

2001 Oral History Project  
Parents of the Baby Boomers, 1941-2001  
Interviewee: Rita Snow  
(also includes Bob Snow)  
Interviewer: Geoffrey Reynolds  
July 19, 2001

GR: Rita, tell me a little about what it was like for you to grow up during the Depression.

RS: I was born in 1929, so...

GR: Oh, so you didn't experience a lot of it.

RS: Not really. I lived on a farm, and in some ways I don't think farms were as affected, at least ours wasn't, because you had huge gardens so you could always have enough food to eat. And they probably even bartered some things. When they butchered a hog or something maybe they would share that if the other people would give them something that they had.

GR: So you don't remember being...

RS: No, I don't remember being deprived.

GR: So as the Depression keeps moving through and then the war approaches, how old were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

RS: I was born in '29, so I was 11 or 12.

GR: Did that really strike you as a child?

RS: Not a lot, but I had a cousin who went to service, so I remember writing to him. We had these little things called V-mail, so I would write to him. Then one of the young men from our village was killed. He was in the Air Force. So that sort of brings it home.

GR: What village was that?

RS: A little farming community in Illinois called Harding. Really small, so the impact of one person being killed was pretty evident.

GR: Did you see the blue star and the gold star postings in the window?

RS: Yes.

GR: Was that always a kind of indication that something had happened?

RS: Well, you knew which family had people in service, and if they had lost somebody.

GR: As a child you must have been involved in scrap drives and some sort of effort?

RS: I remember my mother saved grease. We had a thing on the back of the stove where we would save that. And then she had some old pots and pans, and I remember donating those to a scrap drive. Of course, we had ration coupons. Mother did a lot of canning, so it was always a concern of whether we'd have enough sugar for the canning. Dad, of course had farm equipment, so he had certain gas coupons—little things were stuck on your windshield so that they knew what kind of gas you could get.

GR: Volume and such?

RS: Yes.

GR: So the family did pretty well during the depression right up the war?

RS: Yes. Our lives were always sort of spartan anyway, so it wasn't that different.

GR: So the war is continuing on and you are growing a little bit older, but still probably not old enough to be involved with a serviceman. Or were you?

RS: No.

GR: And the war comes to an end, and you met Bob at college?

RS: No, I was in college, and it was interesting there because we had almost two different kinds of students—the ones who had just come from high school and the veterans who

had come back. So there were a lot of veterans living in the Quonset huts on campus, married student housing. They were pretty motivated so that they were good students and really made you work hard to keep up with the class. I didn't meet Bob until I was teaching in Denver, after I had graduated from college.

GR: What college was that?

RS: It's a little Presbyterian school called Monmouth College in Illinois.

GR: So it took you that long to meet Bob, all the way to Denver. Bob said that you had met in kind of a different situation. Can you explain that?

RS: It was on a train. Nowadays that seems so archaic, I guess, to meet on a train. I thought it was a pretty romantic way to meet someone.

GR: Did you just happen to be sitting next to each other?

RS: I think he and I tell this story a little differently. We were both on the train coming to Chicago for Christmas vacation. We were in the same car because I saw him, and I remembered him because he reminded me of someone that I knew. We didn't speak or anything, but I just remembered him. Then when I went to Union Station to get the train to go back to Denver, I saw him. I guess, egotistically, thought that he remembered me, which he didn't. So, I spoke to him and I think it frightened him. (laughs) So when we got on the train, he was seated, I believe behind me. But, he must have asked the man who was sitting with me if they could trade seats because we ended up sitting together. And that was the start of our romance.

GR: And then you found out that you both were living in Denver?

RS: Yes.

GR: After the courtship had begun on the train, did you continue to date while working?

RS Yes, we met Dec. 30<sup>th</sup> or something, and we were engaged in March and married in June.

GR: Wow...quick.

RS: That's the kind of thing parents are apprehensive about.

GR: Even in some standards today that's still a little quick. Was there any urgency on either one of your parts to get hitched?

RS: Well, I guess the urgency was that we had decided where we wanted to have an apartment. So, I rented it. And so he was living in an apartment, and I was living in an apartment. We decided it would be a lot cheaper if we got married and lived in the same one. So we did.

GR: So you're married and both of you are professional teachers at that point...

RS: Right.

GR: Did you have any desire to start a family soon and give up teaching?

RS: It was two and a half years before our first child was born.

GR: So you enjoy teaching quite a bit?

RS: Yes I did. I enjoyed the children and the teaching. There were a lot of other things that sort of weren't so much fun. You know, bus duty, hall duty, collecting milk money—little things like that.

GR: Duties as assigned.

RS: Right.

GR: Could you tell me what it was like to be a teacher in the late '40s, early '50s in Denver?

RS: The population was growing so fast. I taught in a school that was brand new. This was the first year that it was open. I probably had 32 students maybe, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. The next year that I was there I had maybe 38. Then the third year I was there, we went on what

they called split session, so that two teachers would share the same room. One would come in early in the morning and teach until like, I guess it was one o'clock. And then the other one would come in at noon and teach until maybe five in the afternoon.

GR: So Denver was growing very fast?

RS: It was growing very fast.

GR: Could you tell me a little bit about the ethnic make up of Denver even then?

RS: I had a couple of Spanish-American students in my class. I don't think there were many black people in Denver at that time. More Spanish-American.

GR: So even then you could see that Denver was growing as a diverse community?

RS: Right. I don't remember Asians in the class. There were children whose fathers had been in the war, in World War II. I remember one little boy; he was born while his dad was overseas. I think that he always felt that his younger brother was more loved because Daddy was there when that one was born.

GR: So your first child arrives, and the decision has to be made whether to work.

RS: We left Denver when I was pregnant. We left Denver in 1954, and Bob took a job in Appleton, Wisconsin. So we were living in Appleton when our first child was born. Of course, moving to a different state, you would have to get a teacher's certificate in a new state. And I didn't do that. So, I was an at-home mother.

GR: Was that something that was hard for you to decide to do?

RS: No, because in my era that was a very common thing to do.

GR: Did you personally feel a need to go back at any point?

RS: Not really. When we moved to Ohio, and the children were all in school, I may have thought about it. But again, I would've had to go back to school to get a certificate again. And by that time I was doing some volunteer work and that seemed to be enough.

GR: So you had other outlets to take care of your free time?

RS: Right.

GR: So how many children did you end up raising?

RS: When we lived in Appleton, we had three children. And then we moved to Minnesota and had one more.

GR: So four total.

RS: Four children within seven years.

GR: Were there times when Bob came home that you needed a little time alone—for a walk or some activities outside the home?

RS: It was hard to find any time alone. We never lived very near either of our parents, so you couldn't rely on them for a respite. We had good friends wherever we lived, and sometimes we'd take turns helping each other out.

GR: When you had some free time, did you and Bob spend it together? Or did each of you have your own projects or hobbies that you did?

RS: In our church we belonged to a group of young people, or young marrieds. And we would play bridge or have dinner with friends.

GR: But you didn't strike out on your own very often?

RS: No.

GR: When you weren't socializing as a couple with other adults, what type of activities did the family enjoy?

RS: Well, we took them to the park. When we lived in Minnesota, on Sunday afternoon we would drive into Duluth and watch the lift bridge go up and down. Mostly parks and things. We didn't do any camping. I guess I wasn't anxious to wash diapers in a stream or something.

GR: Did you find it hard, even in the '50s, to find money to do large-scale vacations?

RS: We didn't do any large scale. The only thing that would be close to a vacation was when we would go and visit family. We would visit my parents on the farm. Very often that was at Christmas time until it got so it was easier for the kids to have Christmas at home.

GR: So you didn't have a lot of unsolicited advice when it came to child rearing, did you?

RS: No.

GR: Did you ever feel the need to do that by phone?

RS: The only person I remember calling...when we moved to Minnesota, I remember calling my pediatrician from Wisconsin a couple of times. And then of course we wore out several copies of Dr. Spock.

GR: So you were doing some reading then.

RS: Oh sure.

GR: That sounds like something that you assumed I knew. Was that a largely read book at that time, by your friends?

RS: Everybody was reading Dr. Spock. He raised a whole generation of kids.

GR: Why did you see yourself using a book versus what you remembered from your own childhood as a guide?

RS: When you are a child you are not aware of symptoms and contagions and so forth. But it was just a little paperback book, but you could look up a disease and figure out if one child has it how long it's going to be before the next one picks it up.

GR: So it was more of a medical reference for you?

RS: Oh yes. Have you ever seen Dr. Spock?

GR: Yes, I have. Was it one of those things too where you read about how to take care of disciplinary actions or things like that?

RS: I don't think we bothered much about it. We just did what we could. It was not philosophical, it was more very down to earth advice about how to cope.

GR: Did you find yourself reverting back periodically to what you remember when it came to discipline or just reminding that elders are to be respected? Was that something that the kids learned from watching you, or was it something that you spent some time on?

RS: I guess we just hoped that they would learn things by osmosis, because I don't remember talking to them about things. We always belonged to a church, and therefore we had a lot of good friends and a lot of church programming and so forth. I feel very pleased that our kids are involved, for the most part are very active, in their own churches now.

GR: So they've taken some of the things that they have learned from their childhood years and taken it into their own homes?

RS: I hope so. Maybe they're even doing a better job.

GR: Did your children follow any similar patterns in their occupations that you and Bob did?

RS: I think so, because we were certainly both teaching when we were married. Our oldest son has been teaching for quite a few years, but now he's recruiting and training teachers, so he's still in the field. Our second son teaches geology in college, so he's a teacher.

Our third son is teaching math. Our daughter had a career in pulp and paper chemistry; now she's an at-home mother.

GR: So she kind of followed Bob in that...

RS: Right, oh yes, she did.

GR: How are they dealing with child rearing? Do you get questions once in awhile?

RS: Not very much.

GR: Are their children to a point where they've been through a few years?

RS: They have three children, they're 12, 10, and 8. I think our son-in-law and our daughter are wonderful parents.

GR: Do you attribute that, selfishly, to the way they were raised?

RS: Maybe partly, because our son-in-law comes from a fine family. But they are also involved in church activities, so the kids have had a lot of Sunday school and are old enough that they even go on church trips.

GR: Have you gotten any calls from your grandkids about problems that they are encountering?

RS: No.

BS: More likely advice than asking for advice. (laughs)

RS: Yes. We will see them next weekend. So they could ask us if they have a problem, but I don't think they will.

GR: Once the kids, for the most part, were out of the home, did you and Bob find a hard time reconnecting when it came to schedules and such because Bob had been working and you had decided to stay at home? Was that a hard adjustment when Bob came home all day?

RS: You mean when he retired?

GR: When he retired.

RS: Not really. Because when he retired, we were in the process of getting ready for a move. So he, and then later our younger son, worked very hard on the house. We did a lot of refurbishing to be sure the house was ready for the market. I think he retired in '87, and so we marketed the house and in '91 we moved here.

GR: So you moved right into a smaller dwelling once that was done.

RS: Right.

GR: Was that a decision that was made out of necessity, or was it something that you just wanted to simplify your life?

RS: Well, we had a four-bedroom home, and none of the children lived in Toledo. Bob and I were on a committee from our church, we were suppose to be the representatives to a group that was building a retirement home in Toledo. And we really hadn't thought about retirement homes, but we did go and visit one near Cleveland—that was a Presbyterian venture. So when we got to thinking about it, we heard that they were building one here in Holland. So, when we were in Holland, for another reason, we went to the office and checked it out. It sounded interesting. We decided that rather than move from our house to a smaller house or to a condo, we might as well just move here. So we did.

GR: There's a draw to Holland because both of you went to Hope, but...

RS: No, we didn't. I didn't go to Hope. I went to Monmouth College.

GR: Oh, okay. And Bob went to Hope?

RS: He went to Hope.

GR: Was that part of your decision?

RS: It was maybe a help because it's always good to be in a community where there is a college. You have much better access to concerts, lectures, theater.

GR: And Bob was here as a child?

RS: Right. And one of our sons, our second son, graduated from Hope. And Bob's mother lived here until her death in 1974, so we had made frequent visits.

GR: So you knew enough about the town, even as a wife.

RS: Right.

GR: Have you been happy about that downscale to Freedom Village?

RS: Yes. We don't do lawn maintenance and house repair. And if we want to go away, we tell the front desk, lock the door and go.

BS: Instead of mowing, I play golf.

GR: Which is good.

RS: Which is what he just came in from doing.

GR: You talked a little bit about setting up a retirement home in Toledo. Have both of you, or individually, have you decided to get in other activities here in Holland in the retirement years?

RS: Oh yes.

GR: Other than golf.

RS: We're both quite involved. We're involved here at the Village. Bob may have told you, he's editor of our little newspaper that comes out every month. We both work on the waterfront cleanup. We both work on the recycling, it's a program where they take newspapers and things, and then somebody has to be in charge of each floor. So we do

the one in our hallway. And I'm in charge of the library. So we found plenty to do right here.

BS: Pancake Breakfast.

RS: Oh and the pancake breakfast, right. And then in the community, we joined several organizations. We both enjoy HASP together. We now belong to the Century Club. We belong to a group in our church. I belong to some women's groups at church. A couple of book groups. I delivered food this morning to Community Action House. We work at the Community Kitchen serving food.

GR: So you're staying quite busy then.

RS: Yes.

GR: Do you think that helps you as the years progress?

RS: I think it was our pattern before, so when you retire, you pretty much continue doing...as long as you can, you do what you did before.

GR: Now marrying a veteran, with it comes some obligations periodically. Do you have any involvement in veterans organizations or does Bob?

RS: No, we don't.

GR: Does Bob ever spend much time speaking about the war?

RS: He really didn't talk about it much at first. But we went back to Europe, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary?

BS: Yes, '84.

RS: We rented a car, and we drove his route where he had been. Then he really did talk about it more.

GR: For you, was that good?

RS: Oh yes. And then when he is with fellow veterans, they talk about things. I've done a lot of reading about World War II.

GR: Since you were so young, did you ever feel that you were a little out of step with what had gone on? Or did you spend some time during the war trying to keep up on the events?

RS: Well, you were very aware because you would go to the movie, and of course the news reel would always come on first telling you what was going on. And you would read the newspapers. After the war, we're finding now that there were a lot of things that we really didn't know about at the time.

GR: Did you find it odd that you would marry a veteran someday? Had you thought that that might be a possibility when you were in college?

RS: I don't know if I thought of him so much as a veteran, as a person that I liked that I wanted to marry.

GR: Bob is a little bit older than you, correct?

RS: He's five years.

GR: Not a lot, but...

RS: It may seem a lot when you're in high school.

GR: Is there anything about the last fifty or sixty years that strikes you and that you would like to have people know about? The events and how they've all come together? Things you'd want to change?

RS: Not really. There are some things that you feel you don't have much control over, but you try to be a good citizen and use your voting franchise and try to make a difference that way.

GR: Had you ever thought about the fact that maybe if you and Bob had not decided to have children that teaching would have been a life-long career?

RS: If we hadn't had children, I would have gone back to school to get a library degree. And I did think about doing that when we lived in Toledo because I was working as a volunteer at the library. But, Toledo University didn't have a library science degree, so it would have meant going to Ann Arbor. And I just didn't feel that it was time to do that.

GR: Well thank you, ma'am.

RS: Yes, you're most welcome.