

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Roberta Jones

May 31, 1997

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PREFACE

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Transcribed by Sue L. Holthaus, RMR, CRR, National Court Reporters Association.

ROBERTA JONES

May 31, 1997

Question: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Roberta Jones conducted by Margaret Garrett on May 31st, 1997, in Silver Spring, Maryland. Tape 1, Side 1. Mrs. Jones, what was your name at birth and your name now?

Answer: Roberta Arlene Stubblefield (ph).

Q: And--

A: Oh, my name now?

Q: Your name now.

A: Roberta Stubblefield (ph) Jones.

Q: And what is your date of birth?

A: October 15, 1921.

Q: And where were you born?

A: St. Louis, Missouri.

Q: And you lived in St. Louis for how long?

A: I --just a few months. About six, I think, then we moved to Pocahontas, Arkansas.

Q: And did you live in Pocahontas for awhile?

A: Yes. For awhile. Then we moved to Oklahoma for awhile, then we came back to Pocahontas until I graduated from high school.

Q: And could you talk about your growing up and your family?

A: Oh, yes. I grew up in a--probably a lower-- incomewise, lower middle class, and during the Depression, then we were quite poor because of--because of the Depression, and--

Q: What did your father do?

A: My father did a little farming. He had a grocery store, and that--I'll have to think about this just a minute here. He had a little grocery store a time or two, did some farming, and then for awhile he worked for the WPA, if you know what that was. Works Progress Administration.

Q: It was a government agency?

A: Yes. One that Franklin Roosevelt established, which I think a lot of people in the North thought it was a very bad thing to have, but the southern people thought it was a lifesaver.

Q: So that helped your family--

A: Oh, yes.

Q: --and he was able to work for them?

A: Yes, yes. It was--saved their pride. That meant that they could get the jobs and work for the money and--

Q: Did you understand as a child what was happening, that Roosevelt had set this up and that enabled your father to have a job?

A: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And --because my father lost just about everything in the --in the Depression. Prior to that things were--were good, good enough. And then--when we moved back from Oklahoma to Arkansas, we were there about--there a few months, and someone set fire to our house, and they put it out after--we weren't there, we were visiting my grandmother, so they--and they extinguished--extinguished the fire after it had gutted one room, so then my father had that rebuilt.

Q: How old were you?

A: At--at this point I was nine or ten.

Q: And--

A: Probably nine.

Q: And do you remember how you reacted to the fire?

A: To that one, not --not really, but just a few months later we were back visiting my grandmother again, and someone set it on fire again, and it burned to the ground, and we had nothing except what we had worn to my grandmother's for the weekend. That I remember 'cause I remember coming back and looking down into the base--in the basement --down into the ground which had been the basement and seeing my little wagon and--and it just hurt 'cause all the toys were des--destroyed. Everything. Clothing, the whole bit. And we never found out who did it or why but felt that the people who had lived in our house when we were in Oklahoma had made an enemy somewhere because we hadn't been back but just a probably by that time, maybe six months.

Q: So you think the people set it on fire thinking they were setting someone else's--

A: Thinking--

Q: --house--

A: --the house belonged to the people who had rented it from my dad. So in addition to losing his job, he work--he was a deputy sheriff in the --or something like that in Oklahoma. In addition to losing that job, having to come back to Arkansas without work, someone burned his house down, and he had—he did have a little farm of 40 acres that we could move out to, but all together it was just blow after blow after blow.

Q: So as a child you had some tragedy--

A: We did.

Q: --in life?

A: But we had the most loving parents, and two of the most loving sisters you could imagine, and we didn't know we were all that poor. It was just a--

Q: What was your mother like?

A: A saint. Not only would I say that and my sisters say that, but all of our friends thought she was wonderful. Would love to come to our house because she was just wonderful.

Q: And your father?

A: He was wonderful too, but he was wonderful to our family, to us girls. You know, we were just everything to him as we were to our mother, and he was --I could say as a father, he was perfect. He didn't reach out to the community the way my mother did, and my mother reached out to anyone who needed anything. As poor as we were, she was always giving of her time and whatever she had to everybody else. My father didn't do that. His was taking care of his family, and I could understand that

'cause he had to take care of his family so in that respect, it was a great childhood.

Q: And you had two sisters?

A: Um-hum.

Q: And where were you in the birth order?

A: I was the youngest.

Q: So you were the baby?

A: Yes, um-hum.

Q: And what were your sisters like with you?

A: Wonderful. Just wonderful.

Q: How much older were they?

A: The oldest one was five years older, and the middle, two years older.

Q: So you were fairly close in age?

A: Fairly close and very close. Still are. Still very close. Couldn't do without them.

Q: And when did you start nursing school? Was that right after high school?

A: Right after high school. Probably a matter of six --six months after high school. Because --oh, that's when there was an opening in --went to Baptist Memorial Hospital in Memphis. That's when they had their openings for students was six months after I graduated.

Q: And how did you happen to decide you would go to nursing school?

A: Because my mother wanted me to.

Q: And why did she want you to?

A: Her father was a doctor. My grandfather's a doctor. She had a brother who was a doctor and a nephew who was a doctor, and to her that was just the ultimate profession. We didn't have money for any of us to become doctors or--couldn't possibly even consider that, but for a nursing school, yes. And at that time you had to even buy your --we had to buy our books but, of course, they provided the --actually you worked your way through because you --your room and board was provided, but you had to buy your books. Nothing was actually given to you and worked--

Q: It was hard?

A: Very hard.

Q: Did--did--you said that your mother wanted you to do it?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Did you feel strongly that you wanted to, or did you kind of go along?

A: I didn't, no, I wanted to--I would have loved something in journalism. I would have loved journalism, but you just didn't have a lot of choices during the Depression. You took what you could get and --and I didn't mind. It wasn't --she didn't force or anything, she just said that would be great. She loved that so I thought well, might as well.

Q: And then after you got into nurse's training, did you like it or think--

A: It was all right.

Q: So it was okay?

A: Okay. I'd rather have been in journalism, but it was okay.

Q: And you knew you could get a job.

A: Always. Yes. That was --oh, that was a tremendous factor at that time 'cause this was 1940. 1940-1944 so still jobs were hard to come by.

Q: So you finished training in what year?

A: 1944, I think. Yes.

Q: So that was during the war.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And then what happened?

A: At the begin --in January 1944. Then I --actually I applied to --I wanted to be a flight attendant. That's not what we called them then. What'd we call them. Stewardess. And stewardesses at that time had to be nurses, so I remember I had a --had an interview set up at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, and it was a --really looking forward to it, and then people from my hospital started going into the Services, mostly Army, and got very exciting about that time, and I decided that's what I wanted to do, so that's what I did. Right from nursing school. No experience.

Q: And--

A: I think I was 23.

Q: --did you have any ideas about where you would be sent as a nurse or...?

A: I didn't have any idea, no, but I knew what I wanted.

Q: What did you want?

A: I wanted to go to Europe. Wanted to go to Germany.

Q: And why did you want to go to Germany?

A: I--I'm not certain, but I imagine there was a lot of probably excitement and glamor attached to that adventure because remember at that time, I'd just gotten out of nursing school. Had no idea of what it was all about. 22--or probably 23. I had no idea.

Q: What--

A: Never regretted a minute of it, but I had no idea.

Q: You knew there was some danger.

A: Oh, yes, but at that age, it's not --I'm not going to get hurt.

Q: Nothing would happen to you.

A: Oh, no, huh-uh.

Q: So you signed up.

A: Um-hum.

Q: And then what happened?

A: Went to San Antonio, Texas. And--oh, so--what did I do. Signed up--this was all done by mail because then in Arkansas, now, it's all going through--I really don't know where. So I--I did sign up and received a commission through the mail. The funniest thing was I didn't know I had a commission. This is all just very strange to me, and I thought I'd got it when I--I thought I would get it when I reached San Antonio for basic training, but actually I had it the minute that I received the assignment, and it was strange 'cause I was on the train --we all had to stand up on a train. There were no seats. The trains were so full and there was a chaplain and a--and an enlisted man and I sharing one seat. The chaplain got it when he got on. He was very kind. And he said we'll all--it was about eight hours from my home to San Antonio. He said, "We'll share this seat" so we -- we actually --have to stand until it's our turn to sit in that one seat and --so as we were talking, they told me --this chaplain and this enlisted man had been in for awhile said, "You're already a second lieutenant." I thought that was very interesting. Anyhow --and they thought I was pretty naive so went on down to San Antonio and took basic training there, and I can't remember how much later but not long after that had orders for Camp Swift, Texas, with the 121st Semi-Mobile Evacuation Hospital was --I can't remember the word for that-- activating. Was activating. So the doctors and nurses and corpsmen from --and administrative people from around the nation and--I think it's probably primarily up here in the --in the East were gathering at San Antonio to activate this tent hospital, and from there we went to New York. After we were activated as a hospital, all of us were there, we went to New York by train. Everything's by train in those days, and stayed there a few days, and then at night --well, no, there had to be as much secrecy as possible then because we were going by ship to England, and they still had the U-boats, the Germans had U-boats in the Atlantic, so went by ship to England, and we had no idea where we were going, but I remember going onto the ship and the blackout, complete blackout, and you --suddenly you were on the ship. It's almost as if you didn't really know you were boarding the ship; but there we were, and I think we left, maybe sailed the next morning and took us five days to get to England, and we were in England and --and that --I believe we were waiting for the --when was D-Day? Do you remember what day that was? I think we were waiting for --no, I guess it was the Battle of The Bulge or something. We were waiting for some real heavy activity to loosen up a little so that we could cross the Channel and go to France. Stayed there a few days and then we started --

and then we went to Luxembourg, and from Luxembourg I know one time another nurse and I and a doctor and a couple of corpsmen were sent to somewhere in Germany. At that time everything was "somewhere." No towns could be listed or anything so this was somewhere in Germany which from --and that from Luxembourg is a very, very short distance, and we went in one little old --one little Army ambulance at night. Of course it had been a blackout, and that was quite a trip because the --in a complete blackout, and they had --I guess--I don't know how they ran that ambulance but must have been very dim lights, so you could see a little bit but not much 'cause anyway they came to a --a huge crater, bomb crater in the road, and the driver had to stop just short of that because he didn't have lights, he couldn't see, but he knew there was something there, and he got out--and he flashed --you had to flash your flashlights down to the ground. Never up or out but down to the ground, and I remember him flashing that around to see how big the crater was so he could go around it; and down in a ravine by the road we heard these flashes of lights and heard some kind of firing, some kind of skirmishing down there, and we finally reached our destination. Then the next morning we were really balled out for having come because it was so dangerous, but our commanding officer hadn't known that. Somehow the communications hadn't been so good so we got to this --where we were detached to this very small outfit, and they needed --they just needed help so badly. That's why we were detached there, and they had a lot of German wounded too.

Q: Now, was this your first nursing activity?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: No, no, no, no. No, we helped in England, I'm sorry. Should back up to England, but yes, in England we --we worked in a hospital there for a little while, and I can't remember how long, and those-those were --we had American casualties from a big, big battle. That may have been --I can't remember. Anyhow it was very heavy fighting, big battle, very important fighting at that time, and we had many American casualties. That's why we had to stay in England awhile to take care of them and wait for things to calm down a little bit in Germany and France, so that--that was it until we rejoined our own hospital from this little--whatever that was. It was not an evac hospital, smaller than that.

Q: So in this little, little hospital--

A: Yeah.

Q: --there were a lot of German wounded?

A: And a lot of American wounded.

Q: A lot of American.

A: Uh-huh. And--

Q: How was this for you as a very young, inexperienced nurse to see all these war casualties?

A: I think we lived from day-to-day. I -- I -- I know at that time I had no thought of the war ever ending. Perhaps some people did, I don't know, but I think for the most part all of us were living just by the day because we didn't know if we'd be moving out the next day or what would happen because we didn't --we kept our patients --we were not supposed to keep them over 24 hours and then they were sent back to the rear, so I think we lived essentially --everything was so fast, and perhaps we were moving so fast, everything happened so fast that we didn't really think about tomorrow. Now, I'm sure that people who were moving our little hospital for us had to plan all of that. You know, the logistics had to be tremendous, but the rest --the nurses and doctors and corpsmen just lived for that time.

Q: Okay. So then you were moved to--

A: We would follow where the fighting was, and that would be --well, we were advancing. There was no retreating. This was toward the end of the war. 19--early part of 1944 so you see it was --no. The end of 1944. So it was --the war was winding down--it was still very heavy fighting, but we were advancing constantly, and we were --so we had to move frequently, very frequently, and it was --I don't know how many times we moved, but it was --we'd always set up our tents in a field unless there might be a building handy that --that we could set up in which would be a --a real help for a hospital because I remember, you know, a dog could wander through the operating room in the tents, and that's just the way it was. Set up in muddy ground. No flooring, of course, for the tents. Just mud or dry --just dirt, whatever it happened to be at the time.

Q: And were you an operating room nurse or--

A: No, no, I was just --no, I had just gotten out of --out of nursing school. No, I was a--general duty they called it.

Q: Okay.

A: Just --and as that you're put anywhere where you're needed. No specialty. So from there--at some point we were near--there --well, we were attached--by this time we were attached to the Third Army, to Patton's Third Army, and we were somewhere near where Patton was, and I don't really know where that was, and it couldn't have been very far from the--Buchenwald, the concentration camp Buchenwald.

Q: Now, you were attached to --

A: Patton's Third Army.

Q: --Patton's Third Army. And your unit was?

A: The 121st Evacuation Hospital. A very small tent hospital.

Q: Okay.

A: So we were in --in --near Buchenwald, and Patton had been there. And Patton was a very tough old soldier, and he wanted everyone to visit in that area, within that area to visit Buchenwald to see what was there so they'd be --it would--become so furious. The war's still going on. Become so furious that--that it would make certainly better fighting men, determined, and I know our commanding officer thought it would not be the place for the women to --I think there were 30 or 33 of us women, very few of us. He did not want us to go there, but Patton said everyone would go, no exceptions, and so all of us had to go.

Q: So that meant you didn't do your nursing medical care during the time that you were going to--

A: It was just one day.

Q: Okay.

A: No, we didn't but that would have meant that other --we --I don't remember all that--we would have had to have gone in shifts.

Q: Right, okay.

A: And I think I must have been on the first shift because I know we were told that--that the --the camp had been liberated three days before we got there, so not very much --all they had --had been able to do was hand out food to --to the --to those who were surviving, and there were quite a few who were surviving, and they handed out food. Nothing had been done as far as I can think because the bodies were there. The crematory was still there. Gas chamber, everything was as it had been and --and I'm having flashbacks so --we went there on one --kind of a dismal day. Had to have been in the spring. Had no idea really --I mean you --you know, you've heard that this is going on, but --but you haven't known anyone who's seen it. You haven't seen the pictures because it's just been liberated, just now getting people in and getting the pictures, and so when we arrived there, I can't remember that we even spoke to each other. There were very few of us, so we had to have gone in shifts. Very few of us, and I can't remember even speaking to anybody because it was such a shock; but nobody broke down and wept or had hysterics, and I don't know if part of that was the training you've had as a medical group or not, but I just remember silence, and the shock is incredible and you --perhaps walk through in a bit of a daze because who can --who can assimilate to all of this. You can't. And we were shown through the camp. I don't remember by whom. Probably --

probably some of the soldiers who had liberated them, I'm not sure, but we were shown through the camp around the grounds, and the inmates who were there were still dressed in their striped uniforms and so happy, so filled with joy and trying so hard to do anything they could for us, and I think --I could be wrong here but I think it was both American and British who liberated Buchenwald, but I'm not certain, but all I saw were American soldiers there. And we went through the barracks, and you want me to describe the barracks?

Q: Um-hum.

A: They were wooden buildings, not very large at all, and they had --these were just for sleeping, and they had bunk beds, as I remember it, four high with just a few inches between each two bunks so that you --you just knew --there was just no way a --a person could turn over in the bunk. For them to change their position to turn over, I'm sure they had to slide out and start again. Just a --just probably the head cleared. I think that was about all to get four bunks high. And that just seemed terrible to us, you know, with no mattresses or things like that, none of the comforts. And there was one --we went through one of the barracks, and there were two men there still in their striped uniforms, and they were --you've heard the expression "skin and bones." Well, in this case for these inmates, that was literal. Absolutely literal. And they had been given some black bread by the

Americans I'm sure, and they wanted to share it with us. Now, had we been older, more mature, we would have accepted as their guests because who had they been able to share with or had anything to share with? Or even talked with freely, but we thought how can we take their bread? That's all they had. And we refused. Later I thought had I been older, more mature, I would have handled it differently, but we did refuse that. Then we were shown the --at some point the crematoria --crematoria --I guess--is it crematory or crematorium?

Q: Either one.

A: With the bodies and, you know, ready to be cremated. We were shown the gas chambers and the stacks of bodies, naked bodies so high and the carts or wagons filled with them in addition to the stacks on the ground all around. Then we were taken to one of the Nazi administrator's offices, probably a commanding office, I'm not sure, and they pointed out this lamp shade made out of human skin, and it was a terrible thing. I'm about to cry.

Q: Do you want to stop for a minute?

[Interview interrupted; tape recorder turned off]

End of File One

Beginning of File Two

Q: Tape 1, Side 2. So you said that you saw other camps also?

A: Yes. We --the war was over in the --maybe May 8th, I think, something like but we didn't come home right then, and we --we went --but our --we had no more American soldiers. Of course the fighting was over so being the kind of hospital we were, we didn't keep patients, therefore, we were just waiting until we got orders. In fact, we had orders to go to China. We never went because the war was over there too, was winding down, was over there shortly after that. So we went to --can't remember. I think somewhere -- we were the first hospital across the Danube, so I think--or somewhere along the Danube, and we one day went to another concentration camp, a smaller one, and I don't know the name of this one or where it was, but I do remember it was a cold and rainy day, and we went to the --for some reason we went to the administration building. At the time we went there, I believe there were three of us nurses and the chief nurse, she went there for some reason, we went along with her, and we happened to be at the time that they were -- that the Americans had this camp, they were issuing clothing to the inmates. There again they had their striped uniforms. I suppose because they were issuing--we were issuing -- the Americans were issuing clothing, there came the men sort of in a column coming in to get their clothing, and they were stark naked, not a stitch on them. They came in where we --three or four women were, and they smiled, and they acted as if they were clothed, _____+ clothes. And we had to look at them as if they were clothed, smile at them and, of course, we didn't speak German, they didn't speak English but, you know, the --probably some handling which--you know, all that -- as if nothing had happened, and we were told that these were political prisoners; that some of the best minds in Germany were probably there, but they were not politically correct, and yet what grabbed my attention was that these men didn't seem to be aware --of course they were aware they didn't have clothes on, but they didn't seem somehow to acknowledge that. Some of the big brains in Europe. We only spent a short time there, but that never left me, that impression.

Q: Were you there to do nursing or--

A: No.

Q: --somebody thought that you should see it or...?

A: No. Yes, I really can't remember that but a lot of this thing-- this kind of thing, I think you probably try to forget. I know we were --there were about three of us nurses there with --probably all lieutenants or something, younger nurses there with our chief nurse, and she was just a captain 'cause we had such a small outfit, and she was probably on some administrative mission, I don't know, but we didn't --we didn't do anything. We

were just there with her, and --but that's what impressed me to think that these minds had regressed to that point.

Q: So something had really been done to them to almost dehumanize them.

A: Absolutely. And there again skin and bones was the literal thing. I mean they were -- the --the skin was just absolutely against their bones, and their eyes were--I would say expressionless, and yet they --they --they were glad to be alive because they were free. That probably doesn't make a lot of sense, but you --you knew they were glad to be alive and they were free and that--that they'd been through horrors that--that they couldn't even describe I'm sure. That was the second camp. And the third one was probably the worst, and that was somewhere near --it was in Austria near --oh, gosh. I could look it up, but it's probably not important.

Q: Well, I can stop the tape if you want to look it up.

A: Well, it's probably--

Q: I'll just stop the tape and you can look it up.

A: All right.

[Tape recorder turned off]

Q: You were looking up --you were looking up the name of the third camp, or where the third camp was.

A: Yes. And I don't know the name of it. It was a --it was in an old German Luftwaffe camp. In fact, some of their planes were still on the ground.

Q: You said it was near Linz, Austria?

A: Yeah, near Linz, Austria. And that-- in that one, the women did not--did not do any work, didn't --because they were afraid the women would be attacked by the inmates, but our men --the men from our hospital went in and cleaned up this place because it had just been liberated too, so we were stationed there for some time while --while the men in our unit cleaned it up, took care of --set up the hospital, took care of the sick, and the women were--we were separated, I think, just by a fence, just by a fence, 'cause I remember a tall fence. Of course the fence had been built by the Germans to keep the inmates in but also kept us separated from them, and we were there a few weeks probably, and there were so many children and so many of these were French. Probably most of them were French, but there were children of all ages there, and I remember we would--maybe a couple of us nurses would go for a little walk around the compound and, of course, we couldn't go far but just go around the compound, and these children would line up around the fence. They weren't allowed out, and they too were absolutely skin and bones. No --no flesh, no

muscle that you could see, just --just skin and bones. They'd line up at the fence looking at us, and we might have a bit of chocolate or something with us, and you'd want to give it to them, or fruit, whatever, so badly. Anything you had. But we were told --we were threatened, I suppose, can't give them anything because it would have killed them. They were just on liquids for several days, then they would graduate to a soft diet, then regular food. And one night when we were there, it was very --very striking, very impressive. Some of our big cargo planes, American cargo planes came--now the war is over -- came in to take these --the French people back to Paris, and they were so thrilled, so excited about going home that they took everything that was made of wood from the barracks, put it in a huge, huge pile. I don't know how many feet high. Just as high as they could stack it. Set it afire after dark and sang "The Marseille." That was impressive. Very, very wonderful time for them. And after that there --there was --we just waited to get orders to come back home. There were no more camps, but we stayed in that one camp until we left to come home.

Q: And now what was your assignment in the camp?

A: We had no assignment because we weren't allowed in the camp.

Q: Oh. So you weren't--

A: The women.

Q: --doing any nursing or any work. That was just--

A: Not the women.

Q: --a holding --

A: Holding. Yet--

Q: --for the women while the men --the men were inside--

A: That's right.

Q: --working and you were just waiting until--

A: Until--

Q: Until they finished?

A: Until they finished and got the camp cleaned up and got the patients into some sort of shape that they could leave them. The patients I say, the inmates, and then we came back home.

Q: How was it for you to come back from that to home?

A: You know, then at that time you weren't expected to have any emotions. The hospital --the people --the hospital personnel was not expected to have any emotion because you had to do all you could to help those who --who had --who were traumatized, and I don't think any of us were ever considered to be traumatized. I guess you weren't allowed to be, and there was --and I can't even remember discussing this with any of--any of the other nurses or doctors or corpsmen who were there. It was just --you saw it and that was it.

Q: And after you came back home, you didn't talk about it either?

A: Hum-um. No. Nobody talked about it. You might --you might say a little bit now and then. I know to my --you know, after I had my children, they got older, I did tell them, and once in awhile now I'll tell somebody a little bit about it, but it was something that wasn't discussed, and now I think it's entirely different. They encourage discussion and --and it is therapeutic, but then no.

Q: So you told your children a little bit about it, but you never--

A: I probably told them a lot. I probably told them a lot when they got older.

Q: Because you thought it was important for them to know that--

A: Absolutely.

Q: --you--

A: Absolutely. I wanted them to know that.

Q: Why did you want them to know?

A: Because my generation is the last generation that had the --the firsthand contact, firsthand knowledge, and I know that there are people who believe it never happened, and I think there will be more who will refuse to believe it ever happened, and I think it's wonderful what the Holocaust Museum--the records they are keeping of this because I think it must be, must be kept for history, for the future generations, and I think it's great you're getting the interviews now because it--my --well, I say my generation is the last. Of course the children of the inmates in the concentration camp will have some memories. That's the next generation, but probably there are not too many of them and so I think it's very important.

Q: So what was it like for you after you came back to the States? Did you stay in the Army for awhile, or were you discharged?

A: I stayed in the Army for awhile. Not very long. Well, maybe a couple of years, something like that. And then I got married and got out.

Q: So you got out because you got married?

A: Um-hum. Yes.

Q: How was it being in the Army those two years when you came back home?

A: It was --well, I was --actually we had mostly men from--not men and women, but men from the-- from the--Europe, from the war --well, from the --from the Pacific too. These were the patients we had so it's still family and--because you were sort of family with the patients of those who had been through the same thing that you had and had seen what you had seen, so it wasn't --I don't know, it was just a continuation somehow.

Q: And in that circumstance, people didn't talk much about what they'd been through?

A: No. No. The men who had been --those who may have been --may have been through Africa, Italy, and Germany, terribly wounded, severely ____+

Q: Do you remember whether you thought about --about it, what you had been through and the condition that some of them were in?

A: Oh, yes. We thought about it. We just didn't talk about it. And I don't know why, but the --the men --saw a lot of those patients, saw a lot of them, and now they're --now we're in a stationary general hospital where you keep your patients so you get to know these patients and you're with them for weeks.

Q: And you go through a lot with them.

A: Go through a lot with them 'cause they were terribly wounded. The hospital where I was, one of them was in California. It was plastic surgery, and these were mostly burned patients. Terribly burned with much rehabilitation. In fact, we were in --we were in Pasadena, in the McCornack General Hospital in Pasadena, California, which --and at that time Pasadena was populated by mostly retired, very wealthy people, and they did not want our patients in their restaurants, on their streets. Anywhere. They didn't want them out of the hospital because they were --they didn't want to see them because they were too --too badly wounded. Too disfigured, terribly disfigured. So much --so many had burned faces, and --and they were re-making their faces, reconstructing, and they didn't want them in their restaurants. Now, on one hand, it would be hard to go into a restaurant and sit --sit next to these patients. On the other hand, these people had defended them, and we were very angry. The nurses and doctors were very angry about it, and we'd go out with them because the --the men were too embarrassed to go out with anyone but hospital personnel, so the nurses would go out with them and --and maybe to --to a restaurant where they had dancing after and that sort of thing. And at that time I could not understand how anybody could treat them so cruelly but now I see, maybe they

did have a little bit of a point because it would be very hard for them to face, for the civilians to face if they hadn't been exposed to it.

Q: But it was tough for you at the time to see that happening.

A: Hurt very, very much 'cause these --these men were our --our --in addition to being our patients, they were good friends. Very good friends, and yes, it hurt.

Q: So you were at the Army hospital in Pasadena, and where else did you serve?

A: Texas. Louisiana.

Q: What --what was the hospital in Texas?

A: Oh. Camp Swift. The hospital. Hospitals all have names. I can't remember that name. And Camp Polk in Louisiana.

Q: Did you meet your husband in the military?

A: Uh-huh. I met him in California. I met him at --in Pasadena. He was in the Army.

Q: Was he--

A: In x-ray.

Q: Oh, so he was assigned to the hospital?

A: He was in x-ray. Then got out of the Army, and I didn't --didn't do any more nursing. I guess I just did another year when the Korean War broke out in 1950, and we were in Michigan. I was in a hospital for a year treating Korean War casualties.

Q: Now, you were in the Army or--

A: No.

Q: As a civilian?

A: I was a civilian then.

Q: So you were a civilian working in an Army hospital.

A: In an Army hospital for a year, and that was the end of my nursing career.

Q: And you previously had stopped nursing when you got married?

A: Uh-huh. For about two years I guess. Yes, I think that was two years it was, and the Korean War broke out, and we went to Percy Jones Hospital in Michigan, and they were desperate for civilian nurses, any kind of --you know, Army nurses, civilian nurses, whatever they could get, and they got all the civilian nurses they could get in addition to the Army nurses.

Q: So did your husband also work in the Army hospital--

A: Um-hum.

Q: --when you were there?

A: Um-hum. He was a master sergeant in --maybe not at that time. He was a master sergeant in x-ray, and he was in charge of the --I guess the master serge --the enlisted men in charge of x-radiology. I'm missing that somehow, but anyhow he was --he was always in radiology.

Q: Did he stay in the Army?

A: He retired.

Q: After you got married?

A: Uh-huh. He retired and--

Q: He retired when from the Army?

A: Goodness me. After 24 years and that was--

Q: Oh, I see. So after you were married, he continued in the Army?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Okay.

A: Then--he retired here from Walter Reed.

Q: So that's how you got to the Washington area?

A: That's how we came to the Washington area. A: Been here for many years.

Q: Was he overseas at all?

A: No. He didn't go overseas.

Q: So he didn't have the war experience that you had.

A: No, he didn't.

Q: Did you ever talk with him about it?

A: Very --no, I didn't really. I guess maybe not at all perhaps.

Q: Do you keep in touch with any of the people that you were overseas with?

A: Yes, I did --not now. I did, oh, for years, I did with two. Two special people. Actually three. Three. And then, you know, our --our paths have diverged and, oh, one of them is dead, and I did keep in contact with her until she died.

Q: So even though you didn't talk about it, you were in contact with people--

A: Um-hum.

Q: --who had been through what you had been through?

A: Yes. We never mentioned it. And--and I --now I find that strange. I never felt it strange, but now I do find that really strange. We never mentioned it. So I don't know where any of them are now, and --and I'm sure some --I know this one is dead, perhaps some others. Because I was actually next to the youngest in the group of nurses. Therefore, if I'm 75, they would be older.

Q: So do you think much or some or at all about those experiences overseas now?

A: Quite a bit. I suppose everyone does quite a bit. You know, you don't really get hung up on it, but you'll have these flashbacks and --or something will remind you of what happened then and --yeah. So I guess I do think about it quite a bit.

Q: Do you think that it changed you in any way to have gone through all that?

A: You know, I never thought so. I never thought so, and yet my son one day said to me, he said, "You know, Mom"--he knew someone at work, some woman, and she said her mother had similar experiences, and she thought "I think it's affected my mother. I don't know how, and he said, "And I said to her, you know, it probably did my mother too." I didn't ask him how. Just --I stay off that subject. So I don't think it --I never thought it did. Maybe it did.

Q: Well, it's hard to know what it would have been like if you hadn't have done that 'cause--

A: Yes. May have been the very same. Who knows but it was an experience that you could well do without. I had a woman one time tell me that she didn't think it ever happened, and I don't know why she said that. We weren't talking about it, but she said that she didn't believe that there were ever any concentration camps. She thought that was a lot of propaganda, and I--I'm thinking you're talking to the wrong person, and she talked quite a bit about it until I finally just stopped her and told her whatever --I don't remember what I told her, but anyhow I told her the truth. I was shocked. That shocked me as much as anything probably to think that somebody --she was older than I, so she had been through --in the States. She had known what was going on. I mean she had heard --she had to have heard. No way she could have avoided newspapers, radios, what was going on, and yet she thought that was all propaganda.

Q: How did she take it when you told her?

A: Well, I felt that she didn't believe a word of it. Then not long ago, I met a woman and she was – and I don't --I don't know why the subject came up, but she was telling me that her father-in-law --I don't know, someone, someone in her family did not believe it ever happened. Was propaganda. So again someone else didn't believe it, and then I --that makes me believe there might be a lot of people that believe this never happened, therefore, the story has to be told, has to be kept because I can't imagine there'd be anyone who would think it hadn't happened. I know they're teaching it in the schools today, and there --they --I think they're teaching it--quite a bit about it, and yet there are those who don't believe, and I can't --apparently they don't want to believe it. Why don't they want to believe?

Q: Hard to understand.

A: Um-hum. Have you heard that there are people who don't believe it?

Q: Oh, yes.

A: And why do they not believe it, do you know?

Q: I don't know. Hard to --it's hard to understand.

A: So do you think if these people--those people who do not believe would go through the museum, the Holocaust museum, they'd still not believe?

Q: I don't know whether they would or not, but I think your testimony's a very important piece of documenting that it did happen.

A: Thank you. There are lots of us out here I'm sure. Lots of books are being written now too.

Q: Yes, there are. Is there anything else that you would like to say?

A: I don't think so.

Q: Anything that I've forgotten to ask you?

A: I --I don't think so. No, I don't believe that--would have nothing do with the concentration camps so I don't think there is anything.

Q: Well, that's all right. If there's something else that you want to say. Doesn't have to be directly connected.

A: It would just be experiences that--that would have no bearing on it so I think it's probably unimportant as far as this goes.

Q: Experiences in the war?

A: Um-hum. Would have no bearing on --on --on the --well, it would have had some bearing on the Nazis.

Q: Okay.

A: Do you want something--

Q: If you want to.

A: --or just want to hang around? Oh, I found it very interesting that we--oh, I shouldn't say interesting. That's not--not a good description. Exciting. And something I was glad to do that we didn't --we --of course you heard about Dunkirk.

Q: Um-hum.

A: We were set up in Germany when some of the men who were captured at Dunkirk, this is five years later, had been prisoners of the Germans all this time. Not in a concentration camp but a prison camp. Were liberated. Came back through our hospital for just a few hours 'cause we were still this little tent in the field, and all very --had been wounded seriously and had --had very little care given. Desperately needed care. But they weren't interested in that so much as we were the first English-speaking women they had seen in five years, and they wanted to know what was going on in England, and --and we were so happy and --oh, they were probably there a couple of hours before they went back to the --to the rear, and it was just exciting to talk with them.

Q: And to see how excited they were.

A: Oh, yes. Yes. Uh-huh. And they had heard that the --they had just heard--because they got no news in the prison camps, no letters from home. Nothing. They had no idea what was going on in England, but they had just heard that the American soldiers were marrying all of the English women and that was a terrible thing for them to have to hear, and we were happy to tell them not so. So then they went on back to England I'm sure very quickly.

Q: Well, you must have had days and days of very dreary times so to have something like that happen would certainly--

A: Be --

Q: --give you a different mood.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes, it was. And I think that's probably all that I have to say.

Q: Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much for giving your testimony. It's very important for the museum to have this.

A: Thank you. You're very welcome.

Q: This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Roberta Jones.

End of File Two

Conclusion of Interview