

**Interviewee:** Marani, Jean  
**Interviewer:** Robin Sellers  
**Date of interview:** March 28, 2005  
**Category:** World War II  
**Status:** Open  
**Tape location:** Box #50

**Sellers:** Mrs. Marani, are you aware that we are recording this conversation?

**Marani:** Yes, I am, and you have my permission to do so.

**Sellers:** Thank you so much. Why don't you start then by telling me a little about where you were born and grew up.

**Marani:** All right. I was born in Evanston, Illinois, and lived there for about three years. After my father's death, my mother moved to Sarasota, Florida, where she had friends from Evanston. So I grew up there and lived there until I moved to Tallahassee in 1970. That really was my sort of basic home and I attended public school there, kindergarten and school, and graduated in 1942. I graduated just a few months after World War II began.

**Sellers:** Did you go to Sarasota High?

**Marani:** Yes I did. That was the only — we had just two high schools — well, we had segregation at that time and that was the only high school in my area.

**Sellers:** That was on US 41?

**Marani:** Yes, 41 South.

**Sellers:** So it's where it is now.

**Marani:** It's still there today, the old building. Whenever I'm down that way I go by and salute it [laughs]. It was a good school.

**Sellers:** And it still is. So you were just of an age to be enamored of young men in uniform [laughs].

**Marani:** [laughs] Well, of course, our version of the Cold War you might say — all the activities of Hitler we were aware of because we were in high school. I remember once even being herded into the auditorium to hear one of Hitler's speeches. Of course, it was in German, (we had no idea what he was saying), but I think it was when he marched into Czechoslovakia. I'm hazy about that and I've really never checked it out. As we were doing more and more to assist our allies as far as short of war, one of the things that occurred — it was basically during the

end of my junior year and my senior year. We were training young British men who were going to be in the RAF. One of the bases was in Arcadia, which was not far from Sarasota. There may have been some others; in fact I think there was one in Sebring. But Arcadia was the one that we had contact with. Our community sort of adopted the men at that base and they would come over on weekends. I don't know what their uniform was when they were being flight trained, but when they came over to Sarasota they were in civilian clothes. Different ones would stay in different homes; it was just a community effort. Sarasota has still today a strong population of descendants from Scotland, and so that was another reason that they reached out to these British boys. I was a member of what was called the Junior Woman's Club and we had Sunday afternoon tea dances. They invited the British fellows to come to that, and so that's how we were introduced to them. You wouldn't have noticed them around the streets, except of course once they started speaking. There were three other girls on my street approximately the same age in Sarasota High School and so we corralled – we met four fellows that you might say we became enamored of and entertained them in our homes. They didn't get to Sarasota every weekend but they came as often as they could. We saw them and then when they left to go back, we corresponded. But for some reason, it was hard to get letters back and forth.

**Sellers:** You mean to Arcadia or to England?

**Marani:** No, no, to England. I don't think they were sent airmail in those days, even though we probably paid for it, because I remember buying airmail stamps to England. But they probably went on ships and they would be sunk. Because I'd get a letter from the one that I was corresponding with, whose name was Clifford Guy Randall Coffee [laughs]. I would have said, "I've sent you three letters" and he'd say, "Well, I only got one." So we don't know what happened to them. He became a bomber pilot, and one of the things that he promised when he left was that he was send me a pair of RAF wings. At that time they didn't have the metal wings like Americans did, but they were sewn on their uniforms. He sent two or three and they never reached me, so that was a disappointment.

But once America got in the war, I ceased to hear from Clifford. I did after the war was over, that he was alive and had survived. I think he'd been wounded, if I'm not mistaken. So we would exchange letters usually at Christmastime. He married and settled down to work. He was with a railroad company. He worked in London but commuted back to – I can't remember at the moment the small town in Sussex. Every now and then — the years might go by and I didn't hear from him, but when I got ready to go to England, which was in 1985 (a long time ago), I did write to Cliff and I think I may even have called him. He said, "Well, we want you to come down and have a meal with us." I did, I took the train to the town and there he was. He looked older; I did too, of course, than when I was in high school. But I had a lovely visit and was shown the town and met his son. When we were having a meal, there was a little package in front of my place, and when I opened it up, there was the RAF wings. In this case, they were from one of his uniforms. It wasn't something that he went out and purchased. Of course, I treasured that. No, excuse me, I'm getting ahead of myself - they were not from one of his uniforms, but they were RAF wings. And so I treasured those.

We kept in touch, and then sometimes a year goes by and you don't hear and you sort of forget maybe to send a Christmas card. So, early this year, I received a letter from his son

Derrick. Derrick informed me that his mother had died several years ago and then that Clifford died before Christmas. I appreciated so much that he let me know about that. In fact, at our church we have memorial flowers for Easter and I dedicated one of them to Cliff. But in the letter was a set of RAF wings and the son Derrick said, "This pair was on my father's dress uniform." So, I was very thrilled to have that. I've written him and acknowledged the gift and my regard. Then I ran across, the other day, some photographs that I had taken at the time that Cliff was coming over to Sarasota. So I'm going to make — I'll keep a set for myself but I'll send the others to Derrick. He may have them, I don't know, but I thought it would be nice to have that. So that was a little different experience than some of the other girls had when I got up to college because this was a localized thing. I don't remember ever seeing a number of how many men were trained to fly, but I think a significant number. In Arcadia, there is a monument in the center of the town to the RAF and also listing the names of many of them who were killed. That was a substantial number.

**Sellers:** Yes, a lot of them died in training accidents.

**Marani:** Yes, and they also included ones that they knew about that were killed in the war, in the Battle of Britain and afterwards. Of course, the bombing of England continued for almost all of the war. So that was just a little different experience that I had. After graduation, we had planned that I was going to school in North Carolina at Duke. When the war broke out, my mother thought transportation would be difficult and I might be better off in Florida. Well, of course, that was Florida State, so I came up here as a freshman in September of 1942 and graduated in '46. So I was actually in college during the majority of World War II.

**Sellers:** What kind of efforts were they making at FSCW at the time to support the war effort. Do you remember?

**Marani:** Well, they didn't serve us butter, I know that for sure [chuckles]. We had to turn in our ration books. We had a victory garden kind of thing where we grew vegetables and such for the dining hall.

**Sellers:** Where was it? Do you remember?

**Marani:** No. I lived in Reynolds as a freshman and then after that I was in Landis, and it was somewhere out beyond Landis. Most of my walking was done in the opposite direction to the library. We did that; we had drives for war bombs and blood donations and I remember we had programs that helped to educate us about the war and the efforts. Of course, Tallahassee was surrounded by at least 150,000 men at different times down at the coast at Carrabelle and that area, Camp Gordon Johnston, and then Pensacola wasn't all that far away.

**Sellers:** And Dale Mabry.

**Marani:** Dale Mabry here in our own city, and Dothan and Bainbridge and many, many —

Lake City, and of course, Jacksonville, and I'm sure there were others. But we were not allowed to have automobiles, so it wasn't a problem about the gas rationing, but all of our sugar and meat and butter and those kinds of coupons had to be turned in to the dining hall. We felt that was a big war effort. And we had drills in case of fire, of course, but in case bombing attacks. They weren't very frequent because it appeared that we were not in any kind of danger. But, you know, we went through those kinds of activities. We did our part socially because we had dances in the basements of the various dormitories on the weekends.

**Sellers:** The men were allowed to come?

**Marani:** The men were allowed to come. They were on campus every weekend, hundreds of them. Here was a school of girls that probably – maybe we had 2,500 – we might have had 3,000, but I don't think it was that large. None of us were married, or if there were, there would be one or two, so they came and we visited with them and went to the movies and dated. Of course, in those days you had house mothers and residence hall mothers and you had to bring your young man in and introduce, which was – but the same thing we did at home, so nobody was objecting to that. We had dances and teas and such for them and then the normal thing of eating out and dating and whatnot.

**Sellers:** Did you ever go to any of the bases to entertain or to dances or anything?

**Marani:** Yes, they did. They had several groups that went down to the officer's club, which was down on the coast.

**Sellers:** At Carrabelle?

**Marani:** At Carrabelle, in that area, Camp Gordon Johnston. And there may have been others that I didn't know about. I'm sure that they did. Also, we had French cadets being trained nearby. They came over – I remember it was during my senior year, I believe. That was exciting, because although I had a lot of Spanish in college, I still remembered my high school French. So we enjoyed — we felt that was a big part of our part.

**Sellers:** They had Chinese cadets at Dale Mabry - do you remember that?

**Marani:** Well, now that you mention it, I guess I do. That's where the French cadets were, I believe. They were being trained and we — I'm sure they came out on the weekends. Yes, because one of the things that you kept noticing, you know, girls would increasingly get pairs of wings or cadet's wings or cadet's bars – that was a common thing to acquire. Of course, we were big into sunbathing in those days (and all of us have skin to prove it, we got too much) and Dale Mabry pilots would zoom over the top of Landis Hall and we'd hold up sheets with our telephone numbers on them. That was part of our war effort.

**Sellers:** And a good one it was [laughs].

**Marani:** It brought it home very real to us because as we would correspond, of course, there was all kinds of reports back from invasion and from injuries and death. It was a common thing for a girl to be standing at the mailbox and start to cry because they had gotten a notification. Of course, it wasn't a family situation so they heard from the families.

**Sellers:** But still, it was people that they had known and it was too real.

**Marani:** I remember going back to high school after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The next day, nearly every boy in my senior class and some in the junior class went down to the various recruiters and volunteered. Most of them were told to wait until they graduated, but they were accepted, you know, they volunteered. We had 142 in my class and I would say maybe sixty or seventy of them, maybe more, and I think practically almost every one of them served. They didn't wait to be drafted; they just went and volunteered. So I, along with others, experienced the sadness of having somebody I was close to from high school killed. My good friend that I dated off and on through high school, Edwin Skinner, was killed in Italy after the landings there.

Interestingly enough, at the exhibit of the Museum of Florida History where they have listed the name of all of the fatalities from World War II, the Florida fatalities, they chose — I think they've got close to forty photographs, or whatever number it is, each one stands for a hundred deaths. Two of the photographs up there that were selected were people that came from Sarasota. One of them was killed very early in the war and he was the husband of the woman who was my babysitter when I was in elementary school. Her daughter is one of my closest friends and they came over recently and I took them to see the exhibit. And one of the other photographs that has special meaning for me is Edwin Skinner's that is up there. He was in — I think it was the 35th Division. He was in school at Baltimore and he was going to be drafted. Some people told him to go home and go with the local — but he chose to do it the other way, so he went with a division that was not made up of very many Floridians. He went through the North African campaign and then into Italy and that was when he died. So that was a big part of our college — the sobriety of facing the casualty list.

I mean, we were not touched in the sense that we were deprived of anything in our schooling. We had ample food to eat. We always joked about it because the margarine was white and we put it on the underside of the toast so we couldn't see it. That was the first thing we — we went back to real butter after that. And, of course, the gas — automobiles — I don't believe any girls, except maybe the ones that lived in town had cars.

**Sellers:** I don't believe you were allowed to have automobiles up here unless you did live in town.

**Marani:** Yeah, and the town girls would have cars and sometimes they would take us — when I began coming back, I was in education and was a teacher. I was appointed to a number of committees and commissions in the Department of Education. Coming up to Tallahassee in the '50s and '60s and, you know, I just never had explored the city. We walked or took the bus from the campus downtown and that was about it. We were not — I wasn't, anyway — part of seeing the real Tallahassee.

**Sellers:** Did you belong to a sorority while you were up here?

**Marani:** No, I did not. Thankful to say, I received many academic honors but I wasn't in a sorority.

**Sellers:** Well, you probably didn't need it then.

**Marani:** Well, the sorority life on campus was not like it is probably in a coed school. It wasn't something you almost had to have to get ahead and be somebody. We had just as many girls elected to office in our student government who were not sorority as were, and I had close friends in a number of the sororities and spent weekends sometimes at the houses and went to the dances with them and that kind of thing. It was not a line of demarcation. And I don't know, of course, what it is today.

**Sellers:** It's different today. I mean, it has evolved from what you're talking about to when I was in school to something totally different now. It's almost like they're service organizations.

**Marani:** Well, that's good. And we had many organizations on campus, as you know from your research, that were service oriented. We did a lot of those things. I remember girls knitting and helping roll bandages and things of that nature.

**Sellers:** Did you have regular evenings where you did that?

**Marani:** I didn't do it, so I can't — they probably did. I was given over to study; that's what my mother was paying for, for me to get an education. I obviously did social things. I helped in other ways, but I can't remember what they were.

**Sellers:** But you were involved?

**Marani:** Oh yes, we all were. I was involved when I came back during the summers to Sarasota because I helped out at the USO, and I did things through my church at the time and was just — we were all caught up in it.

**Sellers:** Did the churches welcome the young men?

**Marani:** Oh yes.

**Sellers:** Up here I know they were very active in trying to make the soldiers feel at home, and I guess that would be the same almost everywhere.

**Marani:** They did that. I'm sure the townspeople also reached out and also invited the soldiers to their homes for meals. I know we did that in Sarasota when I was home in the summertime, because we had a bomber base at our airport and then it became a fighter base

because the bombers were too heavy for the runways. And we had a Coast Guard contingent that would patrol the beaches. They had a lot of fun when we'd all go to the beach, checking our IDs and saying, "Girls, you don't go off in the water. If you see a periscope, you call for us." There was almost a flavor of romanticism to the war effort because we weren't, except for the ones that I've talked about — you know, it didn't affect our land. But we did have blackouts in Sarasota; we were right on the coast. There were sinkings of submarines and ships all along Florida. That's one of the maps that is down in the exhibit that shows where all those sinkings were.

**Sellers:** Yes, there were over 100.

**Marani:** Yes, a significant number. But I would say that in our education, there was quite a seriousness to it. We knew that our parents were making a sacrifice to send us to college. There were many girls that they were the first to go to college in their families. The men were not there. Of course, there were civilian men down in Gainesville and I went down to dances there and parties and such. My friends that I knew would come up here on weekends as best they could. I mean, they had to go on the bus because transportation was not available. But it wasn't a frivolity; college was a serious thing. I'm grateful for that because it prepared me for graduate school.

**Sellers:** For real life.

**Marani:** Well, yes, but also for — I waltzed through my master's degree and earned a Ph.D. from Ohio State and did very well academically. I certainly had a good base in both my high school, but particularly in my college. I'm not saying it's not that way today, but we didn't have the reputation of being a big party school. We had a reputation of being a school of beautiful women. We were known all over the world because so many men went through this area and I don't know if you know but in — I guess we were seniors — we had an outbreak of some kind of dysentery and our campus was quarantined.

**Sellers:** Do you know why it was quarantined?

**Marani:** Yes, because they thought what we had was contagious.

**Sellers:** They thought you were going to take it to the military bases.

**Marani:** Yes, well surely.

**Sellers:** It was the military that quarantined you.

**Marani:** Oh, it was? Well, we were quarantined.

**Sellers:** You were quarantined, but it was the military that insisted that that occur.

**Marani:** Well, that was good, because the fellows would stand outside the gates and, of course, the school is not walled but they didn't come across. We would wave at them, you know, and that was about it. Then one time they allowed us to go see "Madame Curie" at the Florida Theater and people were lining the streets to look at us. I remember one little girl ran out to the line of girls and her mother jerked her, "Don't touch them! Don't touch them!" Years after that, maybe four or five, when I was on a train and talking with some people in the club car and one of the men said, "Oh, I knew about Florida State." He said, "You all were quarantined because you had syphilis." I said, "No, we didn't. We had dysentery or something like that." I never caught it. Oh, we washed our hands every minute. It seems like it was a month that we were quarantined.

**Sellers:** I think they traced it finally to a baker.

**Marani:** Something we ate?

**Sellers:** Apparently a baker had something and it got into the bread supply on campus. But Dale Mabry and Carrabelle were terrified that it was going to pass on over to the soldiers and they wouldn't be able to ship them out when they were due to be shipped out, so they had you quarantined.

**Marani:** Yeah, and we still remember that when people from my class get together. We laugh about it, but we had quite a reputation around the country.

**Sellers:** I guess – syphilis.

**Marani:** They thought it was some sort of – one of those diseases.

**Sellers:** Well, I think you've been very thorough; I've hardly had to interrupt at all.

**Marani:** Yeah, I appreciate your questions and comments. I remember that V-E Day occurred my senior year and we were so excited. We just were jubilant, you know. It was like a gigantic New Year's Eve.

**Sellers:** How did you hear about it? Do you remember exactly?

**Marani:** No, I don't remember. I don't even remember whether I was in class or not. I think on the radio, but I don't recall the time of day. I do remember how I know about Pearl Harbor. I had gone with some friends to the theater on Sunday afternoon. When I got home, for some reason I turned on the radio, and it hadn't been on, and that was all there was on the radio. Of course, my mother and I listened intently and I called some of my friends who hadn't heard and we kept it going that way. We couldn't believe it. Then they did not call school off but they piped into all the rooms so we could hear President Roosevelt's declaration – you know, request for declaration of war. That was when the men in our classes, or boys as we called them, went

down to volunteer after school. But I think I might have been in class when the news came. Of course, the signing was later.

**Sellers:** Did they let you out of class, or do you remember?

**Marani:** I don't remember that we were ever let out of class. We might have been but I don't recall that. I just know that we were jubilant and maybe we had something besides prune whip for dessert.

**Sellers:** I've heard so much about that famous prune whip [laughs].

**Marani:** I didn't mind it; it was okay. I thought the food was good. I was one — of the few of my friends from home that I kept up with and roomed with and what not — I was one of the few that didn't gain weight; I came out the same as I went in. You asked about what did we do – we did have a bigger emphasis on physical fitness. We had a modified fitness course where we had to jump over things and crawl through things and climb modest fences. Of course, I'm only 4'11" and I always had to get a boost up. But I went over.

**Sellers:** It's a good thing; I wonder what they would have done to you if you didn't make it over?

**Marani:** Well, I don't know. It never occurred to me that I wouldn't do it. I figured somehow somebody boosted me up and we did that. And we had lifesaving and first aid courses. You know, we did those kinds of things.

**Sellers:** Were the lifesaving courses —?

**Marani:** That was part of the regular swimming lessons. I didn't do the lifesaving but I know it was available. I waited for my master's degree. Along with a lot of others, I tried to enlist – of course, they always said, "We want you to wait until you graduate." That was what we were told. They wouldn't take me because I wasn't tall enough. I was just crushed because I would have certainly gone. Finally they lowered the height, and they had the nerve (of course, this was later) to tell me that I was too old. I thought that was awful.

**Sellers:** That's an insult.

**Marani:** Yeah, I didn't appreciate it at all.

**Sellers:** That's really something.

**Marani:** Well, I know your program, what you're doing with the oral history is a wonderful thing and I'm proud and happy to be a part of it.

**Sellers:** Thank you so much. Let me go ahead and ask you once again then if we've recorded this with your knowledge?

**Marani:** Yes, you have.

**Sellers:** All right, I'm going to turn it off now.

End