

V: That was with the Civil Service, went to a little place and took my typing test, and I passed it, so then I was hired at Robinson Field in Macon, Georgia. It was an Army

Air Force Base, and it was quite a chore to get there. I had to change three times the buses to get out there and then walk a half a mile from where they let us off to the building. There we were in a typing pool and we had, we didn't know what we were typing, because everything was in symbols like letters and numbers. What cargo they shipped out, we never knew what they shipped out from Macon, Georgia, and where it went.

T: Was there a lot of activity on the base while you were there? I mean people on planes coming and going?

V: Oh yes, yes. A lot of military were based there.

T: How many people worked in this typing pool?

V: Oh, I would say maybe about fifty.

T: Were they all women?

V: Oh, yes, and we were just lined up like peanuts, like peas in a pod. You just could reach out and touch the next person, and just the noise was deafening because it was all the old type typewriters at the time.

T: So the noise of fifty typewriters at one time!

V: Oh, yes.

T: Were there active duty military personnel around as well?

V: Oh, yes, it was like an office, you know you could see the general and whoever was in charge. They had the offices surrounding us, so we were kind of in the center of it all.

T: That's a lot of people working in one place.

V: Oh yes, yes.

T: Did you like working there?

V: Yes, I did.

T: What made it a good place to work for you?

V: Well, for one thing, my health insurance was taken care of and it was good pay. And of course, if I could have kept with Civil Service, I would have had a nice retirement pay some day. Of course I hadn't thought about down the road that much. The thing was, they wouldn't hire any service people's wives in that town; for

one thing, there was so many of us, and another thing is that we could just pick up and go if our husband left. If he went overseas, or if he got moved to another area, you'd go with him, you wouldn't just stay there. So I became ill, I suppose from the long hours to get back and forth, and it was damp weather and everything. I ended up with rheumatoid arthritis; my knees all swelled up, so the doctor had recommended that I no longer do that. So then I found employment working in a pecan factory.

T: What kind of work was that?

V: Sorting all kinds of stuff out of pecans. I didn't want to eat pecans for a long time after that.

T: I can imagine, they kind of, you must have smelled them and handled them all day.

V: So I first started out on a belt where you'd have to sort out the broken, and the shells, and so forth. My employer was from New Jersey, and he saw that all of us northern women worked really fast and hard, so he gave us all a raise of five cents, so we got fifty cents an hour.

I was in charge of the belt. Some of these people would complain when I'd see that they could step up their operation just a little more and get a little more out of them. So I'd open up this little knob you'd turn, and a lot more pecans would come out. I had them really working hard, they didn't care for that. I don't think they liked me as a boss very much.

T: Was there a lot of, were both men and women working here, or mostly women?

V: These are all women, only men that were there were black people that they would use. They were the maintenance, and also supplied us with the pecans that we would work on.

T: And those were mostly black guys?

V: They were all black.

T: How about the women you were working with, was that blacks and whites?

V: No, there was no blacks working there on the belts, just whites. Many of them were servicemen's wives. I had a run in with a couple of ladies that weren't very nice to me because they found out that their husbands were under the command of my husband in the training [at Camp Wheeler]; they thought that my husband was too tough on them. And I told them, just be glad that he is, because someday it might mean their life. Be prepared.

T: Yeah, Jim was of course an overseas veteran by this time.

V: That's right, and he knew to train them well was very important.

(1, A, 333)

T: So the racial situation at this factory seemed to be only whites on the line and blacks doing certain other jobs.

V: That's right, yeah.

T: Was that the first time you had encountered black people really, on any large scale?

V: Yes, it was. I don't recall, maybe in Duluth there might have been an operator, an elevator operator, would be black, but course in Duluth you didn't have very many blacks and I didn't mind them. In fact I would be friendly, talk to them. These southern ladies, they were upset to think I would want to talk to them. The blacks were human beings, after all.

T: Yeah, sure. Could you see a difference in how people from the north, whites from the north and whites from the south, dealt with blacks?

V: Oh, yes.

T: How would you describe that difference?

V: Well, I guess slavery hadn't really left them yet, they felt that they could do degrading work and they didn't care how inconvenient it might be. We had this one lady, we moved to another place next door--it was a little nicer, and this landlady had this black woman come in and wash clothes. She didn't have a washing machine, so she had to bend over the bathtub to scrub them with a board. And I know there were washing machines available, but you see, that was it, they could get them to do it. And then they had a black man that, instead of mowing their lawn he had to use a little hand scythe, and scythe and scythe the whole lawn with a little hand scythe. It was just like as if, well you're going to get paid but we don't care how hard you work for it.

T: Now let me go back to school for a moment, because that was the last job you had in Macon, right, the pecan factory?

V: Yes.

T: And then you and Jim moved to Minneapolis upon his discharge in July '45.

V: Right.

T: When you were in school, the last two years of school for you, the US was at war.

V: That's right.

T: And I'm wondering in what ways life at school might have changed, including what was taught in your classes.

V: Well, I don't know. The subjects were the modern history and things like that. I guess in social studies we did study some of the war effort. We were supposed to identify certain planes, I was never very good at that. The boys in our class could look at a picture and say just that's what it is, you know, that kind of thing. And of course, there was many of my classmates that had brothers they were worried about. I hadn't come to that problem yet because my brother hadn't gone overseas and was still in the United States. And of course, writing letters to the neighbor kids, that was kind of objective like, you know, you worried about them, but it wasn't that you were that close. But I did feel for some of these classmates that would tell me about, well their brother was missing, and wondering where they were.

T: What about these planes you mentioned. Was this an exercise part of the curriculum to identify these planes?

V: Yes.

T: Now that suggests that there was a fear of air raids even here.

V: I imagine so. We never got that feeling. I think a lot of facts were kept from us and even today when we watch the history channel, we find there's a lot of facts that was never told to us. You'd see some things; you'd go to a show and they'd have a maybe ten minutes of "This is the News." It was like a television summary of what's happened. It would show at the movies and you could learn the latest things that way--besides reading the newspaper. But I guess we had so much faith in our military that we felt safe in this country.

T: Do you think especially safe in a place like Minnesota that is so far from the coasts?

V: Well that's true. They were making ships in Duluth and we kind of wondered if there had been any bombing, they might try to bomb that area.

T: Was your school involved in the war effort?

End of Side A. Side B begins.

T: This is the 15th of September 2001, side 2 of the interview with Velda Beck. Was your school involved in the war effort?

V: You know, I can't recall anything ever was ever done in school for the war effort... We were encouraged to pick up tin cans and recycle rubber products because there was a shortage. You couldn't get tires and different things like that at that time. My husband was mentioning that everybody needed some rubbers to put over their boots; well, we couldn't get them either. And the shoes that you got--no rubber in them for sure. If you did get something with your stamps, I don't remember if you could get two pair or one pair of shoes a year, but you could get a lot of shoes that were made of paper. But you better not get caught out in the rain or they'd fall apart!

T: So you remember those shoes in the store, huh?

V: I do remember them.

T: So your school reinforced messages of conserving or recycling, but you didn't have tin drives at your school or anything like that?

V: I don't recall that. I know in our communities we did though.

T: You do remember those drives, let's touch on those. What kinds of those drives can you recall?

V: Well, I belonged to the 4-H at that time. Another one that was a cooperative kids... we had a unit that we belonged to. We could we'd go around and collect it. I know we dumped a lot of stuff behind the station in Palisade (*laughs*). I wondered if they did anything with it. We tried to do our bit.

T: So your groups, did you go from door-to-door to do this stuff?

V: Yeah, like from farm to farm. A lot of the farmers, if they any kind of machinery that was obsolete or broken down, they might have gotten rid of it that way, too. We didn't do an awful lot of that, more or less, just kind of on our own, not in groups though.

T: So there was collections of paper and...

V: Not paper, but rubber products; anything that was rubber, or like tires, that could be...

T: Tires were the big thing though, weren't they?

V: Yeah, tires, I'm trying to think of what there could have been that could have been rubber, not an awful lot. But there was tin that was used.

T: Okay, those were collected and then turned over to... in Palisade there somewhere.

V: Yeah, someone who was handling it there, and I don't know who that was. I just wonder, I suppose the station, the one that owned the station or was in charge of the station, probably took care of it. Probably hauled it to Aitkin and they put it on the train and went to some other location.

T: Now from '41-'43, was that the time that you were working as a maid, or was that the time you were living back home on the farm again?

V: Yeah, from '41 I was living in Palisade.

T: That's with your folks again, okay.

V: Yes.

T: Now, once the war began, were there shortages or rationing?

V: Yes.

T: What can you recall about the shortages or the rationing?

V: Of course, being on the farm you had a lot of food you could raise. The meat wasn't a problem. But I remember when it got to be beyond the time when my mother had canned meat and you'd run out, and you'd have to go get these wieners that were awful. They were just kind of orangey-red and I really don't like wieners yet very much to this day because they... I don't know what they were made of. They were just awful.

(1, B, 455)

T: Was just the consistency or the taste?

V: Taste, and... they just were... I just wonder what they were made of, 'cause I don't think there was very much meat in them, maybe.

T: Was that from the butcher in Palisade?

V: Yeah, well, yes.

T: How often did you go shopping? I mean you did live on a farm, so did you go shopping every week, or every month?

V: 'Bout once a week.

T: Did your folks have little ration coupons?

V: Yes, we had ration coupons for gas and for meat, for shoes, for sugar. The meat... if you could get good meat, I mean that was hard to get, too, because a lot of that went to the troops. My dad was, he wasn't frugal, but he was trying to make ends meet, and the wieners were cheap! I remember that.

T: Did you eat those pretty regularly?

V: Oh, I suppose more regularly than I wanted (*laughs*).

T: Did your mom ever complain about other things being in too short of supply?

V: Well, clothing; I know that was kind of hard to come by, good clothing, because that all went for the troops, too. You couldn't get silk stockings anymore; that silk all went for the troops. And nylon, when there was some nylons, you couldn't... Oh that brings to mind that when I, after we were married and living in Minneapolis, they put nylons out at the store, at the Glass Block [department store], and advertised. So the boss let us, another lady and me, go and stand in line. And we were at the wrong door; they never opened that door. And we could not get out of that crowd and they would not let us out. So this big, heavy lady, she says, "Out of the way folks," and she just pushed everyone aside and this other lady and I we went back to work and we never did get our nylons. It was like a panic attack!

T: Even after the war? That was '45 when you moved to Minneapolis.

V: That was like '46.

T: And there were still shortages of certain things? So just ending the war didn't end the shortages.

V: And I remember seeing my first jet fly over there too.

T: In Minneapolis?

V: Yes, that was really, that was when you used to look up in the air when a plane went over, everyone would look up in the air, oh there's a plane!

T: And not a propeller plane, anymore.

V: Yes.

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T: Was there ever a blackout that you remember in Palisade or Duluth?

V: No, I never remember a blackout. But we did have, we had to pull our curtains to make blinds, all the blinds at night.

T: Was that in Duluth that you remember that too, when you lived in Duluth?

V: In Palisade we did it, I guess we must have done it in Duluth, too, 'cause most times when I worked, sometimes was at night and when I'd come home it would be daylight.

T: How do you think, in a larger sense, life in Palisade changed as a result of the war?

V: Well, a shortage of help for one thing. Just a few of the young men were deferred on the farm and of course, we conserved our fuel supply. When we, we used to go and see an awful lot of these fellows that were going off to war and we'd have some party for them and we'd just get a whole big bunch of us in a car, so one car would go, and that kind of thing. Course, that was considered a fun thing, but still, we thought it was important to see these guys off. I suppose really, living on the farm we didn't really feel the shortages as much as you would have in a bigger cities where they had their victory gardens and that kind of thing. 'Cause when you're on a farm you raise your food and you have it there, it was just the extravagant things you didn't buy that much of; you tried to conserve your money, but if you wanted to buy it, it may not have been there.

T: Right. On the whole, would you say that the war brought your community together, or not?

V: I think, especially the churches, I think we were, we had prayer services for some of them. We didn't have a prayer service like we had the other day in our church where we went to pray for the victims [of the attacks of 11 September 2001] and to not to have hatred for the innocent who are of that ethnic group. So I believe the church was probably the hub of the small community at that time.

T: Did you and your folks attend church pretty regularly?

V: Well my folks, it happened that my folks were Methodists, and I was, I chose to be a Lutheran, and of course my husband's Lutheran, too. And so my brother and I went to confirmation together before he went in the service, and we were confirmed in the little church there.

T: That was in Palisade?

V: Yes; and we sang in the choir and I went to church regularly, every Sunday.

T: Did your place of worship sponsor some volunteer programs to aid in the war effort?

V: No, I can't recall anything that they did.

T: Some churches would roll bandages or paper drives, or something

V: I guess we failed in that respect.

T: Do you recall the message at church, even from the pulpit, changing once the US was at war?

V: Oh yes. We prayed for those that were going and were there. And if there was any one of the families who had heard that there was some tragedy--that was announced in church.

T: Was the message, the sermons, a message linking politics with the faith?

V: No, the minister we had at that time was an old traditional guy and he gave the kind of sermons where you could almost go to sleep. Yeah, he just quoted the bible. He didn't get anything into there about to make you draw your attention to something that, you know the ministers today, try to bring some human interest into a sermon, and it makes it more interesting. No, he didn't do that. He just, he wasn't a fire and brimstone type, but he was just an old, old-time guy. He had retired, and the minister we had, had gone to be a chaplain--the one the confirmed me--and this old guy came out of retirement to be the minister at that church where I went.

T: So the chaplain, your minister who became a chaplain, did he return to the area then after the war, to Palisade?

V: No, he didn't, he became the minister down in Minneapolis. He was a great guy.

T: Did you attend church while you lived in Duluth?

V: I didn't. Because I worked five days a week and I'd have my weekends off. I had a pretty good job that way. So I didn't attend any church, but I could go the chapel if I wished to at the hospital.

T: Did you and Jim go to church down in Macon?

V: No, we didn't. We didn't never go to church there. There was a church nearby, it was the Gospel Tabernacle. Come to think about it now, I did go. The landlord where we stayed was the lay minister, and I used to go to their church with them. He'd preach a sermon and I'd sit there and listen to him; they were very nice people and they were very caring and kind of watched over us like we were their kids.

T: Well at that point you were nineteen, twenty years old?

V: Well, I was eighteen when we got married. See, I had turned nineteen.

I remember she liked chocolate candies. Jim could get chocolate candies from the PX, and she'd say, "Oh,"--she always called me "Veldar," 'cause she had the English accent--"Veldar, you think you could get me some chocolate candy?"

T: *(laughs)* Okay, so that was a shortage that she was feeling, so obviously chocolates weren't in the stores.

V: And that is one shortage we did get, was candy.

T: Candy?

V: Yes, candy was one thing that you couldn't get.

T: Was it hard candy, or mostly chocolates?

V: Oh, chocolates, chocolate candy or something of that nature. Candy bars.

T: Were those also part of the ration coupon system or just in short supply?

V: No, just short supply.

T: I see. Well, I want to ask a question about your folks on the farm. Is it your impression they were financially better or worse off once the war started?

V: Well, I would say that they were better off, because we got a good price for their milk products. At that time, my mother just had a few chickens. She sold a few eggs and that. My dad had a job at a filling station and I think he considered himself pretty well paid. That was an opportunity for him, because the person who might have been working there was off to war, fighting the war.

T: At the filling station?

V: Yeah, yeah. And he was forty-one years old, he was born in 1900, so you know, he was a young man yet, then.

T: Sure, so he not only got better prices for his farm products, but he was able to pick up a little cash wage in town, too, because of a job that was freed up by someone who went into the service.

V: Right.

V: Well, you were living in Macon after the middle of 1944, did you live on base or off base?

V: No, off base.

T: Off base. Was that preferable to living on base?

V: You couldn't live on base.

T: Oh, you couldn't live on base?

V: No, my husband Jim was given a little extra money, I don't remember what it was, for living off base.

T: Did you live in Macon then?

V: Yes.

T: Okay, how would you describe the neighborhood you lived in, in Macon?

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V: Oh, it was a nice neighborhood. I don't know if the homes would have been considered old, but I think all the homes were built way off the ground so the air would circulate when it was so hot. And very poorly insulated, so when it was cold in the winter, because it was that damp cold, you just couldn't seem to get warmed up. The wind would whistle through these great big windows we had. But it was all nice, clean, neat neighborhood we lived in.

Of course, we didn't have a car, and the only way we could get anywhere was by taxi or take a bus. One of my husband's friends had a car and he would come and get him and take him to camp, so we didn't see a lot of the town. When you come to think about it, just where the bus rode, I don't recall ever going through any of the part where the black people lived.

T: Your neighborhood was segregated?

V: Oh, yes, there was no blacks in the neighborhood.

T: Did you encounter black people on the bus or during your average day in Macon?

V: Oh, when I was en route to go to the Robertson Field, there would be some. They always had to sit in the back of the bus, of course.

T: This was 1945 in the south, so...

V: It was 1944.

T: Before you were working at the camp.

V: Yeah, and into '45; didn't change at all at that time.

T: Right. Were you cooking your meals at home for the most part when you lived in Macon?

V: Yes.

T: So you had ration coupons then as well.

V: Yes.

T: Did you have different type of ration coupons because Jim was in the army?

V: No, but we could go to the PX and get some things. One time my friend and I thought we were going to go buy flour and sugar *(laughs)* 'cause we could get it without a ration. So we took a suitcase along. Well, you get ten pounds of each in a suitcase you got a lot of weight--besides some other things that we could buy.

T: Sure.

V: There was a bus going through and we kind of slid that suitcase along on the ground because we couldn't lift it.

T: Because it was heavy with flour and other stuff.

V: We were afraid the handle would come off.

T: *(laughs)*

V: So we never tried that again. But we could go out and buy some things there because we were entitled to, and I had a card that identified me, too.

T: So you didn't need ration coupons at the PX?

V: Not there, no, not there.

T: Do you think that made a real difference for you, as far as what you were able to buy and how you lived?

V: I suppose it did, it just seemed like you got used to it. You just knew you had to make due, and so you did.

T: You were living in Macon when President Roosevelt died in April of 1945?

V: Yes.

T: How did you react to that piece of news?

V: Oh, that was so sad. Our neighbors across the hall had two radios, so they sold us one and we could hear all the broadcasts. The one thing that we were thankful for was that President Truman was so able to take over. He was so capable and a very good president. But everyone loved, well I don't suppose everyone did, but everyone who was a Democrat certainly loved President Roosevelt. He was a wonderful man and he got so many good programs that are still in effect today that's helping people of our income category.

T: If you were to identify the emotion you felt when you heard the news, what would the word be?

V: Very, very sad.

T: Sad, okay.

V: Yeah.

T: You were also living in Macon when the Germans surrendered. V-E Day, May 8, 1945. What was your reaction to that news?

V: Oh, just thank God that that part of the war is over. Maybe we can start to get our life back in order. My husband had a lot of points at that time, and we knew that he would be discharged before many of the others that came along and that served after he did. So, that was, I guess a good feeling that we knew that part was over. A feeling of relief, I'd say.

T: Relief.

V: Relief, I'd say, yes.

T: Now you were at the pecan factory then, right, working at the pecan factory?

V: Yes.

T: Was there a reaction among your co-workers that you recall?

V: Oh, yes, yes, it was, you know it was just like everyone was in shock, just like this last disaster with the World Trade Building [on 11 September 2001]. You mean when the war was over or when?

T: Yes.

V: Oh, when the war was over. Oh, yeah it was, everyone was very happy, it was a happy feeling when you went to work that next day that this has finally ended.

T: Were you or Jim concerned that Jim would be sent to the Pacific for the invasion of Japan?

V: It was always a fact that it could happen.

T: That he could be sent out again.

V: Yes.

T: This feeling that he might have to go again, how did you handle that?

V: Well, I guess you just had to tell yourself that this was something that may happen; you have to deal with it. But I wondered: Where am I going to go, am I going to go back home, or am I going to stay here or what am I going to do? That was in the back of my mind.

T: Kind of uncertainty.

V: Yeah, uncertainty, yes.

T: Jim was discharged in July and you both moved. Did you go right to Minneapolis then?

V: Oh, we spent a little time at his parents. Then he got sent up to go to Dunwoody Institute. They had a facility where you could go and try to find a... they had a listing of different places, like rooms and apartments and things like that. I remember we had two to look at, neither one was very good. But it was in the area [where] we could both walk to work, me one way and him the other, because we didn't have a car. You couldn't get one. Couldn't get a car.

T: So you're going to have to walk or take public transportation wherever you went.

V: And there wasn't any public transportation. I had to walk quite a ways just to get a bus. So there just was no direct route to my work. I walked there. Didn't hurt me any, though.

T: You were both in Minneapolis at the time of V-J day, when Japan surrendered in August?

V: No, we were at the County Fair at that particular time. I don't know if we had started at Dunwoody and came home for a weekend; I'm not sure what day it was, if it was a weekday or weekend? But we were at the County Fair, that I remember.

T: And was the news announced, or just spread by rumor?

V: I suppose it was announced. Pretty soon everyone was saying, "The Japs have surrendered!" You know, it was just like a current going through the crowd.

T: What was the response as this news began to spread?

V: Oh, joyful, joyful. People just jumped up and down and were just joyful.

T: Did you feel it as much, do you think, now that Jim was already discharged or...?

V: Did I feel more joyful?

T: Do you think you felt that bit of news as much, being that Jim was already out of the service?

V: I think if he'd been in the service yet I maybe would have been more relieved. Because I felt now at least he's not going to have to go overseas, now that he had been mustered out. But it felt a relief for our whole country, there'd be less lives lost.

T: Velda, last couple questions here. In a larger sense, how did the war change the course of your life?

V: Well, I think we probably wouldn't have gotten married so fast, course I don't know if that would have changed either. But that seems like you stepped up your marriage a lot earlier then, and grasped the happy years because you didn't know what was ahead of you.

T: A sense of urgency almost.

V: Yes, you know you'd have that time together at least.

T: How about in the longer term? How do you feel that period changed how life turned out for you?

V: I think I married the right man. He's been a good supporter and we've had a lot of good times, and we have the same interests, so I wouldn't ever have changed it.

T: That's a good feeling to be able to say that.

V: Yes, after fifty-seven years, I think that's a compliment to my husband.

T: Oh, it sure is. Can I ask you now, do you have a favorite personal memory about the war years to share?

V: *(pauses briefly)* Well, I think it was a wonderful thing to be able to be a serviceman's wife, you really got to learn a lot more about what the service is all

about, and what they did for our country. A lot more than if you'd stayed on the farm as a farm wife--staying home on the farm canning string beans.

So you got another outlook on life altogether from being away and seeing how the struggles of some of these young people. They didn't all have maybe a nice little cozy room like we had. And they'd had children by this time, too. So just think what a struggle it was for those who had young children and being away or pregnant and the husband would be taking off going overseas. Here she'd be pregnant, and heaven knows what if she was going back to her parents or where she was going. You see a lot of that when you're traveling, and he did go back and forth on furlough three times. He did drive a couple different times. You see these people get on, and a young woman get on the train and be quite far along and pregnant, or they'd have a baby traveling on the train and they'd have to take that baby into this little cubbyhole to change them. Didn't have changing stations at this time, or a tray where you could lay the baby, like they have here at different airports and maybe lay them on a dirty train floor and change their pants. Yeah, it wasn't so easy in those days. But you made do, you didn't know any better. So you made do with what you had.

T: And were thankful to have it.

V: Yes.

T: Thanks very much for the interview.

V: Oh it's been great, very interesting to have you here. I'm glad, we could enlighten you of anything that's a little different from what you've interviewed [with] the others. We are very happy about that.

END OF INTERVIEW