

MEMORIES...

A Personal Interview with
PAULINE FARLEY



Her Memories and Experiences
During WORLD WAR II
On the American Homefront

Interviewed by Ellen Hogan
Huntington Beach, California
May 1997

July 14, 1997

Dear Pauline:

Thank you so much for your participation in our interview project. I enjoyed your memories of that time in American history, and hope that it was fun for you to recall days past. I especially appreciate your sharing with me the personal stories of what it was like to make do under sometimes difficult circumstances.

The sacrifices wives and mothers made to keep spirits high and life as near "normal" as possible meant that people could gain strength from the family bond and the everyday experiences that shape most of our lives. It is easy to measure the courage of those who put their lives on the line, but the quiet courage and sacrifices of women often occurred without applause or recognition. I can just see you sitting there sewing dresses and planning meals not even knowing what kind of food would be available at the store. And dealing with your husband's bout with polio while you had small babies! It was the sort of thing that women did as their part. Keeping harmony and laughter in the home provided, I believe, the strength and will for the final victory of our fighting men.

Here is your copy of your interview. I especially am appreciative of your information about the Air Base. I found a book at the library near me in Costa Mesa, and enclose a copy of the front page. It is all about the Base, and has lots of pictures. If you have access at your library, you might enjoy it. Thank you again for your willingness to make time for the interview. If there are any small inaccuracies, I apologize. The acoustics at the center left a lot to be desired, I'm afraid, and sometimes either my pen or my ear was a bit behind my brain in processing all the information.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ellen M. Hogan".

Ellen M. Hogan
1605 Corsica Place
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PAULINE

P I was living in California when the war started, but I was born in Colorado though. I had a big family: three sisters and six brothers. My husband was the only one in his family. He was born in Los Angeles.

E What a change for him! Did he like marrying into such a big family?

P Oh yes, oh yes. He really liked that. All my brothers, all my sisters. When the war started, we were married and had two little children. We'd only been married a couple of years, and we lived in Huntington Beach.

E Do you remember Pearl Harbor Day?

P Yes, I do.

E Did you expect the war, or were you surprised?

P It came as a shock. I know when it started, we weren't married too long. We'll be married sixty-seven years in July.

E Congratulations! Were you working at that time?

P No, because I had the small children.

E Did your husband have to go in the military?

P No, they didn't take him in the service, because one leg was shorter than the other. He did work for them, though. He was cooking for the servicemen.

E Where exactly did he work?

P He worked at the Air Base.

E You mean El Toro?

P No, the one over in Santa Ana.

E You mean the LTA station in Tustin?

P No. Do you know where Orange Coast College is?

E Right.

P There was an Air Base over there. It was between Santa Ana and Costa Mesa, right where the Fairgrounds and Orange Coast College are now.

E No! I didn't know there was a base there.

P Yes, a big one. They trained air cadets there. They had about 5,000 men at any time. The men would come in for a few weeks and then leave and the next group would come in.

E I never even knew that, and I live about 3 or 4 miles from there.

P Well, of course my husband worked on the base. They didn't have planes there. They had the cadets, and then they had a whole section that was enlisted men. They didn't have any actual flying there. The men went on to somewhere else for the rest of their training.

E How long was the base there. Do you know?

P Well, they started building it even before the war. July or August I think, but I don't think it opened until the next spring. It was a big place. They had barracks, school buildings - for the classes, you know - a post office, movies. Everything just like a small town. And they had four cadet mess halls.

E Did he work long hours?

- P Oh, yes. He cooked for five thousand men, each shift, each meal. He'd work ten or twelve hours a day. Generally he worked till it was over with. That was a lot of hard work with so many people in and out. Now, of course it's all gone.
- E Did you have a garden?
- P Yes, yes. We ate very simply, really. We bought a little house in 1940 and had a big garden. We grew string beans, tomatoes, spinach, corn – you name it. Squash and radishes. We didn't have to buy a lot. There were empty lots around then, and people would plant vegetables.
- E Did you do any canning?
- P Oh, yes. I canned tomatoes and different things. Whatever was in season and we had more of then we could eat. Tomatoes I remember.
- E How often did you go to the grocery store?
- P At that time Huntington Beach was real small. The market wasn't too far from where lived, but he took care of a lot of that.
- E He did the shopping for you?.
- P Oh, yes.
- E Did you have any problem with ration books, like running out of stamps?
- P We didn't have stamp books, at least I don't remember using them. Maybe my husband did. I was very busy with the children and the house.
- E So you don't remember ration stamps at all?
- P No, I don't.

E So you could find what you wanted or made do?

P That's right.

E Did you ever hear about people who would buy a lot of something and then stockpile it and make it hard for others to get it?

P No, I never heard about that. His mother and dad lived in Huntington Beach. His dad went fishing all the time at the end of the pier. There were good fish at that time. So his dad went fishing every day.

E Well, that must have helped a lot. So, with the garden and some fish, all you needed were a few staples and you could make things do. Did your husband cook at home?

P Yes, he did a lot of cooking. Yes, he did.

E Did you do any shopping from catalogs?

P Yes, yes. From Sears that I remember.

E Do you remember that it was hard to get nylons?

P I don't remember women wearing nylons then.

E Leg makeup?

P No, never.

E What about fun? Did you have any chances to go out dancing, bowling, to the movies?

P After we were married four years, my husband got polio. And he got it working at the base. He was the only one that got polio. So, he was in bed about a year, and I took care of him and my babies.

E What a scare that must have been. Did he make a good recovery?

P Yes. He's in a wheelchair now. But not from polio.

E Did you do things like, maybe play cards in the evening?

P We had friends in after he was better. They'd come over, sit around and talk and play cards. We joined the Elks Lodge, and we'd go there and visit and get together. Then, we'd go to the show downtown in Huntington Beach once in a while. When he first got polio, I cried a lot. And afterwards, we made up our minds well, there's nothing we can do about it, so we, you know . . .

E Made the best of it?

P Yes.

E Did you have a car, and enough gas to drive around?

P To get to work and, well, we didn't go very far, with gas being rationed.

E People told me that if your car broke down and you couldn't fix it, you were out of luck. You couldn't buy a new car – or washing machine or anything like that.

P I didn't have a washing machine. I did my wash my hand. It was a lot of work, with kids and all. Jimmy was born in July, and my husband came down with polio in August. But, anyway, we got through it, and we thank the Lord.

E Do you remember the blackouts? Was it scary?

P Yes. We never knew it if was practice or real.

E Did you ever hear about the anti-aircraft guns going off along the coast a couple of months after Pearl Harbor?

P No, never did.

PAULINE

E Did you ever doubt that we'd win the war?

P No.

E I know you said you yourself didn't have much experience with ration stamps, but did you ever hear about the black market? Where people would buy things and then sell them for more money?

P Well, there weren't a lot of people in Huntington Beach then, not like it is now. No, I don't recall anything like that.

E So from what you remember, people just did what they could and helped each other? Like if you had a garden and had lots of squash . .

P Yes, we'd give it to our neighbors, you know.

E Even though it was a hard time, it must have been fun in a way.

P Yes, it was.

E What about things like sheets and towels, and even furniture, when they wore out?

P I guess maybe they stayed worn out. Although, there were furniture stores in Santa Ana you could go to.

E Did you find you were eating more eggs and cheese, because meat was hard to get?

P Oh, yes, they had that long cheese, and maybe they'd give you half. My husband's father had chickens, so we could have eggs.

E Did you have a problem getting milk for the children?

P I don't remember having any problem with that.

- E When you did go to the store, or when your husband brought home groceries, did you see any changes from your regular brands, like in cereal or bread?
- P I don't think we bought a lot of cereal. Besides the oatmeal that we always had every day.
- E Do you remember doing any re-cycling? String, tin cans, kitchen grease?
- P I think so. Tinfoil and cans. In fact, I'm still saving newspapers for the church.
- E It sounds like you handled the day to day things very well, with your garden and the eggs, and fish. So, if someone were to ask you for your biggest memory of the war, what would you think of first? The funniest, or the saddest, or the happiest.
- P The saddest was, of course, when my husband got sick. The happiest was that the war was over, and when my six brothers all came back safely.
- E Well, you certainly had some good times and some bad times to remember from the war. Do you think people today could handle it as well as you guys did?
- P I imagine. Because we didn't really have a lot of problems we couldn't deal with.

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