

NINA RUSK HOSCH

MRS. HOSCH: [Recording begins mid-sentence] . . . years old, and he kept on insisting and insisting, and so here I am. I want to tell you a little bit about what it was like to be a little girl in the Rusk family between 1914 and 1920. Those were my years of living on Clairemont Avenue. My father was William Henry Rusk, born up in Cherokee County, one of eleven children. My mother, [inaudible—Nannen?] Stanley Rusk, was born up around Kennesaw Mountain. When they married, they lived in Canton, Georgia; and all of my brothers and sisters were born there. Kelly was the oldest, then George, then Annie Grace, then Harold, then Margaret; and they made up a family. In 1909 they moved down to Clairemont Avenue in a little house located just beyond Scott Boulevard, on the right. When Mama was forty-one years old and Papa was forty-eight, I came along. I don't know whether this was an accident or the result of one last fling or something; [laughter] but anyway, there I was, sort of a tag-along of a readymade family. The sister who was next to me was seven and a half years older than I was, and my oldest brother was seventeen when I was born. So they really made up the family; and I was just sort of out to myself, so to speak. I had to learn to fend for myself, to play by myself, to be by myself, and that sort of thing.

Our neighbors, beginning with the house next to us, as you go out Clairemont Avenue, were Mr. and Mrs. Lonnie [spelling?] Houston. We called them "Mr. Lonnie [spelling?] and Miss Anna," if any of you people remember them. She lived there for many, many years after he died. The house was down below the street level, if you remember that little house. Right now there are condominiums in that area. Going on out, on the same side—and I'm sure that I will skip over some people that I don't recall—but there were two girls that lived a little ways out: Martha Murdoch [Murdock?] and Elizabeth Jones. I think this was the Jones family—[looking at audience and acknowledging someone] I see a nod in a head over here. They were a little bit

older than I was, so they were not my playmates; but they lived there. Then out on the corner of Clairemont and North Decatur Road, Dr. and Mrs. Ripley lived. Then coming back toward Decatur on the other side, I remember the Billups family—Lynnette [spelling?] Billups, whom—I'm sure most all of you knew [sounds like "Lanita"—Lynnette?]. And again, there were two or three houses where I don't recall the names of the families who lived there. But the Gibbs home was on the corner of that little street [Maediris] that goes off right where the Y[MCA] is and then, across from that little street, the Johnson family. Now, they had three girls: Martha, Elizabeth, and Charlotte. Charlotte was about my age, and so we were playmates. Next to them, coming this way [toward Decatur], was the Blodgett family, with the daughter, Betty, and son, Billy Blodgett. I think there was another one but, I'm not—

UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER: Frances.

MRS. HOSCH: --Frances, that's right. Thanks. Frances was the youngest, then, wasn't she? Betty was a little bit older than I was also. Then there was a great, big field where the boys in the neighborhood played ball, and then the Dowman family; and the Dowmans had a whole bunch of boys. And Walter Dowman and my brother Harold were very, very good friends. And so we've gotten back up to Scott Boulevard now, and coming across Clairemont [Scott Boulevard?] was the Randall property; and all I ever knew was that the Randall sisters lived there. I never saw them but one time, out on the porch. All I can recall is that we were absolutely forbidden to go on their property; but they didn't have any children, so there was no reason for my wanting to go on their property. Next door to them lived Jasper and Fanny Tilley [spelling?] and their daughter, Mildred. They later had a son, Jasper, Jr.; but Mildred was my very favorite chief playmate. She was about a year younger than I was, but nevertheless we were the two that played with each other all the time.

I had to learn to play by myself a lot. But what does a little girl do to play by herself? I had only two bought toys, and these were both dolls. One was a little girl doll, and one was a Kewpie doll. My mother sewed for the entire family, and she always gave me scraps; and she was determined that she would teach me how to sew, and I should practice on the Kewpie doll. [TO AUDIENCE] Any of you ladies ever try to make a dress for a Kewpie doll? [laughter] You know, the joint in the arm is only at the shoulder; the legs are together; and this great, big, fat tummy. [laughter] And I have ruined more scraps of material trying to cut out a dress that, once I sewed it up, I could get the arms in, but then it wouldn't go over the tummy and whatever. I finally gave up and decided to make hats for my Kewpie doll, and I'd go out in the chicken house and get feathers to make hats.

We had a cat. It was never anybody's cat; it was just the family cat. And whenever anybody in the family got a new pair of shoes, they always had the box. And most of the boxes were pretty good size because the men in our family had big feet. And Papa would take this box and prop the lid up like so [demonstrates with index cards], and he would run some strings in to tie it together, and it would make like a little bed or something, and put a string in the front. And I'd put the cat in the box and drag that cat up and down Clairemont Avenue down toward Miss Anna's house. There was a big, old tree out there. The sidewalk was those hexagonal cement blocks, and the roots of the tree had forced these blocks up; so I couldn't drag my cat all the way down to Miss Anna's house, as much as I would like to, so that was my turn-around place. The other day when I drove by, I looked at that tree, and I realized they'd taken up those cement blocks years ago; and the place had been paved, but the roots of that tree are still pushing up the cement. [laughter] You still can't drag a cat down there. [laughter]

One other thing I did alone—well let me tell you first—I may ramble a little bit. When I was about six months old, the house burned. And there were men working on the road at the

time, and they came up to evacuate the house. And I guess the fire started in the kitchen; Mama was canning. So one of these men just picked up the great, big pot of whatever it was she was canning, took it next door, put some wood in the stove, and vanished till he [?] finished the canning whatever that was. [laughter] My brother insists that there was some brandied peaches there also when the fire started, but they were gone by the time the fire was over. [laughter] The family moved into the Gibbs home, which was empty at the time, until Papa rebuilt the house. So the white house out there with the porch across the front that goes down the side—the white frame house—that was our home. We had six acres there, a horse, cow, pigs, chickens, a big garden, a surrey—nobody had a car out in that direction except Mr. Blodgett across the street, because he had the Buick agency here. So you either walked to Decatur, or you rode in the surrey. And I can look back on it as a good place to live and a good life and all that sort of thing.

Well, this new house that was built, with the porch coming down the side, you could enter a hallway off of this side porch. And to the right of it was the dining room, and to the left was the living room, with great, big sliding doors between the hall and these two rooms. And we didn't have carpeting on the floor in the living room or the music room, which was the other front room on the house. There were some scatter rugs; and we had one old scatter rug that had come down from Canton, Georgia, that I was allowed to use to play with, and it had a horse's head on it. And I would put the rug in the hallway, and I would go way into the dining room, and I would start running, and I would get on that rug, and I could guide it on that waxed floor all the way through the living room and into the music room. That was great fun. That was called "riding the horse."

Papa taught me how to make animals out of cucumbers. And when the cucumbers would get too old and turn yellow and whatever or too big, he would give me the cucumbers.

And with sticks and stones and whatever I would put legs on them and ears and mouth and tails and all that, and I had cucumber horses and cows and pigs and chickens and whatever. That was a fun thing. And this old cat we had, we would tie pieces of paper around its legs and put it out on the waxed floor. Well, if you've ever done this to a cat, you know he picks up one leg and he shakes and falls on all the other three, you know. It's great fun to watch a cat do that.

[laughter] Papa was the sort of a person that enjoyed all sorts of little things. He could dream up certain things for fun. For instance, he would lower the upper part of a window just a tiny bit in the wintertime, especially when the wind was blowing real hard; and he would stretch some silk thread through this little opening. And when the wind blows, believe me, it makes music. It's just as easy as anything; it makes music.

One night we had a neighborhood gathering of all the kids in the neighborhood and their parents, if they wanted to come; and Harold and Margaret were going to put on a show. They put up a sheet over the doors to the dining room—the doors from the hallway into the dining room—and they put all their lights back in the dining room; and all of us sat in the living room in the dark. And they went through all of their antics and contortions and whatever, and you saw them in silhouette, you see. This was like—this was a, quote, “movie picture.” And so all of a sudden they called me to come back there. And so I went back, and I was to be in the picture. Well, Margaret and Harold made one of those [clasps left wrist with right hand] saddle—I've forgotten what you call them—saddle-type chairs for somebody to sit on [sedan chair]. So they put me on it, and they walked all around and all around for a while, carrying me on this thing; and then finally, when they got right in the middle of the scene, they just opened up, and they dropped me. [laughter] And everybody laughed but me. [laughter] I took a lot of beating off of them sometimes.

I played with paper dolls. You remember the Dolly Dimple paper dolls? And the oatmeal box had a paper doll on it that, every time we got a box of oatmeal, then this could be cut out and because of the cardboard, they were stiff enough to prop up against the wall, you know. I just had a whole string of these Dolly Dimple paper dolls. *The Ladies' Home Journal* also had Dolly Dimple paper dolls, and I had those. Now, my sister had started cutting out paper dolls out of the Sears Roebuck catalog, and she had a huge collection of these things. And she kept them in a book—you know, so many in between the pages. Well, one day Mama gave me Margaret's paper dolls to play with, and I proceeded to tear their heads off. [laughter] And Margaret, of course, hasn't liked me since then. [laughter] Mama's attitude was, "Well, just--so Nina has torn them off. You just get busy and cut yourself out some more paper dolls."

Well, Mildred and I played out in the yard. We had—not really a sandpile—it was a mixture of sand and dirt, I'm sure. And we made little villages, and we made houses, and we made mud pies, and we made mud chocolate milk. I'll clue you in: that doesn't taste very good. [laughter] But one day, I wanted her to do something; and I can't recall what it was, but she didn't want to do it. And I kept insisting, and she still didn't want to do it. So I told her if she wasn't going to do it, that I was going to crawl up under the house and die. So she still didn't do it. So I just proceeded to go over and start crawling up under the house. Well, she let out a blood-curdling yell that brought her mother over. And when Fanny found out what I was up to, she decided it was time for me to be sent to my mama. So we went around behind the house, and Mama was sweeping the back porch at the time. And I back porch was screened in and had latticework, and the back door was rather heavy. And she had taken a piece of stove wood and had stuck it in the crack of the door to prop it open while she could sweep everything right out the back steps. So Fanny took me and Mildred around there, Mildred still crying, and explained to Mama what I had done. And I can see Mama right now, just holding the broom. [laughter]

And I didn't know that Mildred had put her hand up in the crack of the door, and I accidentally hit that piece of stove wood; and the door came to on Mildred's fingers. Well, I had just never been so hurt in all my life, you know, and here I had injured my very dearest friend. So all of a sudden we were more concerned with Mildred's hand than we were with the fact that I was going to crawl up under the house and die. Anyway, Mildred forgave me, and we continued to play together.

I remember one day we went way down in the woods behind the house, and there was a little branch that flowed from the Randall property, under a barbed-wire fence, onto our property. And this was a day that we were out gathering moss, and the moss was much prettier over on the Randalls' side of the barbed-wire fence. So Mildred and I decided we had to have some of that moss. Well, how do you get moss if it's over on the Randalls' side? Because we had been given specific instructions never to go on the Randall property. So we made a pact, and we decided that we would try and that we would never tell anybody. So I'm telling it for the first time [laughter] that Mildred and I stole moss off of the Randall branch and got by with it. We really did.

One of the reasons I liked to go over to the Johnsons' was because those girls had a teddy bear. And I really envied them that teddy bear—I just thought that was the nicest thing in the world to play with. And as I was trying to get my wits about me to tell y'all some of these things, I suddenly realized that I never did, as far as I know, ever ask for any kind of a toy. I guess it just wasn't in our way of living or something. Kids these days and times, you know, they ask for the moon, as far as toys are concerned. But I had my two dolls, I had my cucumbers, and I had the cat, and you know, all this kind of stuff. But I used to like to go over to play with the Johnson kids just to get to play with the teddy bear.

My cousins, Helen and Dean Rusk, lived across town, out on Whitehall Street. Helen was a year older than I was, and Dean was about five years older than I am, and we visited back and forth. When he came to visit—I mean, when they came to visit us, see, my brother Harold is ten years older than I am, and Margaret's seven. They didn't have anything to do with me, you know; I'm just this little odd soul running around. But when Dean and Helen came, then they both played with me and Dean started treating me just like he treated Helen. So I just looked on him as a brother, rather than—and I guess he looked on me as a sister, and so this is—we've just had this kind of a relationship, you know, all these years; it started way back then.

Well, one time Helen didn't come; and Mama and Papa and Dean and I went up to Cherokee County, where Papa's oldest sister, Jane, lived in the old family home up there. It must have taken the better part of a day in a horse and surrey to get up there. I remember riding up there; and when we got there, they were building in between the main house and the detached kitchen to make it all one great, big house. And the only thing that they had finished at that time, well, the sills were down, and the studs were up; and Dean and I played, running in and out, you know, the studs, and walking on the sills in this house. That's all I remember about that, but we had a good time riding up there, I recall.

This was also the time of World War I. Papa was in the marble business. His marble shop was right across from the depot for part of the time, but then he moved it one more block toward Atlanta right next to the railroad. Not long ago I was out in the cemetery here, and my parents are buried out there, and I drove by the old part of the cemetery. For the first time I thought, "I wonder how many of those monuments were the handiwork of my father?"

Between the years of 1909 and 1920, when we left here. Papa had a different sort of a way of presenting his ideas of monuments to his customers. He had a great, big roll of paper, four or five feet wide—it was a huge roll of paper. And he was pretty good at mechanical drawing. And

he thought that an individual who was selecting a monument ought to be able to see it life-size. You don't have just a little picture to pick out something; he would sit down and draw the whole thing; and when he would go to see a customer in the customer's home, he would have to put the thing down on the floor and roll it out and show them the kinds of monuments that he would build.

Well, when World War II came along, just all of a sudden one day, they declared marble as an item that was nonessential for shipping purposes; and, of course, the railroads were the only means of getting marble around. This hit my father right where he lived, so to speak. He went to work out at Camp Gordon, and we took in some boarders: a Mr. and Mrs. Reedy [spelling?] and a Mr. Escher [Usher? spelling?]. And they, too, worked out at—well, Mrs. Reedy didn't, but the two men worked out at Camp Gordon. I don't know what they did, but anyway, they worked out there. They were not in the army; they were civilians working at Camp Gordon.

My oldest brother, Kelly, was the only one who would have been old enough to be drafted; but he had gotten married when I was two years old, and by this time he had a little girl. She's just four years younger than I am. George wasn't old enough to be drafted, but he dropped out of high school and worked at the Atlantic Steel plant. And I remember that there was an accident out there one day, and I don't know what kind; but a piece of steel went into his leg, and he was brought home and cared for at home. I guess they got the steel out, but anyway, he had a sore leg for a while. The only other illness that we had in the family through those years that I know of was that Annie Grace had the flu of 1918. Now that look back, I say to myself, "Mama must have been a very good nurse to have taken care of Annie Grace with all these people around, and nobody else got the flu."

Downstairs in our hall the telephone hung on the wall—you know, the crank kind. And on one side of the telephone was a picture of Marshal Foch, and on the other side was General

Pershing. Well, I thought General Pershing was the handsomest man I had ever seen a picture of in all my life. And the stairway came down on a landing and then came down again; and if I sat on about the fifth or sixth step, I could just be eye-to-eye with General Pershing's picture over on the wall. And I used to just sit there and admire General Pershing.

Kelly had married when I was two years old and had left home, so I didn't have any memory of Kelly at home. I didn't really know him. One day I was out in the front yard, and a man was coming down the street that I didn't know, and I went flying in the house to tell Mama that there was a German coming down the street [laughter]. It turned out to be Kelly, my oldest brother.

Papa no longer had any need for his designs of monuments, so he gave Margaret this great, big roll of paper. She cut it up to make a scrapbook of World War II [sic—means World War I], and she made paste out of flour and water; you know, that was the only way we had of making paste in those days, and it was a gooey mess. [Responding to comment from unidentified audience member] I beg your pardon? World War I, yeah, excuse me. I'm getting my wars all mixed up. So she cut up this roll of paper into very large sheets; and whatever was published in the newspaper she would clip it out, and she made herself a huge scrapbook. I don't remember—well, during this period of time I ran away. And when they found me, I was on the bridge on North Decatur Road, right over the railroad track. And in those days it was a wooden bridge. And I remember that I was standing on the lower rail and trying to reach up my foot to the top rail, and I was right over the railroad track, you know, looking right down, when suddenly the surrey appears over the crest of the hill on North Decatur Road. And Mrs. Reedy had gone out to Camp Gordon to pick up the men to bring them back home, and so they rescued me from that.

Papa made me a doll bed out of broken wooden chairs—folding chairs that were cast-offs out at Camp Gordon. I still have that little bed—you know, the back of the chair for the head and footboard to the doll bed, and he made it so the side would let down. We put a pillow in for a mattress, and it was strong enough that I could sit in it and dress my doll and that sort of thing.

He came home one day with a big sack of potato peelings. He had noticed, in going by the kitchen, that, when they peeled potatoes, they peeled so much of the potato with the skin, that—and the little eyes of the potato were quite visible, and so he planted all these things out in the backyard. So I learned about how you plant potatoes in World War I.

I remember the Armistice Day parade. Papa was the sort that would never miss a parade or any other kind of fun thing that was going on. We went up on—I don't remember which floor of the Flatiron Building, but it was probably just the second, maybe the third, floor. And when the parade came up the street—this is downtown Atlanta—six men were carrying a casket. And Papa told me the Kaiser was in the casket. [laughter] That's all I remember about that.

Sundays. Oh, Sundays. We belonged to the Presbyterian Church. The surrey had to be gotten out and Old Dan hitched to the surrey, and off we would go to church. Papa sang in the choir, and he had a rather deep, bass voice. I would sit in the pews with Mama and watch for Papa to march in with the choir and listen to him sing. One day he came in, and he had shaved his moustache off, and I didn't recognize him. And when we got back home, I told him I didn't recognize him because he didn't have his moustache; well, he let it grow out and never did shave it off again. [laughter]

The Houston Chapel was located on North Decatur Road just across the railroad on the left. [To audience]: Any of you remember the Houston Chapel? You do. Did you go there on Sunday afternoons? Well, we did. And I can still hear my father singing, "There's a Church in

the Valley by the Wildwood” with his deep, bass voice, coming out the door, “Come, come, come.” He wouldn’t let us read the funny papers on Sunday, so Monday was the day when we could look at the Katzenjammer Kids and Maggie and Jiggs and Moon Mullins, but never on Sunday.

There were—I guess I better look at these notes a minute—oh, one day, well, Papa had made some chicken coops, and the lumber was still sort of scattered around in the yard. Maybe he hadn’t finished them or something. And I went out to investigate, and there was a board that had a nail in it, and I was barefooted, and I stepped on the nail. And Mama went out in the garden and pulled up a beet, took it in the house, and cut it in two and scraped some of the middle out of the beet and made a poultice and put it on my foot. No tetanus, no nothing. I got well.

Mama had her own way of punishing me. I don’t remember the things I did; I just remember the punishment. But the clock sat on the mantelpiece in her bedroom—this is where she sewed—and Papa had made me a little chair. So she would make me put the chair right in front of the fireplace, where I could see the clock; and I had to sit in that chair until the minute hand went all the way around to where it had been. Another favorite way of punishing me was she usually had a thimble on because she sewed so much—made all of our clothes. She would thump me on the head [demonstrates] like so with the thimble, and that hurts.

Papa was very good with birds. He could make a noise like an owl that would make the owls come right on up to where he was. He could hear one way in the distance, and he could call them, and they’d come and sit in a tree right beside him. I don’t know why I was afraid of owls. I’m sure that maybe Harold or Margaret or somebody decided that they would tease me and make me afraid of owls. But the two houses that are there now—between our house and Mr. Lonnie’s [spelling?] house—were not there then, and that was all our side yard; it was just a

big grove of trees. One night Papa heard an owl, and so he decided he'd go out and call the owl. He told me to come out there with him, and I went out with him. And sure enough, that old owl just came right up and—from way in the distance—and sat in the tree right up above him; and it scared the living daylights out of me. And I went flying in the house, closed all the windows, and carried on like crazy. Don't know why I should be afraid of owls.

Oh, we went to the horse races in Lakewood. That was a big deal. Then—I guess I've just about covered about all I can remember from that period of time.

At age five, then, we moved to Cedartown, and Papa had tried to get his marble business going back again but wasn't successful; so he bought a farm about four miles out of Cedartown, and we moved. The house was a two-story house with columns in the front and the little bitty porch upstairs on the front. And the first night we were there I went out on the porch; and, to my utter joy and amazement, there was the moon. And I went running back in the house to tell Mama and Papa the moon had moved with us. [laughter] And that began a whole new life of my living on a farm in the country and learning about that sort of thing.

So now I'll swap over to World War II, unless some of you want to ask any questions about that part of my life. In World War I the medical school at Emory had been approached by the army to set up a hospital, and it was called the Emory Unit 43rd General Hospital. Doctors such as Dr. Westmoreland and Dr. Si Strickler, Sr., and Frank Boland, Sr., were doctors in that unit. The hospital went to France and was there only about five or six months. But the named hospital for the Emory Unit, the 43rd General, was reactivated for World War II; and they started recruiting doctors and nurses and enlisted personnel here in Atlanta. The table of organization for this hospital was about forty doctors and fifteen or so medical administrative people, a hundred nurses, and about five hundred enlisted men. When they recruited the doctors, they were able to get all but one from the local area. We had to import our psychiatrist, but all of the

rest of the doctors were from around here or from Georgia. Sixty-three of the nurses out of the hundred were—quote—local people. Thirty-two of them, I think, were graduates of Emory School of Nursing. So we had a chance to know each other, you see, before we ever went into the army, but we had to pick up additional people to fill out our table of organization.

Dr. J. D. Martin, a surgeon, was one of the doctors with us; and he decided about two years ago that a book* should be written about our service in the army. And Dr. Martin is a fascinating person. He's eighty years old; he's got a mind like a steel trap; he's almost blind. But he was very, very determined that this book should be written; and when Dr. Martin gets determined that something is to be done, it gets done, some way. He approached some of us who were in the unit to see if we would help him, and a group of the doctors got together. Most of the doctors are deceased by now, but there are still eight or ten who live here in Atlanta; and they helped him. And then he had me and a group of nurses work together on getting together the information about our nurses and their activities. And then one of the enlisted men, who is here, did the same thing as far as the enlisted men were concerned. We each had committees, so to speak, to put this book* together; so if you think it reads like it was put together by a committee, it was.

I'm sure that a number of you would remember many of the doctors. [Thumbing through book*] Let me get back to the roster here and quickly go over their names. Someone has already mentioned that Dr. [inaudible—Hauk? Houghton?] was her physician; and he was certainly one of our better ones. Our commanding officer was not from here; he was regular army. But then there was—and I'm not going to read ranks down, other than when they change. So there was Lieutenant Colonel Ira Ferguson and Richard Wood—that's Hugh Wood.

* SEE NOTE AT THE END OF THIS TRANSCRIPT FOR TITLE AND OTHER PUBLICATION DATA

Dr. Ferguson is deceased, but Dr. Wood is still living. Then Major Bailey; Major Blackford [Blackfoot?], William Bryan—he was our radiologist; Dr. Burke was ear, nose, and throat; Dr. Claiborne [spelling?] was a medical man; Dr. Cross was a surgeon; Harpole [spelling?] was a maxillofacial surgeon; Hartwell Joyner [spelling?] from up in Gainesville was a medical man; Albert Lynch was an orthopedic man; J. D. Martin was general surgery; John Munford was medical; Francis Parker was laboratory; Si Strickler, Jr., was medical; William Trimble, medical; Elbert Aigner [spelling?], medical; William Armstrong, ear, nose, and throat; Frank Boland [spelling?], Jr., was a surgeon; Joe Boland [spelling?] was orthopedic; Ed Bosworth was medical; James Chambers was—I guess he was medical; Harry Croswell was a dentist; Drew Ferguson was a surgeon; Buckhauser [spelling?] was a dentist; Gibony [spelling?] was a medical man; Roy Gibson was medicine; Robert Gillespie was—I guess he was a surgeon; Allen [Alan?] Halper's a surgeon; Byron Hoffman was medicine; Julius Hughes was a dentist; John Lang [Lange?] was—well, he went in as a pediatrician, I think—I don't know what he was—he must have worked in medicine [laughter]; Dr. Robert Maben was our brain surgeon; Earl Rasmussen was a surgeon; Charles Stone was a medical man; Dave Varner was a surgeon; Nick Wheeler was a surgeon; and [inaudible—sounds like “Evry”] was a dentist; William Goodyear was—I think was a surgeon. I worked all the time with Dr. Harpole, so I had a hard time keeping up with what everybody else was doing. I was in the maxillofacial business. [Goes back to book*] Then there was Fred Smith, and I guess that's the list of the doctors; and so I'm sure that a number of you would have known a number of these people.

Well, we were recruited; and Emory University gave us quite a send-off. And in September of '42 we went to Camp Livingston out in Louisiana. We thought we were going to be going overseas right away, and there was a leak about our status of departure and everything; and Uncle Sam got real annoyed, and we got grounded for a whole year out in Camp

Livingston. For some, it was a very long period of waiting, especially for the doctors. The nurses were assigned to the station hospital, and we worked regular shifts in the hospital. But they brought in five other medical units to be trained in that particular area, so we were just running over each other. There were so many nurses and doctors and whatever and trying to get some training in that particular hospital. We had our field duty, we learned how to march, we attended classes on chemical warfare, they decided they were going to teach us how to swim under burning oil and all this kind of stuff, you know. The nurses did not have to go through the infiltration course, but the medical officers did. That's where you have to get down on the ground and crawl under live fire; and if you, you know, raise up, you've had it.

Part of this time, a lot of the doctors were sent off on detached service for further training to places like Mayo's [sic] or the Crile Clinic or hospitals up in St. Louis or whatever, especially some of the younger men. We didn't have anyone who was really trained in neurosurgery, and so Dr. Maben was sent off and was gone almost the whole training period up at Mayo's [sic], where he had a chance to learn a good bit about that. And he became our neurosurgeon once we were overseas; and then after he came back to Atlanta, why, he practiced neurosurgery.

The nurses were just put on duty in the hospital; and, when there got to be too many nurses from our unit and other units that were there, they sent about eighty of our nurses off on detached service to other hospitals at Camp Polk and Camp House and the Army-Navy hospital in Arkansas, and whatever. We became sort of accustomed to that routine of work, of going to classes, of road marches, of bivouacs, and all that sort of thing.

The orders to go overseas came about a year after we landed out there, and we boarded a troop train. And this was the very first time our entire unit had ever been together—all the nurses, all the doctors, all the enlisted men. So this was—five hundred, and six hundred and—almost seven hundred individuals on a troop train to go to New York. We—[glances at

watch] don't let me run over now, 'cause—we went to Camp Shanks. The doctors had a real good time at Camp Shanks. The nurses were quartered in a psychiatric hospital, with patients below us and patients above us; and we were locked into the big ward. It was one great, big room. And if you can imagine a hundred and five women in one room. [laughter] With the doors locked, we were not permitted to go out at all except for some road marches and to get some equipment and some of our shots. They waited till the last minute to give us our second yellow fever shot and that sort of thing, so some of the gals got a little bit sick off of that.

But this was a period of time when they were changing our uniforms from those very nice, lovely blues that we had to the OD [olive drab] color. And during the week we were at Camp Shanks, we had to dispose of all of our uniforms—hats, bags, shoes, dresses, whatever, slacks, shirts—that were all in blues and go into the ODs. So this was a real mess. We were given—we had been told that we would pack our things in our footlockers. And our footlockers had our names stenciled on them and all that sort of thing. But you got to Shanks, you give up your footlocker. You're given a couple of barracks bags. No, we were given three. They were called the A Bag and the B Bag and the C Bag. And every hour on the hour it seemed to us that we would get orders for packing certain things in one or the other of these bags, depending on whether we would need the article onboard ship going over or not. And we managed to hide a few little luxury items—an evening dress or two, things like that, you know—but you'd have to hide them when somebody would come around to inspect the contents of your bedding roll and your A Bag and B Bag and C Bag. I managed to get over there with one evening dress—never did get to wear it, but my roommate did. [laughter] Tent mate, I should say.

We finally left Shanks. They make the army travel so funny. We were dressed up in our Class A uniforms, brand-new, complete with gloves, with our helmets on, and our pistol belts, and our canteens and whatever hanging around our Class A uniforms. We boarded trucks, and

we got on a train and went into New York to get the ship to go overseas. Everything was supposed to be quiet and in blackouts and all that kind of stuff. And then when we got there, here was an orchestra to play a good farewell for us. They played “Ramblin’ Wreck from Georgia Tech” and that sort of thing. And then, as we carted all of our stuff—and by “stuff,” I mean the gas mask, the Musette bag, the pocketbook, the helmet—you know all this kind of stuff. And you’re going up the gangplank, and the orchestra came out with, “A Pretty Girl Is like a Melody.” [laughter] That one really got to us—anything but a pretty girl.

We were two weeks getting over there—and “over there” was Oran, Algeria. And as we sailed through by Gibraltar, that was the most—one of the most—magnificent sights that I think I have ever seen. It was right at sunset. The water was so still that it was like a mirror, and it was mirroring this beautiful, beautiful sunset.

We were in a very, very large convoy. It was supposed to be the largest medical convoy that had ever gone overseas. And one ship that was in our convoy, that went on to Bizerte, was bombed but not much damage done to it. One of the nurses that was on that ship wound up at Emory University in graduate school at the same time I was in graduate school, so we had a good time talking about our trip overseas. Once we got to North Africa, we were put in a staging area. The nurses were in a staging area of two thousand nurses. The doctors were out in a place called Goat Hill—it was miles away. I believe the enlisted men were nearby, and we never saw them. This staging area had tents, and it had a latrine; but we did all of our bathing out of our helmets on these stands that they built so that a helmet would fit into a slot, you know, and not topple over. Try washing your feet in a helmet—it just doesn’t—on the ground—it just doesn’t work. You know, the water spills. [laughter] But anyway, out in the wide-open spaces, two thousand nurses taking their baths and all this stuff.

Fortunately, I was one of the ones who was sent on detached service to a hospital in town; and it was just so much better to be working than it was to be out in the staging area. Our hospital was being built at the time. We got there in September; we didn't move into our own hospital until mid-October. Mid-October, the rains came. And most of our hospital was in tentage, but they had constructed a few buildings out of fieldstone, with zinc roofs and plastic-type stuff in the windows, cement floors. The crucial part of the hospital was housed in the buildings, and most of the patient wards were in tentage. So this was a thousand-bed hospital. This means a lot of tents out there. So one day, on a sunny afternoon, we admitted two patients. These two were our first two patients. And the next day, in the afternoon, three hundred and forty-two patients arrived in the mud. The ambulances rolled in, and the mud was up to our ankles. And in helping write the book,* one of the things that—well, there were several things--that really sort of hit me was that, so one day, you've got two patients, and the next day you've got three hundred and forty-some-odd. How do you feed them? How do you bed them down? How do you find out what's the matter with them? You're a brand-new hospital, working together for the first time. Now, we had been at Livingston; but we had never worked together as a unit. And this was a fascinating thing to me, that people will just plunge in and get a job done, regardless of the handicaps that you have; regardless of the rain, the mud, maybe the lack of water, the lack of heat—the lack of heat was the thing that really got to us in North Africa. And I, for one, got sort of mad at the coal strikers here in the States. We had pot-belly stoves in those tents for the patients, and we went through several months of being able to have a fire for the patient one hour in the morning and one hour at night; and the amount of water that you could heat in a bucket on a pot-belly stove was the amount of water that you had to bathe twenty patients. So I wasn't very happy with the coal strikers back here in the

* SEE NOTE AT THE END OF THIS TRANSCRIPT FOR TITLE AND OTHER PUBLICATION DATA

States. We didn't have—we had some old crates and things like that that we could burn, and we did. You know, we'd scrounge for wood. We didn't have any heat in our own tents, and I don't ever want to be that cold again. That was the most miserable, miserable part of the whole war, was being so blasted, blasted cold.

We were not as busy in North Africa as we were later on. The war by that time was—when we got to North Africa, Sicily was just being invaded; and we began to get some casualties out of Sicily. But our patients became mostly patients who were on their way home, so we were sort of a waylay station for many of these patients. We did have to take care of Italian prisoners of war with malaria. Five hundred beds were set aside to care for these Italian POWs. One of the shocks that we had was that, as we would be confronted with the enemy, we realized that they had not had the same kind of precautions; they had not had tetanus shots, they had not had yellow fever shots or the malaria preventive medications, and so forth, and so we began to run into this sort of thing.

Then in July of the next year we tore down the hospital down to the ground and moved out to Italy. Our equipment was packed onboard a ship, and we were sent to Italy and farmed out to existing hospitals in Italy. These hospitals were in Naples, in Rome—fighting then was just north of Rome. We were divided up into such small groups that we rarely saw more than two or three of the people that were in our unit at any time. Two teams—surgical teams—were organized to go on ships, hospital ships, for the invasion. Another group was organized to go in with an evacuation hospital; Dr. Martin was one of the surgeons in that group. The doctors were farmed out to troop ships, one doctor per ship, to go in on the invasion. So each of these men will have a story of their own to tell, you know.

Most of the nurses were left back in Italy at the time of the invasion. The two hospital ships went over, made a trip and operated on the men they picked up, on the way back to Naples; and that was a three-day sailing trip. And then the evacuation hospital went in right with the invasion and went on up through quite a ways up into France. The doctors, of course, with their troop ships, they landed. And I was one of the ones back in Italy. And I can recall that one day we got a patient in on the ward that I was working on. He was a full colonel, he'd been shot in the back, the bullet had gone through his spleen, severed his spinal cord, tore up some of his intestinal tract. He had been picked up on the beach, flown back to the hospital in Naples, been through the operating room, he'd had his spleen removed—they'd had to turn him over, and they did the abdominal thing. And he was on my ward, in my care, five hours after he'd been wounded on the beach in southern France. I could just hardly believe that we had, even in one instance, that kind of care for the wounded. Of course, when the Korean War came along, and we had helicopters, that was another story. But this is back in World War II.

We got together finally in southern France. The big group of nurses left Italy on an old World War I reconditioned vessel, *The John L. Clem*. God, that thing smelled bad. And the ports, you know, in southern France had been bombed, and then the French had scuttled their fleet and that sort of thing, and so it was impossible to land the ship. So we had to be transferred to a landing craft out at sea. So this British tank carrier thing came alongside the ship, and we were to be transferred from our ship over to there. Well, when they move troops, they make you get together at least one to two hours ahead of time, and we had to travel in alphabetical order, so that when they call off the roster, you know, and check us off for every move.

You learned to play bridge with those that are either in front of you or behind you, you know, somewhere along the line. Well, there was a bridge foursome just ahead of me in line.

One of the girls had a piece of plyboard [holds up index fingers to demonstrate] that was about that big square, and this was the bridge table. We had been required to get in line about two hours beforehand, and so we were just—the line sort of snaked its way down the deck—and these four girls ahead of me were playing bridge. They had taken off their helmets, put their helmets on the floor, and they were sitting on their helmets, and then they pulled out the bridge table and whatever. We had long since learned in traveling that, if we put our dress uniform inside our coat, with the sleeves out the sleeves, and button up the coat and put the hood down over and tie it and put the belt around, and put shoes in one pocket and lingerie in another pocket, then when we got where we were going, we'd have a clean outfit, it wouldn't be wrinkled, you know, the whole thing, and we could go out on a date. So most everybody had their clothes in their coats. Well, two uniforms and maybe a sweater or whatever, you know, inside the coat, you feel like you're carrying a body or something. And again, we had on our gas masks and Musette bags and pocketbooks and helmets and pistol belts and canteens—you know, the whole works. Traveling in woolens. Uncle Sam makes you travel in woolens in the summertime. We were traveling—we had had to sew the Seventh Army patch on our sleeves just for a period of three weeks and then take them off again. But, oh, we had our Seventh Army patch. These girls were in the middle of a bridge hand when the order came to move. So they simply picked up their tricks and put tricks in their pockets and put their hands in other pockets and so forth and put their helmets on. And so help me, they put a plank between the edge of the deck to the rim of the troop carrier out there. And the big ship was sort of rolling one way, and other ship was rolling a little bit the other way. And this was a plank—you know, no wider than this [demonstrates by holding up two index fingers]. And you know, the Mediterranean was thirty feet down here someplace. So we had to gather all of this stuff and walk the plank and then turn around on the plank and then go down the ladder down there. So

I watched all these girls go ahead of me; and by the time I got across and got down, they had already taken off their helmets, put them on the floor, got out the bridge table, pulled out the deck of cards, and they were finishing up their hand. [laughter] We didn't miss a thing.

We were in--I'm going to close--[glances at watch] heavens to Betsy. We were in France for a year. We had a marvelous hospital. It was in a building. I went in; and if I could have hugged walls, I would have, you know. The very idea of living in a room with a ceiling and walls—we'd been in tents for so long. That was great. We took care of a total of about twenty-eight thousand patients, and we had wonderful people. I mean, all these doctors and surgeons and medical men and whatever were top men and our nurses were well trained. We had our fun, we had our hard work, but we enjoyed it. And we're glad that we've had a chance to [taps book* on table beside her] write it down. [applause]

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by CS

*Publication data for book:

The 43rd General Hospital World War II: The Emory University Unit

Author: Martin, John D. Jr. & Nina Rusk Hosch, Co-Chairmen of the Editorial Committee, et al. (includes index)

Publisher: Atlanta: Emory University., 1983 1st ed.