

Interviewee: Jerome Brill
Interviewer: Rachael I. Cherry
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Brill: Father's name is Joseph and mother's name is Rose.

Cherry: Your mother's maiden name?

Brill: Schlesinger. S-C-H-L-E-S-I-N-G-E-R.

Cherry: Where were your parents born?

Brill: My mother was born in Czechoslovakia and my father was born in Hungary somewhere. I don't know exactly where.

Cherry: Do you know when your parents immigrated to the United States?

Brill: Not anywhere close.

Cherry: Do you know if they were already married?

Brill: No. They didn't even know each other. They met in America and married here.

Cherry: Did they have any siblings or did their parents move over with them?

Brill: There were other relatives — sisters, brothers. They'd come over one at a time as they had enough money to pay the transportation. Passports were easy to get back in those days.

Cherry: Do you know why your parents immigrated?

Brill: I don't, other than other relatives in their family had previously come over and were successful and even sent money to encourage them to come over to America. It's free — the land of the free, that is.

Cherry: Do you or did you have any siblings?

Brill: Siblings? I had two younger sisters and two older sisters. Do I need to list them for you?

Cherry: If you'd like.

Brill: The youngest was Gertrude, then Shirley — were both younger than me in that order and then next older, Lillian, and then the oldest is Miriam. All four now deceased.

Cherry: Where did you spend your childhood?

Brill: In Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

Cherry: Did you — you attended primary school?

Brill: Oh, yes, and high school.

Cherry: And high school? And you were born in 1924 — not too long afterward — the Great Depression. Do you remember what — how your family — was economically, during that time?

Brill: They were poor, very low education. I remember trying to help with the finances, going downtown in the public square buying newspapers for a penny and half and selling them for three cents. Back in those days you could buy things with small amounts of money.

Cherry: Were your parents — did they speak English before they came to America? Did they learn it here?

Brill: I think they learned it here, because they spoke — they learned to speak English fairly well. I even have a letter my father wrote once and it was — no grammar, no spelling, but when you can sound it, you can understand it. When I was in the military, he wrote me one letter before I got shot down.

Cherry: Did they speak their native languages in the home?

Brill: They spoke Jewish in the home. They both knew that, but I — if they spoke Hungarian, I didn't recognize it.

Cherry: They spoke Yiddish?

Brill: Oh, yeah.

Cherry: Did you speak Yiddish?

Brill: Oh, sure. When — all during the elementary and high school years, I went to elementary school — public school — and then from there I went to Hebrew School, the Talmud Torah and then come home from dinner after both of those everyday. Of course, Saturdays and Sundays they conducted services there and when I got bar mitzvah, then I was allowed to conduct services for the rest of the children. It was a Hebrew school and during the education

process, I learned how to translate the entire Old Testament in Hebrew back into English, literally, the offside is that every time I tried to ask questions — no, you don't ask questions. That's the way it's written, that's the way it is. So, the discipline of learning.

Cherry: Do you remember about your high school — your high school days?

Brill: Well, I played the violin when I was in elementary school for a couple years and partway through high school, I took all the business courses I could, because poor people didn't even think about going to college: shorthand, typing, book keeping — everything related to business — probably one of the better decisions I made in early life, because after getting out of school, it was easier for me to get a job than the rest of the coal miners' children.

Cherry: You were only about fifteen when World War II began — 1939. Or were you—

Brill: Let's see. Yeah, that's right.

Cherry: Do you remember being aware of international political events at the time when you were in high school? Were you astute to what was going on?

Brill: Oh, yeah.

Cherry: What do you — do you recall what you thought was happening or going on or having an opinion?

Brill: Our family, that is our parents and their sisters and brothers, were — very collegiately lived right together next door to each other most of the time during my growing up years and on Shabbas eve we'd get together and listen to the radio about Hitler's doings. Some of the family were still over there and we could see firsthand the pain and suffering he caused. While most of the family that I knew about were able to immigrate, there's only one cousin that I know that survived anywhere close to my age and he's a few years older, but the rest of them couldn't make it. The grandparents and all never got to leave the country.

Cherry: Do you remember the surrounding community's reaction to Germany invading Poland? Or do you remember what you thought when news broke?

Brill: Oh, yeah. Let's see. I guess it was — what — 1939 or somewhere around then. I was still a student in high school. I didn't graduate until '42, but in Wilkes-Barre it's (located) in a valley completely surrounded by mountains. At the center of the town — and at each section of the mountainside were ethnic groups like — we call it, "the hill." Well, the hill was up on Market Street from downtown all the way up the mountainside — the entire Jewish community. There were three schules, houses of worship, two orthodox and one conservative within walking distance of each other. I mean, all together. There was no way that I could leave school and volunteer. I went down and talked to them and they — I was just a little — one of

the littlest kids in class — skinny, you know, poor — and they thanked me for coming in. “You’re gonna have to finish high school first and get your degree. After that, then come and talk to us.” I couldn’t — they wouldn’t let me quit school, in other words. At least that’s what they told me and so, I did have to accept that that’s the way it was for me, even though I saw cousins and friends all older just by a couple of years. The YMHA was the center of all activities in that community, so all of your friends were in the boys club or the girls club or basketball or whatever.

Cherry: Why did you want to join the military at fifteen? What was driving you to do that?

Brill: The — oh, that’s right — and the family were getting together, listening to the news on the radio — what Hitler was doing in Europe — extermination and murdering the population. The older ones, they were capable of going ahead and enlisting and I wanted to go, too, but they convinced me that — get better prepared and finish school and I graduated in June of 1942 and discovered that I still couldn’t enlist until I became nineteen. So, they allowed me to enroll — what did they call it — to get on the list of citizens that were in that age group and then come back next year. Well, when I became age nineteen on the 7th of March — by the end of March I was in the service. It just took like that to get me in.

Cherry: March 7, 1943?

Brill: 1943.

Cherry: Do you remember your reaction when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Brill: Yes. It was a Sunday afternoon and I was helping my older sister and her husband (Leonard Laks) move out of a grocery store. I was helping them after school and weekends in the grocery store in delivering groceries and I learned how to cut meat — and getting business experience. We — this was a Sunday afternoon — we were going to a ride and we heard it on the radio. This was just a social afternoon. The weather was really nice and as soon as we heard that news (about Pearl Harbor), Lenny turned that car around, and went (straight) back home. Next day, he said, “You and your sister can keep the store running for as long as you are able and if it’s not productive, then close it. Don’t worry about selling it or whatever, just close it,” because he volunteered — enlisted. He was older than I am, of course, and he off to officer candidate school and became a captain in the military. It was very shocking to our neighborhood, because if you think about this valley — one section of the valley, coming up from the (bottom of the) circle to the top of the mountain, which was (almost) the entire Jewish community, over on the next range the Polish community, then over here were — the ethnic groups stayed together. Most of the ones that worked in the coal mines were the Polish and the — you know, the labor force — and the ones who were (in) a little bit higher level of civilized community activities were in the business or other types of work. My father worked in a dairy, so it was a little bit different than some of the children I went to school with. Their fathers come home covered in black soot, working hard. They died at an early age. So a

different kind of life.

Cherry: The United States didn't enter the war until Pearl Harbor — the very next day, actually. Do you remember thinking before then — because you knew what was going on before Pearl Harbor was attacked. You tried to enlist in 1939. Do you remember having an opinion wondering why the United States had not yet declared war or had not officially entered the war?

Brill: Well, at the age I was in, I was able to maintain a monitoring status to see what was happening, because we had other relatives who were already in the military, even just a couple years older than me. They beat me in. So, the whole family — all the aunts and uncles living so close together — kept up on everything that was going on. I think that most people knew it was coming sooner or later. It wasn't a big surprise, a big shock, but the thing that was the biggest tragedy is that we lost most of our fleet at Pearl Harbor right there in the Harbor, except for a couple of aircraft carriers that were out on a cruise. We lost most of the Pacific fleet just because we didn't anticipate the possibility. It was a Sunday and that was a crushing blow to patriotic Americans.

Cherry: When you joined — when you were called on March 7, 1943 — where did you — where were you sent? To the Army?

Brill: Right. It was in the Army and all the recruits who were drafted were sent to a military base in Pennsylvania. The first day we got there, we had to get out of our civilian clothes and they gave us our very first uniform. Well, I've got a picture of the very first uniform. It was fatigues and they made me stand up with me hands like this [gestures with hands stretched out away from body]. They gave me the biggest size they had and the sleeves were hanging down on both sides like a scarecrow. The pants' legs were sticking out sideways. They made me pose for it. I didn't even have a choice, but it was the funniest thing you ever saw. Then I was so embarrassed, but (they) said, "Come on, we were just kidding. Come on, we'll give you the best uniform you could get." When I was in there, they did give me a nice uniform and everything and the next day shipped me down to Clearwater. For two days I spent taking examinations, IQ tests, specialty tests, and I told them, "We're just wasting time doing all of these tests, because I already know what I want to be. I want to be a pilot. I don't need all the rest of this stuff," and I was so sincere, they said, "Well, let's see." We went outside and they put me in one of those two-seater, front and back, training planes. It was bi-wing and, "You get in there and see if you can, you know, strap in," and I got in. The thing (fuselage) was higher than my (head) — I couldn't even see out. They said, "Can you see what we mean? You're not gonna fly one of these planes." So, that took the heat off right away and (we) went back in and — Let's see, we were at Clearwater, so now we had finished these examination tests, IQ, specialty, technical, waiting for the grades and the silence — everybody — we had a bunch of guys there all waiting to be shipped to someplace. Being as little as I was, they tried (me) out for marching. They took big steps, I was running just to keep up and, "Don't worry about marching. You don't need to worry about marching." Finally, the phys. ed., you know, the physical training. I couldn't begin to do what those guys were doing — the big guys — so they sent me into the mess hall where a bunch of guys were sitting around peeling potatoes by hand and I got

there about ten minutes later than they did. They were all there working away, having fun, and I come walking and here comes the chef, a great big monster of a guy. “Where have you been?” “Well, I just got here.” “They’ve been here. Where were you?” “Well, I was trying to find my way.” He said, “Alright, well you get busy and get caught up with them.” They had these racks where they put pots — great big, tall pots — and they had three racks. He says, “Hand me that pot up there on the third rack.” Well, that third rack was up there, where the ceiling is almost, and there was no step-stool, no ladder. Well, I started climbing up the side of the rack and reached the handle and started sliding it down. Here comes that big pot all over the kitchen and three or four other pots going crazy. He looked at me, “Come here, you!” He got a bag — paper bag — filled it full of cookies. “You take these cookies and you go downtown and I don’t want to see you back here until a minute before, a minute after a quarter ‘til five. When you’re ready with everybody else to go home, you go home with them. No KP. (I) never had KP in the military. They didn’t want me after that. So, I just went around visiting in Clearwater and that Prince Murat Hotel. I don’t know if you’ve ever been there. It’s a beautiful place. Just wandered around sightseeing and it was not like being in the Army.

Cherry: Just to complete the picture, how tall were you and how much did you weigh when you joined? Do you know? Can you give me an estimate?

Brill: I think about 114-15 pounds and might have been about 5'4", something like that — just a skinny little kid. But I lucked out — the test that I took — I had a high IQ. They didn’t — already (all of the) book keeping business courses and several (others made it) easy for me to score high on the test and I said, “I want to go to air cadet school.” “You can’t. You’re too small.” “Okay, well I still want to fly.” Radio school, St. Louis. That’s Scottfield, Illinois. I went straight to radio school and this was in springtime, because the weather was pretty nice by then. They had morning classes and afternoon classes. In the morning classes you learned the Morse code and in the afternoon classes you learned the theory of electricity and how to build radio transmitters and receivers. If you got ninety-five or better on your scores for the whole week, then you got a free pass for the whole weekend as a reward. They were trying to get people to really get in there. So, I said, “A free pass for the weekend. Wow!” But where would I go? I don’t know. East St. Louis is in Illinois. St. Louis, the big city, is in Missouri on the west side of the Mississippi River. “Go down to the USO, they’ll tell you where to go.” Okay, got my pass, got dressed up. I had a dress uniform and went down to the USO and I told them that I’d never been any place like this. If I wonder around downtown I get lost and I can’t do that, and they said, “Well, we’ve got several different things going. Do you know anything about music?” Well, I played the violin during elementary and high school. I learned a little bit about something about music. “Okay, here’s a pass to the Metropolitan Opera and you take the bus up to the park — Prospect Park — which is just north of St. Louis. I said, “What’s up there?” “Every week they have an outdoor amphitheater and they have operettas — a new operetta every single week — and if you get this free pass, you can go into the operetta and it won’t cost you anything.” Well, since I love music and I’d never seen a live operetta before, I saw every operetta they had for all the time I was there and I really — that was a high spot. I really enjoyed all of that kind of association, because the only people who went there were the ones who loved music, too. This was a natural, outdoor amphitheater — (it) was just gorgeous.

I can't even remember all the operettas we saw, but the most famous (ones) I can still see them on channel five sometimes. Then we finished up with radio school and went on to gunnery — machine guns. .50-caliber — you start off with a shot gun, learning how to shoot skeet — to lead, because the airplane goes fast. You have to aim here and so we shot guns, shooting skeet, and it was just fun. Then they had targets set up and they'd stand at this target and there's something on that target. You have to hit that one and each one had a different configuration. I began enjoying it after my shoulder — you know, after a couple of weeks, I could lean into it and it wouldn't bang me. Then got out of radio school and started flying on B-24 bombers. I had scarlet fever, so I was in the hospital for about a month. They were flying around the country, drinking beer and enjoying life, just practicing flying as a team. About the end of that time, I recovered and they discharged me from the hospital and the crew said, "We're going to have our crew pictures taken," and that's the ones that you saw here and, "then we're going to go out for dinner." Okay, went out for dinner. I don't know whether they conspired or what, but everybody sat down and we're having steak out in Wyoming — the best steak country in the whole country. So I sat down and they brought out steak and I looked. The place was here, but the steak was laying all over half the table — the biggest thing I ever saw in my life. I looked at it and they laughed. I couldn't eat (but) a nibble out of the corner of this and so that was my indoctrination. Now, I'm one of the guys. We did some flight training and got a brand new B-24 airplane and flew it from St. Louis and up to New England and Newfoundland and Iceland and the over to Scotland, across the ocean and landed, finally, in northern Ireland. But then we shipped out to a place called Norwich, which is on the hump of England, where it meets the channel. You've heard of the cliffs of Dover? Well, you could almost see across the channel, it's so narrow there. Deep, but narrow this way. Got into the flight crew and we were still in training status, us being new crews. The rest of them had already been bombing all over Europe, but we got orders to — everybody report. All of the flight crews report down and we were given orders about bombing, making as many bombing runs back and forth and back and forth as you can, starting, I think it was, about two o'clock in the morning. That's the first time — the first bombing mission. By the time we got ready to get all harnessed up — you wear your parachute and everything — as a radio operator, I had a whole packet of other materials with the Morse Code and secret codes and all for the day. Then we couldn't get out of the marshalling area, because the weather turned bad and they held it up. Most people didn't know that, really, the invasion was scheduled for June 5 and we postponed it for one day. So, June 6 was my very first combat mission and it was the invasion of Normandy. Flying across the sky was, like when you hit a wasp nest, planes all over the place. We dropped our bombs all the way up and down the whole coast of France and Belgium and then made a u-turn and come back on the northern part near Munich and Rotterdam and all. By that time, the sun was coming up and I looked down, and you could have walked from France to England, there were so many ships. The Channel was full of ships and all the battleships were lined up in a long row. When they blast off with their big guns, their sixteen inch guns, smoke rings were puffing out and became huge — sixty feet across. Big smoke rings and that was the most amazing thing that on that day will never go out of my memory. We got back to base and, boy, that was exciting. We flew a total of thirteen missions and we got shot down.

Cherry: You had roughly a little over a year of training before you went on your first

mission on D-day, because you were drafted in '43, then you trained in the States, and about what time did you get over to Norwich? Do you remember what month?

Brill: It was, I think, somewhere in the middle — in the latter part of April.

Cherry: Do you remember being educated about the war before, you know, during your war training? Did they sit you down and tell you why the United States was in the war?

Brill: Oh, we had a — flight crews, especially — we had a special education, training courses. Some of them were presented to us by British officers. Young people — civilians — during their normal life, they're not in the business of hunting down enemies and killing them. So, one of the films we sat through was called, "Kill or Be Killed," and the main theme throughout was, if you don't shoot them and kill them first, they're going to kill you. If you hesitate, you're lost. They built on that theme and all of a sudden the war and the brutality and the killing and everything suddenly became personal. During the time that we flew those missions, we flew about four or five at a time and then rested and then flew some more. Well, I went into London for a weekend pass. From Norwich to London, it was just a short train ride and I can still remember when I stayed at the Strand Palace Hotel. Lord Nelson, on his horse, on the statue, was right outside and all of the government buildings were right there at the Strand Palace Hotel and the area. I was really fascinated. It was the first time I'd ever had fish and chips that you buy in a newspaper and they just cut it open — everybody's walking down the street eating fish and chips with their fingers. It was delicious. I'd never had that before. About the middle of the night — by that time, the Germans were sending over what they called, "V-1 rockets," and the — it was not their latest, it was the early ones — and they had an engine mounted about this huge bomb. It was like a model-A Ford, putt-putt-putt-putt. Well, as long as you could hear the putt-putt-putt, you were safe, but when it shut off, that's when it went down to the target area. Well, it was just a couple blocks from the Strand Palace Hotel where one of the V-1 rockets took out a whole city block. One bomb wiped out a whole city block. When I came out of the hotel, I heard the explosion, and I looked and I couldn't believe it. I'm dropping bombs and one bomb did this? Of course, that was a monster, a huge thing. A whole city block — That was the first time I'd been on the other side of the violence. I packed up and went back to base. That was all of London that I could stand, because it was just a terrible thing. Then, in just a few more weeks, it was all over for me.

Cherry: Thirteen missions. Lucky number thirteen — shot down on the thirteenth one over the Channel?

Brill: No, we were hit over target and my plane went down at about 8000 feet and two engines were burning. The pilot was able to pull it out — he was a great big guy — he leveled it out and they had extinguishers built into the engine — so turned off the fuel supply for those two engines and put out those fires — so now we had two engines still going. I was down in the bomb bay looking to mark where did our bombs (exploded) — did we hit the target or miss the target? The fuel was coming in from the main tank, out the bomb bay. We left the doors open and it took about maybe five or ten minutes and that was the end of the main fuel tanks, but we

still had wing tanks to fly with. We were heading back and we got near Munich and I said, “Boy, we’re almost right there. Right across the Channel, we’re home.” And the pilot said, “I’m not sure we can make it across the channel and if we have to ditch in the Channel, the plane is going to break and we may not survive. So, I’m going to play it safe and go down toward where the invasion of Normandy is, and they’ve got a runway. We can land on the runway.” The plane ran out of fuel and we had to bale out. We got all of the crew members out. I gave first aid to the waist gunner, Billy Joel Davis. He had been hit in the head and was bleeding. Since I didn’t have a machine gun as a radio operator, I was free to move around. I gave him first aid, sulfur powder and taped his wounds and snapped his parachute on and told the other waist gunner, “If we ring the alarm bell, you hold his harness and you go out the (side gunnery window). Jump out with him and pull his harness — parachute — first and then let him go out. And when he’s clear, then you pull your own parachute and you’ll both be safe.” That’s exactly the way it happened. We couldn’t make it back to the landing strip. The plane crashed into a residence in this little community up there in Belgium and I still got a picture of the family. The father and the wife and one child were killed in their home. It was only a twelve-year old boy who was out playing that survived in that family. I felt bad, but there was nothing (I could do), because after I parachuted out, I landed in the canal near Antwerp. Great big — the Dole River was huge — must be about a half a mile wide, at least — right smack in the middle of it. When I lifted up the parachute, there was the windmill. Oh, look a real windmill! And about a dozen wehrmacht guys with rifles waiting, so I thought, well, okay, no place to run now. So, I unbuckled my ammunition belt and pistol and dagger — whatever they call it — and dropped it in the river — took off my watch — anything — my escape kit with my special instructions and different kinds of European currency if I was able to escape — and everything went down the drain. By the time the fishing boat came out to pick me up out of the water, I had nothing left except the sheepskin flying suit and then they take the sheepskin off and I just got this little electric underwear — you might say, “long Johns” — with wires through to keep me warm — and brought me up there. I laid down next to the windmill and our engineer was the next guy to come up, and he had hurt his leg when he landed on the hard ground, and so they brought him up and that was all that they could capture right away. Four of them — I think it was four of them — maybe six — hooked up with the Dutch underground. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of Harry Arden, he was head of the Dutch underground and the Queen of Holland gave him the highest honor after the war for his service to his country. Where was I going with this?

Cherry: You were laying there with the windmill—

Brill: Oh, that’s right. They brought a truck over — just an open truck — we got on the truck and they drove us up to Frankfurt and we — since it was so early in the war — the first morning we were there, we went into the interrogation chamber and this German officer sat me down and, “Just relax, you’ve got nothing to worry about. For you, the war is over. There’s no more fighting. We just need to understand each other so that you’ll be able to manage your affairs,” and he just gave us B.S. for about fifteen - twenty minutes. Over on the table was about four or five pieces of equipment — like the Nordenbombsite — you know, secret equipment that most people didn’t know about, unless they were flying with them. He just (kept) talking friendly — no questions and everything (or anything). He occasionally would stop and ask a

question and I finally said, “You lived in America seven years and you come back to Germany, because you’re a loyal citizen and you wanted to help your fatherland. Well, I’m here to tell you that I feel the same amount of loyalty to my country as you did to your country and under American law — under international law — the Geneva Convention says, I only have obligations to tell you my name, rank and serial number, and that’s my name and that’s my rank and that’s my serial number and that’s all I’m ready to tell you about. He began to get angry, “I could have you shot as a spy! You’re not in uniform. What kind of uniform is that? I don’t even know if you are in a military uniform?” Well, all military people have ID dog tags. He snatched the dog tags off my chest and there in the right hand corner was stamped the letter H — you know, embossed — and he went berserk. He started shouting — I mean, not conversation — Shouting real loud, “Juden! Juden!” and he whipped out a pistol and put it in my nose, “I could have you shot as a spy right now, drag you out, off to the street and people would praise me.”

Cherry: Because “H” stands for—

Brill: “Hebrew.” That’s what “Juden” is in German and I said, “Before I opened my parachute, I said my last prayer just in case. I was prepared to die for my country and there’s nothing else that I think I need to. If I’m under enemy control, they’re the ones that make the decision.” He couldn’t believe that I’m sitting there with that pistol in my nose telling him this. I must have looked like a wet chicken, because he was a great big guy, and he went back to his desk, “I can’t believe it. I can’t believe it! They’re not going to believe me!” He started banging on a bell and they took me out and threw me in a dungeon for three days. No windows — black, pitch black. If there was a bucket somewhere, I didn’t even see it, so — you know. What was happening is the flights were very intensive during those first weeks after the Normandy invasion and we lost a lot of aircraft. Those interrogation prisons were filling up so fast. They needed the space. Boom! I landed in a boxcar. Have you ever been to St. Petersburg? The Museum of History?

Cherry: I’ve been to St. Pete. I’ve not been to the museum.

Brill: It’s right downtown off the water—

End of Side A

Brill: If you ever have an opportunity to go to St. Petersburg, it’s right on the waterfront in downtown. It’s the Museum of History and [Tape stopped].

Cherry: You left off at the bombings were coming quickly after the invasion.

Brill: They transferred us out of the prison at Frankfurt into boxcars. A freight car — no windows, with the door closed — it’s like cattle — not even cattle — some kind of freight that doesn’t require any facilities of any kind. In the Museum of History in St. Petersburg,

there's one of those little freight cars that they brought over to this country and when we toured it a few years ago, my wife and I — they had photographs of all of World War II activities, letters and mementos. I thought that was the end of it, when you come down through the entire row of everything on the wall and then on the other side of the wall, all of a sudden, there is this freight car. I just choked up and started crying. Just (like) somebody beat me (up) right there. You've heard of PTSD?

Cherry: Yes.

Brill: Post-traumatic stress disorder. It just hit me and, all of a sudden, I was out of it. There's that car — because they loaded us onto the freight cars, identical to that one, and shoved us indoors — standing or sitting room. No room to move around or anything and locked us in. IN some places there were cracks in the wood just (_____??), so it had some air when the train was moving. We went from Frankfurt, that prison, all the way over to Poland — a prison camp, near Gdansk, in Poland. That was Stalag Luft IV. Once we got there, a place called Kiefheide — it was a railroad station — then we were able to unload. I guess it was about four or five days in transit, because we were stuck in the Berlin marshalling yards for a couple days to get more cars. Got out of the boxcars at Kivaida and there the guards were — the Nazi SS troopers with bayonets on their rifles and big police dogs — gonna march up, double time, up to the camp and, I don't know, how many miles — I guess seven, eight miles, it wasn't that far, but it was uphill all the way. They forced the men to double time and you had to keep in line, because if you fell out, they stabbed you with a bayonet or they shot you along the way. I guess I was small enough and still healthy enough to where it was easy for me to run uphill, but some of the bigger guys didn't make it. When we got to that prison camp, under the Geneva Convention, they had our Red Cross inspectors come by to look at conditions in camps held by Germany, Britain, and America. They all had the same standards for prisoners, so there was no more (harassment) — since we were all non-commissioned officers — there was no more degrading. It became, generally, peaceful in the camp, but there were ten buildings — five on each side, in each (of the five) different sections. There were guard towers with machine guns and if anybody tried to be out there when they shouldn't, that was the end of them. I can still see, to this day, some young fellow that had been wounded and was in the hospital for a while and then came up to the prison camp, and he just couldn't cope. In broad daylight — and I was just outside of the barracks that we were living in, sitting on the little steps, because they're off the ground — and I saw him go across, over to the fence, climb the fence and the guards shouted at him to get down. He was climbing the fence. He wasn't listening and they shot him and left him hanging there for several hours as a lesson to everybody else. That is never going to go away. When the Battle of Stalingrad took place — this was February 7 or 6 or maybe a couple of days before that even — the Russians turned back the German Army and started pushing them from east to west and they were headed toward overrunning where our camp was. So, we got orders to evacuate at 2:30 in the morning. "Wear everything you got," because the snow was about three feet deep — because it was cold outside. "Take whatever food you got and whatever you want to carry, because we're not coming back." From February 7 to the end of the war, which was May 6-7, depending on where you were, we marched out into that snow and dug a hole in the snow at night. That's where we had to sleep, or maybe a farm that had a big barn.

We'd get into the big barn, out of the bad weather. I guess we marched almost six hundred miles across Europe. We just had hundreds and hundreds of the guys marching along that couldn't keep up, that dropped down — shot. Every once in a while, I'd see a truck come by, picking up the bodies. There was a big old truck with arms and legs hanging out, and it drove slowly. You got the message. Don't try to run away and escape, because you're not going to make it. But the British Polar Bear division stopped us at the Elbe River, near Munich, and we were stuck there for a couple of days. Then they won that battle and the Germans couldn't get across the bridge and, all of a sudden, I could see the guards taking off their uniforms, throwing away their weapons, running into the woods to hide, to get away, to escape. There was a convoy of motor vehicles of all different kinds — trucks and jeeps and weapons carriers. One of the guys knew how to drive a truck. He was older than us and so we took one of the little pick-up trucks and four or five of us jumped into it and headed back west, to get back to American lines if we could. We — I don't know how many miles we drove. We stayed overnight at a farmhouse and they gave us breakfast the next day. We kept on going until the British Polar Bear division spotted us and (said), "Over here. You don't have to run no more."

Cherry: You were in a German truck in Germany?

Brill: Well, it was Belgium, now. They were friendly, because they knew. They gave us breakfast and when the British got us, the first thing we did was come up to their headquarters, where the big tents were. "Everybody take all of your clothes off," and they put them in a pile and they burned them on the spot. We were covered with lice, every inch, top to bottom. You had to go into that room and they sprayed you with this powder — I forgot — a special kind of insecticide powder to kill all of the lice. Then you went into the shower and got cleaned up. Then they gave us uniforms — British military uniforms — with the waist jacket. They were long (dress) jackets and, boy, they were pretty nice. They felt good. You know, coming in (dirty) rags to nice uniforms. Wow! This is almost living! We went down to — in a truck they took us down to Le Havre, France. There was the port of embarkation where the liberty ships and the military ships went into the harbor and put down supplies and took back troops. There was a field hospital with tents with little — not bunk beds — they were the little fold-up—

Cherry: Cots?

Brill: Cots. Fold-up cots. I laid there for five or six days, semi-conscious. I wasn't able to eat anything anymore. Then here comes a liberty ship. "Pennsylvania. Who's from Pennsylvania?" Four hundred guys, all from Pennsylvania, got on that liberty ship and headed across the ocean and the water was just as calm as a swimming pool for that whole trip. I said, "This is the Atlantic Ocean? I looks like a swimming pool!" We got back into New York and the ships in the harbor — the fire rescue ships were shooting streams of water, welcoming us with the sirens blowing. Past the Statue of Liberty—

Cherry: Was this May? June?

Brill: Yeah, this was the latter part of May. The war ended, I think, the 5th or 6th, so it took us a couple of weeks to get back. They wanted to send us home for a furlough. They gave us a pass to go home. I couldn't eat anything. I stayed home for a couple of days and I had to go back into the Army hospital, near Harrisburg. They had a big Army hospital there. So I stayed in the hospital there until I was able to get my body chemistry (to accept) soft foods first. Then I was able to start (eating) a little bit of food down at a time, but by that time I had lost my furlough time and I had to go back to San Antonio, Texas. That's where they really worked on us to build our health and our strength up. A lot of the guys thought we were just getting fat enough so we can go to Japan now and take care of them. While we were there, the war ended, and there was no need for any more military training. I enjoyed San Antonio. It was a big city and a lot of interesting attractions there, but when it came time for (to return to active duty) they didn't need us anymore — you get an instant discharge. They discharged us right on the spot, gave us our papers, and — well how do we get home? “That way.” So a couple of us got together and rented a truck and we drove from San Antonio up to St. Louis, and then caught a plane from St. Louis back to Pennsylvania. One of the things that I need to insert, because I didn't do it earlier — my next older sister, Lillian, was getting married to a Master Sergeant, who was our next door neighbor in Pennsylvania, and they were being married on the fourth of July. Well, our plane was shot down on the 29th of June. So, up in Pennsylvania, you know, they had all of these schules and all of the relatives were in for this big wedding and all of the relatives from New York and all over. They had a wedding in the morning and were over at the house having refreshments, and a telegraph was delivered, “Missing in action.” I was told that broke up the wedding party. I never knew this until way later, but the reason I became acquainted with this is that the wedding party and the telegram and breaking up the wedding — the YMHA was where all four sisters were active in bowling, and you know, whatever activities the girl's club - the Hadassah and all of those organizations — Everybody in the whole city knew that I was missing in action — shot down. Later on, the next telegram came, “He's alive, but he's in prison,” and that broke up, you know, spoiled the wedding party and everything. Well, after I got home — now I'm leaping back to the present — the first day I'm home — got off the train after being discharged. I've still got my uniform, because I didn't have any civilian clothes yet. I went down to the YMHA right downtown and on the mantle there is inscribed, in the lobby of the YMHA, from Hillel — I don't know if you've heard of Hillel — and the inscription said, “Where a man is needed, be thou the man.” I thought, well, now, that's just such a wonderful saying, you know, after what my life had been through up until now. I know that there are some things that I can still do to be useful to society. In the women's club, there were my four sisters. They belonged to all of the women's clubs, with the different age groups, and here comes one of the sisterhood groups coming down the stairways from the second floor down into the lobby area, and I'm in there. I never understood who screamed out, “Oh, look. There's the Brill boy. He's such a coward. He's the one that was afraid to fight.” I didn't know what was happening. I suddenly blacked out — PTSD. I was no longer at the Y. I just walked out of there and the whole bunch of women just didn't understand. They'd all heard about it when I spoiled the wedding and got shot down, but they didn't understand what the war was all about. I walked from the valley all the way up the mountain. At night, I first attempted suicide. I tried to hang—

Cherry: Would you like to take a break now?

Brill: I tried to hang myself. I couldn't do it. I fell down. I realized in the next few weeks and months, I couldn't live at home anymore. I was a coward to the whole community and was a shame and an embarrassment to everybody and that's the message that they had given me. So I packed up and went down to Miami Beach.

Cherry: What made you choose Miami?

Brill: I had been there part of the time when I was in the military and for training. I'd been to Clearwater, so I was a little familiar, but it was as far away as I could get. There was no — unless I went to Key West the rest of the way — Started a whole life all over again and I can still remember to this day on 27th Avenue in Miami, is a military air force base. Any veteran — free living. I decided I wanted to go to school at the University of Miami, so that's where I could live as a student. In the meantime, school wasn't ready to start just yet and I needed to find a job. I'm looking back like it was yesterday. I went down to one of these — an open air cafeteria, where you sit down at the counter — and I had fifteen cents and I ordered a bowl of grits. That was my last fifteen cents and the guy — after I had finished the bowl of grits — he says, "It looks like you could have a little more." So he gave me another bowl of grits with some butter and mixed it up. I made it through the day and right down the street was the men's haberdashery — a clothing — not a haberdashery — a store that sold piece goods. I forgot they called it — the name of the thing — but this old couple were running the store and they had a son and another guy was their salesman, who sold the goods. They hired me to come to work for them until I got established. I don't know how they knew about me. "But I can't come to work, because I'm living way out at the airport, so how can I get here?" "You're not going to live at the airport. You're going to come home and live with us and when you get settled in —." They were so nice and I worked with them until things did stabilize themselves somewhat and started my career and enrolled in the University of Miami and then went on from there. I took a dual major, education and business management. I did my internship training at Miami Senior High and finished the course. When I got out, I got offers to teach all over the southern part of the country — every state, every community. They were looking for teachers. They were scarce, but when I got to meet them, I got married. When I started looking, they weren't paying teachers enough to buy groceries on, so I couldn't afford to go into teaching. So I went into business management and stayed in a wholesale liquor distribution company, Austin Nicholas and Company. I was the system office manager and I redesigned some systems. After a few years, we bought a house — a little house — and so my life began stabilizing. But I could see that if I stayed with this company, I'm not going anywhere. They had a home office in Brooklyn, New York, so I decided I needed to find a little bit different angle for my career. I started looking around and saw that the State was advertising for parole officers — probation officers. One of the things — the 9th Judicial Circuit, which is in Vero Beach, Martin County, and Polk County in that area, and the job started on July 1. Now I had to give notice there. They were good to me and I had to give them notice. They accepted my notice — two weeks — to help finish up and clean up. While I was there, I analyzed their distribution. They served the whole southern part of Florida by trucks out of Coral Gables. I did a map — a retail distribution map — showing

where the customers are located and I said, “You can save money and give better service if you move your warehouse and offices over into this area near Hialeah, and that way your trucks won’t have so much of a dead run and everybody gets better service.” Boy, they really appreciated that and they moved the office and their business was improved a whole lot. Before I went to the State, my sister and husband had a retail liquor store in West Palm Beach and asked me to come and help them. One of their employees left, so I came and helped them for a while and that didn’t go anywhere. That kind of business wasn’t — you know, you see too much of it — the degrading part of society. That’s when — right across the street was the courthouse — I got the offer from the Florida Probation and Parole Commission. I took the exam. Boom! IN a snap, I came to Tallahassee for a week of orientation and then, boom, into Vero Beach, and I spent a year in those four counties doing pre-sentence investigations for the court.

[Mr. Brill continues until the end of the tape to speak about his career with the State of Florida and his activities following his retirement.]

End of Transcription

Interviewee: Rosalind Brill
Interviewer: Rachael I. Cherry
Date of Interview: January 15, 2006
Category: World War II
Status: Open
Tape location: Box #56 (2 tapes)

Cherry: This is Rachael Cherry and I'm at 2300 Merchants Row Boulevard, apartment 241, Tallahassee, FL 32311-3362, and today is January 15, 2006. It is a Sunday and the time is 9:32 am. Today I am interviewing Rosalind Brill, also known as Pat Brill, and we are going to talk about her remembrance of the beginning of World War II and her activities during the war — also some biographical information. Mrs. Brill are you aware that you're being interviewed?

Brill: Yes.

Cherry: Do you consent to this interview being recorded?

Brill: Right.

Cherry: Please state and spell your first and last names.

Brill: R-O-S-A-L-I-N-D- B-R-I-L-L.

Cherry: What is your date of birth?

Brill: December 11, 1926.

Cherry: Where were you born?

Brill: In Boston, Massachusetts.

Cherry: What were the names of your parents?

Brill: My father's name was Joe — Joseph — Willie Simmons. Actually, his real name was supposed to be Simons, but he had a fight with his father and he changed his names to Simmons. But the rest of the family spelled it S-I-M-O-N-S. We spell it S-I-M-M-O-N-S.

Cherry: And your mother's name?

Brill: Alice. Her last name was Oransky, of course.

Cherry: And where were they born?

Brill: Both were born in Boston. Immigrant parents.

Cherry: So your grandparents were from—

Brill: Europe.

Cherry: Do you know which countries?

Brill: No. I couldn't tell you that.

Cherry: Did your parents speak any other languages or just English?

Brill: Well, they spoke Yiddish, which I didn't understand.

Cherry: Do you have any siblings?

Brill: No.

Cherry: Where did you spend your childhood?

Brill: Well, beginning in Boston and then my father discovered dog racing. They built a dog track in Boston and that's where we met Warren and Pearl Lemire. Warren is the man who invented the rabbit that goes around the dog track. And they said, "Why don't you come to Florida?" Of course, my mother and I both hated the weather in Boston and that's how we ended up in Florida.

Cherry: Do you know about how old you were when you moved to Florida?

Brill: This was in 1934 when we came to Florida, so I was only about five or six years old (eight years old).

Cherry: About eight years old.

Brill: Eight years old.

Cherry: Where in Florida did you move to?

Brill: Miami.

Cherry: Miami. Did you go to high school there? Did you guys stay there for a while?

Brill: It wasn't high school. It was elementary school.

Cherry: But did you stay there long enough to get to high school?

Brill: Oh, yeah. I can't remember the first school that I went to, but I was amazed because did you know that children went to school with no shoes on?

Cherry: Why didn't they have shoes on?

Brill: That was the way they went. Of course, me, coming from Boston, I've got to wear shoes. And finally, when — of course, I went to Edison — now that was a high school and in those years — the worst thing — it had a bad reputation. Boys would get into fist fights. That was the worst thing that would happen at the school. When I had children and Nancy was going to school, kids were still not wearing shoes. But then, everybody's got to wear shoes. In fact, Florida was a very poor state. You had to buy your own books and all of your supplies. They supplied you with a room and a teacher, but every year, if you graduated, you sold your books to the incoming students and you bought, you know, others from other students. So, Florida was very poor in those years. Then they discovered that school teachers are on vacation during the summer and they started offering packages, hotel rooms, and that's what started tourism.

Cherry: In Florida? Did your father work at the dog track or did he own part of it?

Brill: No, he was a laundryman. Now, I don't know if you know what a laundry man is. This is in Boston. You know, nobody had washing machines and so he was a laundry man. He'd come by, pick up your laundry, take it to Economy Laundry, have it washed. They charged you extra if you wanted it dried. I remember, he would bring some laundry to my mother and she'd put it on the little furnaces, you know, radiators that we had. She'd dry the clothes and he would give her the extra money. Because this is, I didn't realize (we were in a) the Depression. My father always worked. We always had food on the table. I'll tell you a story. One day, I'm in my bedroom with a little girlfriend and my mother comes in and she says, "What are you doing?" And I'm taking my clothes off (the hangers) which my mother made — crocheted, knitted, she sewed clothes. She's poor, this little girl. She doesn't have clothes and I'm gonna give her — My mother said, "You can't give her your clothes." First of all, I didn't realize I was a fatso and they fit me, and this girl was a skinny little nothing. But I didn't realize there was a such a thing as a depression. I didn't know anything about that. Anyways, that's where I grew up until I moved to Florida.

Cherry: In Florida, did your mother work or was it still just the laundry business?

Brill: No. My dad, he tried all kinds of things to get a job in Florida. Finally, he bought a business in colored town. In those years it was segregated. The blacks had to live in one place and the whites had to live in another. This was a grocery store that he bought. What we did, was in the backroom, we fixed up a place and we lived in the back. Of course, it wasn't really legal, because whites weren't supposed to live there. But the police kind of looked the other way, you know. But did you know the Seminole Indians, they couldn't shop in the white

town either. They had to shop in colored town and they would come in with their babies. My mother always had a scale and she weighed the babies. They wore these beautiful costumes that they make, you know, it was really — I got an education. One day, I'm standing in front of the store and here comes a touring car with KKK in it. You know, the hooded white, and I'm watching and they had nooses hanging out the side of the door. They just were going very slow down the street, intimidating blacks. It was really terrible.

Cherry: So your father owned that store for a long time?

Brill: Yeah. Then he got sick and I don't remember — of course, you don't go to the hospital, you know. Times were rough. So, he was in bed. I don't know what was wrong with him. But I remember his legs used to pain him. My mother would spend hours rubbing his legs. He had this colored lady in charge of his story, but they were robbing him blind. We went back to Boston for a couple of years and then the war broke out.

Cherry: How old were you when you went back to Boston?

Brill: I think I was a teenager. I was now in high school.

Cherry: Did you attend the rest of your high school in Boston?

Brill: Yeah.

Cherry: That's a good point to start talking about the war. Do you remember what was going on in the news right around the time when the war broke out? And I mean when Germany invaded Poland in 1939.

Brill: No.

Cherry: So you don't remember being aware of what was going on internationally?

Brill: No.

Cherry: Do you remember when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Brill: Yeah.

Cherry: Your reaction to that?

Brill: Well, I couldn't understand why they were attacked. I mean, what did we do?

Cherry: And you weren't aware of what was going on at the time internationally. So did it seem out of the blue?

Brill: Yes. I didn't understand. Of course, my parents didn't explain anything to me either. You know, in those years we had no television, only had radio. But my dad went to work as a pipe fitter in Boston on ships and then we decided we didn't like the weather. You know, Boston weather isn't something to be ignored. So, we came back to Florida. I don't remember what year it was, but I was a teenager. We lived on Miami Beach and by then, you see, the Air Force had taken over all of the hotels on Miami Beach. When men would first get into the service, they put them up in all of these hotels and they were doing calisthenics on the beach. Me and my girlfriends would go out there and watch all of these guys, you know. All of them came from the north and they couldn't take the heat and they were passing out. What the Air Force did, they put salt tablets in front of all of the elevators in all of the hotels and urged the guys to take salt tablets to keep fluid. I remember one time, I dated a real Indian from the midwest. A very nice-looking fellow, tall — he was going to take me out to a nightclub. He's got his khakis on and we get up and we go to dance. He was drenched. He is absolutely soaking wet and I'm trying to dance and I'm getting soaking wet. What a mess that was! Here I felt so sorry — it was hard, you know. South Florida gets pretty hot, but that's the way I like it. In fact, I don't particularly like what we have here (in Tallahassee).

Cherry: Because it's dole today. This was after Pearl Harbor was attacked, because you went back to Florida?

Brill: Yeah.

Cherry: You lived with your parents?

Brill: Oh yeah.

Cherry: Your father was working—

Brill: At the Dade dry docks — another pipe fitter working on boats.

Cherry: Private ships or government—

Brill: Oh no, this is — we were at war. All of those ships (were government)—

Cherry: Your mother — did she participate?

Brill: See in Boston, when the war was on, she went to work as a diamond tool cutter. I guess this was for the war effort. I don't know what they used those things for, but she and her sisters also worked at the same place. But when we came back to Florida, she didn't work. Just my dad.

Cherry: He was a private, contracted individual? He was not in the military.

Brill: No, no. He was too old. In fact, I remember, he used to take my mother to the movies, because they'd stand in line and people would be looking at him like, why isn't he — but he was too old. He was doing his share, you know. And then I became — see, on Miami Beach — are you familiar with Miami Beach?

Cherry: Vaguely.

Brill: Well, at South Beach where I lived, they had a pier. When we first came to Florida, Minsky's Burlesque was at this pier. Well, during the war, they turned that over to the servicemen so that servicemen could go over there. I was a hostess and I was a teenager, but we danced with the soldiers, you know, talked to them all of the stuff like that.

Cherry: So you worked for the burlesque club?

Brill: Well, no. That burlesque was gone by then.

Cherry: I just wanted to clarify that for the record.

Brill: No, this was a serviceman's pier. I don't know if it's still standing.

Cherry: I can do some research and find out to see if it's still there. So Pearl Harbor had been attacked, you moved back to Florida. Once Pearl Harbor was attacked, do you remember trying to become more aware of what was going on? There were these military individuals around, did you then have an idea of what was happening internationally?

Brill: Oh, yeah, because I had dated a lot of soldiers. In fact, I was working for a PX on Miami Beach, Washington Avenue. I was working there. I was serving ice cream and so I dated a lot of soldiers.

Cherry: Do you remember what your understanding of the war was at that time? What cause was being fought for?

Brill: No. I knew what the heck was going on. I remember dating one fellow and he told me his father was Jewish. He was over in Europe and the Nazis, I guess, knew this man was Jewish, and they grabbed him and pulled his beard, just pulled it off. It almost killed him. I would hear the horror stories. It was terrible. In fact, in one of the hotels, WACs were stationed. Women in the Air Corps. I'm ready to join. See, I was too young, so they wouldn't take me. Well, I guess I'm doing the best I can, you know, working in the hotels as an elevator operator.

Cherry: And you worked in one hotel or several hotels?

Brill: Oh, yeah. The St. Moitz, the Shelborne, the Albion, the National. I can't remember all of the names of the hotels. I don't even know if half of the hotels are still standing.

Cherry: The National is standing still. I believe it may be a landmark down there. I'm not sure. I'll have to check. Based on what you said about the Jewish man's father being victimized, they you were aware — your community was aware of the social persecution occurring in Europe.

Brill: Oh, yeah.

Cherry: Did you understand what was going on? Did you have an idea of the extent of the persecution?

Brill: Well, to this day, I still don't understand what they had against the Jewish people. I still don't understand it. You know, I used to go to the movies and they had (???) News. They'd have — this was when what's his name, the Nazi—

Cherry: Hitler.

Brill: Hitler. Hitler would be standing there talking and who knew what he was talking about, but people in the audience would bust out laughing. I'm wondering, what in the world are they laughing about, when he's saying — I mean, they would translate it, because I certainly couldn't understand German. This was terrible and I still to this day don't understand, you know. I'll tell you one thing. Nancy was in school. She was, you know, in elementary school. One day, she was standing in line, and I guess kids knew she was Jewish, and one day, a girl turns around and says to Nancy, "You killed Jesus!" Nancy says, "I did not!" You know, what does she understand what she's talking about, and I'm saying, what in the world are they talking? What are they even mentioning stuff like that in school? To this day I don't understand it either.

Cherry: For records purposed, Nancy is your daughter — one of your daughters. We will mention the rest of your children later. Were you aware then that people were being murdered in Germany or that they were being shipped out and being relocated?

Brill: Well, I just listened to the (???) news or news on the radio, and I really didn't understand, you know, what this was all about. And of course I was worried that it's going to come over here and I understand it did. There were submarines off the coast and I didn't realize it. But nothing happened.

Cherry: Do you remember blackouts being ordered in the city? Miami being right there on the coast?

Brill: Oh, yes. I remember even in Boston, I remember one time I was taking a shower — "Lights out!" I'm taking a shower and the lights were off. Yeah, we had that.

Cherry: But you never saw any explosions in the water?

Brill: No.

Cherry: Did you see anything on the beach? Any wreckage?

Brill: No.

Cherry: Besides seeing the servicemen exercise on the beach and seeing them around town and dating them, do you have any other experiences with them that stood out in your mind?

Brill: No, not really.

Cherry: Do you remember perceiving any fear among them or perceiving their attitudes about the war?

Brill: Well, of course I dated the soldiers and most of them had just gotten into the service so they didn't really have any experience because they haven't been shipped out. That was the end of that. You know, once they shipped out I never heard from them.

Cherry: How long did you work at the hotels? Through the end of the war? Past the war?

Brill: Let me see. I guess when I got married. We got married in 1948 and I was working and Jerry got a job as a night clerk, but one day he got very sick and we ended up having to rush him to the hospital — the veteran's hospital in Miami — and I think he had a kidney infection or something like that. I said, "Look, Jerry, we'll just live on what I make." He, of course, had saved a lot of money from his service when he was in the war, and I said, "If we can, we'll just live on what I make," and him not to work. He was going to college and working nights. That was too much for him. That's what we did.

Cherry: What is his full name? Your husband's full name?

Brill: Jerome.

Cherry: How did you meet him?

Brill: That's a funny story. A girlfriend and I decided to go up to the YMHA, which is on Collins Avenue and Lincoln Road in Miami Beach. We go up there to see what's going on and there's a juke box in there, so we go over there and we're trying to get it to go on, and we can't get it on. Jerry happened to be there and he walks over — mechanical genius — and he plugs it into the wall. Of course, then it goes. So, we're talking and this was one of those fly by night watermelon stands. He invites the two of us over to have some watermelon. Of course, I was very independent. I worked. I had my own money and I wasn't too impressed with him. He was a skinny little nothing, you know. Of course, I didn't realize why he was so skinny. Anyway, we had watermelon and now I'm starting to walk home because that's not (that far) —

you know, I used to walk to work. I lived right there on Washington Avenue, South Beach. So, I'd walk to work. So, we were walking home and I'm pushing my girlfriend on to Jerry. Meanwhile he calls me (up) and we had a couple of dates and then I decide to go to Boston to see my cousins and my aunts and uncles, you know. So, I went there. My mother sent me a whole bunch of letters that he (Jerry) had written to me and I couldn't remember who the heck he was because I used to date a lot. Anyway, I come back and he called me up and we had some dates. The next thing you know, we go on a cruise and he proposes. Why not?

Cherry: What year did you meet him?

Brill: It must have been 1946, I guess. So, we got married in 1948. Because my parents weren't wealthy — my father was driving a cab now, this was after the war. I didn't have a formal wedding. In fact, we went to this rabbi's home and we got married. I wore a blue suit and he wore a blue suit and that's the way it goes.

Cherry: Was he out of the military when you met him?

Brill: Oh yeah. He had been a P.O.W. He had gotten out and gone back to Pennsylvania, where he'd come from. So, I didn't meet his parents until after I'd had my first son, Dennis. That's the only time I saw his father, a very tall man. They came for the briss and that's it. Then his father died and my sister-in-law, Miriam, had her mother move in with her, and Miriam had two adopted children, a boy and a girl. They were terribly mean to their mother — to my mother-in-law. She was blind. She couldn't really see. She just saw shadows. They used to hit her and do all kinds of things, you know, move the silverware. That's when I told Jerry, "This is not right." My mother-in-law came to live with use. Her daughter, Lillian, and her husband — he was still in the military, her husband — and they moved to Alaska. Well, the mother couldn't go to Alaska. That's how she ended up living with Miriam and then with me and then Lillian moved back to the states, and she's used to living with Lillian and her children and so she moved back. Well, I did the best I could. In fact, I remember, I tried to get my mother-in-law to come with some of the other elderly ladies, but no. She wasn't very sociable, I guess, because she couldn't see very well. That was the end of that.

Cherry: What was Jerry doing in Miami when he met you? Why was he down there, rather than in Pennsylvania?

Brill: You'll have to ask him. I don't know. I found out a little bit why he didn't impress me, because he was such a skinny guy and I didn't realize that he had been a P.O.W. and had a terrible time. I think I made a good choice.

Cherry: Fifty-seven years later. It may be a little late to change your mind.

Brill: Especially now — [Mrs. Brill talks about her marriage.]

Cherry: How many children do you have?

Brill: Four.

Cherry: And their names?

Brill: Well, first was Dennis and then there was Jarin and then — see, we lived in Miami and at the time we had the two boys. Our neighbor's little boy came down with the mumps and I came down with the mumps. I had never had any childhood diseases and I had the mumps. I was swollen like you'd never saw anything like it in your life. It was just horrible. You know what, if a man gets mumps, he becomes sterile sometimes. Did you know that?

Cherry: Did not know that.

Brill: So it probably affected my reproductions, because ten years went by. We moved to Tallahassee. Well first — we didn't move from Miami straight to Tallahassee. First, we moved to West Palm Beach, because Jerry's sister and brother-in-law lived in West Palm and they had a liquor store — package store. [Mrs. Brill speaks about the liquor store business.] Across the street was the courthouse and somebody told Jerry, "Hey, there's a job to be a parole officer." So Jerry took the exam and we moved to Vero Beach. He was a parole officer for one year and he did a lot of good for all those men. His story, he used to tell them, that he was a prisoner of war, and you know, locked up, and he really worked with these guys. I never knew if he was bringing a parolee home for lunch or the district attorney, but I always had food on the table. Then, he was sending in some terrific reports or something and they were very impressed in Tallahassee with him. "Pack up your stuff, we're moving you to Tallahassee." We come to Tallahassee, we rented a house way out off of Thomasville Road, and like I say, we only had the two boys, and all of a sudden here comes the two girls. Ten years difference. I think that's because I had the mumps.

Cherry: You think it affected your system.

Brill: Yeah, I really do — Anyway, we — I skipped over what we did in Miami with my (???) First, we lived in an apartment on Biscayne Boulevard, then we moved in with my mother and father in a house. We rented a house with them and I had Dennis at that time. Things weren't going so well, so we finally bought our first house on Alapata in Miami. We had the house there and then I had Jarin. We ended up on Tallahassee from West Palm Beach and we've been here (ever since). For thirty-five years we lived here. Both of my parents, of course, are gone. They moved to Orlando, but then my mother died. She had high blood pressure all of her life. My dad came to live with us in Tallahassee and he lasted a few years. I think that's about it.

Cherry: If you don't mind, I'd like to back up a little bit and ask you a couple of questions. When you moved to Florida and the Depression was going on, you don't remember

economic hardship for your family. Do you remember any restrictions during the war? Maybe rationing that affected your life?

Brill: Oh, yeah. Well, my mother had coupons. You know, everybody got coupons and that's how you went shopping. My mother always managed to have food on the table. In fact, now I look back, I didn't do right by my mother and father, because I would meet some soldiers and I would say, "Oh, come home with me. My mother will feed you." She never knew whether I was coming home for lunch or if I'm bringing two or three guys, but she always managed — even though rationing — she always managed to feed all of those guys. But that was like our war effort — to help.

Cherry: Bringing the guys home was your war effort?

Brill: Yeah.

Cherry: Did your mother keep a garden or did you recycle materials?

Brill: Oh, I think we did. I think we recycled, but my mother didn't work. She stayed home, but we did all kinds of things for the war effort.

Cherry: Following the war, did things improve? Do you remember rationing ending?

Brill: Oh, finally. Yeah, we were able to survive. We always had food to eat. We weren't poor. My mother always managed. She had a budget. She always managed somehow.

Cherry: By the end of the war, do you think your understanding of the war changed or improved? Did you hear new things from the soldiers coming back?

Brill: No, because I never saw them when they came back. You see, when they first got into the service, they were in Miami Beach and then they left. I never heard from any of them, so I don't even know if half of them survived or whatever.

Cherry: Do you remember losing any high school friends during the war?

Brill: No.

Cherry: Your school was co-ed? Boys and girls?

Brill: Oh, yeah. I remember one of the funniest things I ever saw. This was in Boston. I was in high school and we didn't have discrimination in Boston. Blacks, whites, everybody went to school. One day, this black boy was standing in the doorway of the room, and it's a wonder I didn't bust out laughing, because this teacher comes over and, to this black boy, "I don't want to see you darken my door again!" I bust out laughing. To say that he didn't want to

see him darken — to a black boy — he was standing in the doorway. What a dumb thing to say, because, really why do they even to this day differentiate? No one chooses when you're born, whether you're going to be black or white or yellow. How they discriminate today — That gets me mad, because, you know, I lived in colored town and I saw discrimination something fierce, and I hate it. The one time that I met discrimination, is when I was working in the hotels. I told my boss, "I just heard this one fancy hotel up the street is hiring a girl," and he says to me, "Don't bother going there because they don't hire Jews." That's the first time I had ever heard something like that.

Cherry: What was your reaction?

Brill: I was pretty pissed off. I don't like that.

Cherry: Was that his discrimination or was he—

Brill: I don't know. You know, that was my boss. I never asked him or anything like that, but it seems like one of the other girls was a black girl that I was working with. But she was a girl, it didn't matter to me what color she was. She was nice to me. I was nice to her.

Cherry: Shortly after the end of the war, the hotel returned to civilian tourists.

Brill: Yes, they all took the hotels back and I was still working. I remember the Shellborne Hotel was a pretty fancy hotel and the owners lived on the top, you know, penthouse. I remember they had a big contest about who had the fanciest fur coats, because these were very wealthy people staying at the hotel. All of these furs that they (have and) — they're having a contest.

Cherry: You were sad to see the servicemen go?

Brill: Well, yeah, because there went all of my dates.

Cherry: Okay, I think that's a good place to wrap the interview up. The time is 10:15 am and the date is once again January 16, 2006 [CORRECTION: January 15, 2006]. Signing off.

End of Transcription