**Simsbury Women in World War II**

**The Simsbury Historical Society is helping to keep the history of residents and their memories of World War II alive.**

**This project began in 2018 with the preparation of questions to be used to facilitate oral interviews with women who had lived in town during World War II. As it turned out, some women were interviewed in person, some answered questions in writing and some sent their stories in written form.**

**All either lived in Simsbury during the war or moved here soon after the war.**

**The following women have shared their memories and stories with you.**

**Enjoy them.**

Questions for WWII Civilians:

I. Section 1 – Introduction

Date and time of interview, (Include interviewer’s name)

Name and age of interviewee.

2. War is declared

What do you remember about Dec 7, 1941?

Did life change in Simsbury immediately?

3. Life during Wartime

Where did you live during the War?

How did the war change your attitudes and habits?

Tell me about shortages, rationing and recycling. How did everyone cope

with these changes?

How did Simsbury respond to the war (civil defense, etc.)?

4. Personal information

Were you in school then?

Did you work outside the home and, if so, what did you do?

Did you have family/friends in the service? Or doing war work?

How did you communicate with them?

How did you feel about the War and changes?

5. Free time

How did you entertain yourself after school or work? What did people do?

6. End of the War

How did you celebrate when the war ended?

How did the war change your life and that of your family?

7. Summary

What was your most memorable experience of the War?

Is there anything else I should ask you?

Thank you for sharing your experiences in Simsbury during World War II.

Participants in oral histories: Simsbury Women in WWII

Mary Jane Rossetti Babbitt

Charlotte Bacon

Laura Rotondo Bisson

Jeanne Genlot Burns

Wanda Colman

Erica Boehm Hall

Eleanor Kniffin

June Hogblom Mackay

Thelma Tetra Messenger

Mary Pringle Mitchell

Helen Puchko Muszynski

Gloria Calcagni Pereira

Patricia (Pat) Dewey Wiles

Mary Jane Rosetti Babbitt

Born: May 2, 1930

Family name: Rossetti

Mary Jane said:

“I was born in Simsbury on 72 Riverside Drive. Dr. Owen L. Murphy delivered me and three other siblings: Isabel, Gloria and George. The older two: Anna and Chris were born in Unionville.

My mom and dad owned Rossetti’s general store with gas pumps on this street and had a firework stand in the front of the house in the summer.

After the war started, my brother Chris was drafted and retired as a Lt. Colonel. George joined the Merchant Marines at age 17 and was a head radio dispatcher.

It was a lonely and sad time for the family. So many things changed. There was sadness everywhere. One of our neighbors lost their son. I can remember all the townspeople rushing to St. Mary’s to pray for them.

I can remember being afraid when I would hear the planes go over. We had the air raids and had plywood made to fit in all the windows so the lights wouldn’t show. My brother-in-law was the one on our street that checked the houses for darkness. They had a name, but I can’t think of it at this time.

You asked me if we were treated differently. The one thing that comes to mind is that we lived on a wealthy street where at that time a lot of our neighbors had nannies, maids, etc. My best friend was a dentist’s daughter and would be over my home a lot and would stay with us at times when the family traveled. When she had her 16th coming out party I was not invited. I never understood it until years later.

Going to the movies at the Eno was our only social activity.

We had ration stamps that were used for gas and food. We made out fine because my dad raised a huge garden and would help out the neighbors.

We all seemed to work together praying for the war to be over. I can remember coming home from school and seeing my mom saying the rosary with my brothers’ picture next to her.

We only had the radio at that time and when Pearl Harbor was bombed I can remember my dad (that I had never seen cry) putting his head on the table and crying like a baby. We had relatives at our house that day. It’s the same as remembering 9/11 or Kennedy’s death.

We had the missile site in Simsbury and soldiers were brought in to man it. My mom and dad would have three or four of the servicemen over on Sundays for dinner.

I collected money for the Red Cross and got recognition for collecting the most metal.

After the war I belonged to the American Legion Ladies Auxiliary and the women’s’ Republican committee.

When the war ended and it was announced on the radio. I can remember all of us rushing to St. Mary’s to pray and thank God. We became one big family during the war.

Rehashing this brings back so many sad and happy memories. I could go on and on. I was proud of my brothers and what they sacrificed. Actually I believe we all sacrificed in a way.”

(Attached is a copy of a photograph of Rossetti’s store and the gas pumps)

Leave space?

Charlotte Bacon

Born: May 2, 1934

Family name: Bidwell

Charlotte said:

“I am a native of Simsbury and have lived here all my life. I attended Central Grammar School.

School children were able to purchase War Bonds during the school day. We were allowed to leave our classrooms and go into the hallway where tables were set up. We redeemed our money in exchange for stamps which were glued into War Bond booklets. It cost 25 Cents per stamp. Each booklet was filled when we had contributed $18.75. After the war, each booklet could be exchanged for $25.

What I remember mostly vividly were the practice air raids which were held after dark. A siren at Ensign Bickford would blow to announce the beginning of the raid. The family would gather in one room of our house on Hopmeadow Street. Heavy black shades would be drawn over the window and all lights were extinguished. My father would put on a pith helmet and take a flashlight and leave the house. His assignment was to walk up the street and check to be sure no lights shone in the houses. It might seem unnecessary to perform these exercises, since why would German planes want to bomb a small town, but Simsbury is home to Ensign Bickford and the output of the factory was contributing to the war effort by manufacturing explosives. After a period of time, the factory whistle would blow again indicating that the practice raid was over.

Townspeople were asked to gather unwanted metal trash and leave it on the lawn in front of Eno Memorial Hall. Since we lived on my great-grandmother’s farm (the Aaron Eno Farm) I knew there was a lot of rusting farm machinery in the fields. A friend and I dragged the metal along Hopmeadow Street and threw it on a huge mound of metal piled on the front lawn of Eno.

The need for metal was so great, in fact, that we school kids would remove the metal wrapper that came on sticks of gum. We rolled the foil flat with a pencil into a little bundle and contributed it to the war effort! Another unusual collection, strangely enough, was the seed pods on milkweed. These pods, when opened, created the fluff that was used to stuff life preservers! We harvested the pods and put them in the string bags that grocery stores use for onions. Much of the town was rural, so finding milkweed was easy.

Households had ration books containing stickers that could be redeemed for certain grocery items which were in short supply. One of these items was eggs. Our family preserved eggs by a process called “water glassing.” Water glass is sodium silicate and could be obtained in either a liquid or powder form. It was added to well water or rain water (chlorine is harmful) to the process) and put in an earthenware crock in the cellar. Raw eggs were added to the crock of liquid and these eggs were usable for more than eight months. My mother would send me down to the cellar with a wooden, slotted spoon to fetch the eggs from the crock.

Butter was also rationed. “Oleo margarine” was our butter substitute. Nowadays we call it margarine but then it was called “oleo.” At any rate, it tasted just like shortening. One pound came in a plastic bag. In order to make it look more acceptable, there was an orange capsule inside the bag. My task was the squeeze the bag until the contents were softened and then “pop” the capsule, allowing it to color the contents to a buttery hue. It looked like butter, therefore, but certainly did not taste the same!

Most people subscribed to LIFE MAGAZINE. Many issues of the magazine contained very graphic pictures of the swollen bodies of dead soldiers. My mother frequently hid the magazine so that I could not be exposed to the photographs. Another unsettling experience was viewing the newsreels which always accompanied the movies at the Eno Memorial Hall. I remember seeing Japanese soldiers emerging from tunnels in the mountains with their clothes on fire from the flame throwers used by our soldiers.

Many families lost family members during the war. My uncle was killed and one of my first cousins was imprisoned by the Germans

INCIDENTAL ADDITION

In the fall of 1945, at the end of the war, there was a polio epidemic in town. As I recall, the disease was thought to have originated with a student at Westminster School. Schools were closed and we were quarantined. We were not supposed to play with other children. My sister was one of the seven or so kids from Simsbury who contracted the disease. Although she had few lasting effects, one third-grade boy in town died.”

Laura Rotondo Bisson

Born 1937

Family Name: Rotondo

Laura says:

“My name is Laura Bisson and maiden name being Rotondo. I was born in Hartford, Connecticut and raised in Simsbury, Connecticut. I have three children all of whom were born and raised in Simsbury as well.

In 1943 I was six years old and had started first grade. One of my two brothers was drafted into the Army at age 18 and my other brother at age 17 enlisted before they got to draft him because he wanted to choose what branch to serve in. He went into the Marine Corps. Both were still in high school at the time but both received their graduate diplomas after the war.

I remember out home on Davey Street in Simsbury had one of those silk banners/flag with two stars on it hanging in our front window, which indicated we had two household members are war. The sad memory I have is hearing my mother cry every night when she was praying for my brothers’ safe return.

I don’t feel my life changed all that much or was terribly different since I was so young. I do remember my mother canning and preserving all different kinds of foods and stocking our shelves in the basement. But that was how we lived all the time anyway. She and my father had always had a garden and were always frugal. We never had a car until I was graduating from Simsbury High.

When I was eight years old my parents bought their first house just down the street on West Street. I remember the day the war was over and how the whistle down at Ensign Bickford blared and blared continually and people were coming out of their homes with smiles and arms raised in thanksgiving. We lived next door to the American Legion Hall and I remember they had a bar downstairs where all of the servicemen from Simsbury for the most part would partake of social gatherings down there. I believe it was open to all servicemen especially.

In my young years while my brothers were serving, one in France and Germany, the other one in the South Pacific, I remember anxiously awaiting their return at different times when they were sent home on ‘furlough.’ I would ask them all kinds of questions and they did not willingly talk freely about their experiences. My younger brother would always tell me a story that would be entertaining for someone my age, like when he was in the South Pacific the monkeys were pests always getting into their belongings and snacks if they had any. Even after the war when they came home, they never talked about what they endured and encountered. Because my parents did not write English and they wanted my brothers to receive mail, and now I was in first grade, I was expected to know how to write and somehow I managed to write them letters. I found out later it made them cry and be homesick, cry in happiness though.

Today I have some small personal souvenirs from my brothers.

I guess I would say that my most memorable characters at that time would be my brothers, plus two cousins that also served.

A lasting impression that has not left me to this day is the fact that I feel I am very patriotic , toward the flag, toward wartime music, toward the Marine Corps Hymn that I learned the words to at an early age, and my passion for many years has been World War II movies. I also still have a memory of dreams I used to have at age 8, 9, and 10 of being in the war with a rifle hiding behind a tree. Later I ended up marrying a Marine who was serving during the Korean War and we actually lived near his base for a year before he was discharged.”

Jeanne Genlot Burns

Born: 1937

Family Name: Genlot

In Jeanne’s words:

“As a child of five years old when the war started, there are many activities that I do not remember or was too young to understand.

Things that I do remember:

* We had air raids at night and were required to turn off all lights in our house for a certain period of time. (Note: air raid drills)
* We had stamps to buy food and gas, which were rationed. Our family walked many placed so that we could save on our gasoline purchases. A friend told me that he remembered Hershey’s candy bars, Fleer’s double bubble gum and cellophane were in short supply.
* Many families saved money to purchase War Bonds to help finance the military operations. Not sure about this but…I think on Friday nights we used to go to the auditorium (which was on the lower level) of South School for some type of gathering for local people to purchase bonds.
* My mother hung a small rectangular cloth banner in our living room window. It was red, white and blue, with a gold fringe on the edges and had a gold star in the middle. Each gold star represented a member of the family that was in the service. I had three older siblings that were drafted or enlisted. As each one became involved, our banner in the window was changed to add another star.
* My oldest brother, August, was a pilot in the Air Force. My sister, Marcella, was a member of the Marine Corps. My youngest brother, George, was drafted in the Army. He did not serve very long because he was discharged soon after the war ended as I assume were many other men and women.”

(Attached are pictures of the Simsbury Memorial Day parade in 1943, of Jeanne and August in his uniform, and of Marcella Genlot in her Marine uniform)

Wanda Colman

Born: May 8, 1937 in England

Family name: Hutchinson

Wanda remembers:

Wanda was born in London, England but raised in Sharon, Connecticut. Her family was evacuated by ship in the fall of 1940. Her father was an American citizen.

During the war, Wanda helped her parents with daily activities (gardening, canning tomatoes, raising and selling rabbits). The family members collected and flattened cans, recycled, bought war bonds, etc. Her father was an air raid warden and Wanda accompanied him on his rounds.

The war changed their lives as they had moved to the USA and were considered “Foreigners” because of their accents and because Wanda’s mother made all of their clothing. They corresponded with relatives in England by letter or an occasional telegram. Wanda’s father tried to enlist but did not qualify due to a pilonidal cyst.

She remembers listening to the radio and going to weekly Wednesday matinees at the theatre in the next town to see weekly movies of the war. They listened to the short wave radio and read telegrams and letters from her godfather (in England).

Wanda’s family had a huge garden and raised chickens, rabbits, ducks, and sheep. They drove to a locker in Goshen (alike to Copaco with animals). Her father made head cheese and sausage while her mother canned. They had a ‘root cellar.’ They coped well with shortages due to thrifty attitudes.

On May 8, 1945 (her 8th birthday) there was a huge celebration on the Sharon Town Green and Wanda understood why. They were overwhelmingly joyful and relieved to be safe at last at the end of the war.

Wanda states: “War affects children for the rest of their lives. Devise new ways to win and protect our freedom without killing. Learn all you can about America’s history, especially the wars. Talk with WWII veterans and others who lived through it, see some tattoos from those who were actually in the concentration camps, see the photos, watch old movies, read non-fiction books, visit your great grandparents before they are gone.

How can you describe freedom? Study the Constitution. Find a way to know what and why America exists and how to protect our way of life from those who wish to destroy it.”

A personal note: “ I don’t mind talking about any of this, but a strange feeling happens when I do. Even when cheerful, when happy even, tears well up and roll down my face. This also happens when there is an unexpected explosion, firework or old war video – like the Day of Infamy speech – or a balloon popping. I know as a small child in England I was aware of all that was happening – air raids and everything and that war was coming to England and it did and then followed us to America? So I guess I am very lucky that I turned out to be ‘quite normal’ and now realize that the tears are perhaps a mild PTSD, but I think more, a deep compassion for all humanity of WWII – the good, the evil, and the greatness of America. That is overwhelming and humbling and the tears flow as they did when I was repeating the Oath of Allegiance, except for the part when it said I would not take up arms against my country, at the age of 21 when I finally became an American Citizen.”

Erica Boehm Hall

Born: October 23, 1930

Maiden name: Boehm

Married William Hall in 1950

No children

Information provided by JoAnne Boehm

Erica was born in Long Island but moved to Simsbury in the early 1930’s. her father worked as a baker at Ethel Walker School. Her mother worked as a seamstress at Ethel Walker School. Erica had three siblings. They “did not have much.”

Erica graduated from Simsbury high School in 1948. She worked for Beekley Corporation, which made business forms for hospitals, etc. She began as a secretary but worked her way up to Vice President. She retired from this company.

William Hall served in the Navy during WWII. He worked for the telephone company after the war until he retired.

She experienced prejudiced during the war due to the family’s German ethnicity.

William and Erica bought a Coast Guard minesweeper in the late sixties/early 1970. They made it into a home and lived on it in the Mystic River in Mystic. The boat was sold after Bill’s death.

Erica owns a store called “Shells Galore and More” in Mystic. She lives in Mystic., CT.

Eleanor Kniffin

Born: May 17, 1926

Eleanor came to Simsbury in June of 1946

Eleanor said:

“I do remember arriving from the West as a new bride. Donald and I had to live with his parents in the house on the hill in Tariffville for 8 months before we could find an apartment of our own. His parents were very good to us all that time. Housing was at a standstill for 2(?) years or more.

We finally found an upstairs apartment in the Bertini’s house in the center of Granby across the street from the Gury and Kellogg grocery store and next door to Avery Hardware and Post Office.

Later we brought home our first child, Mary Hilary, to that apartment.

Wish I could help in this interesting project but my arrival followed the end of the war by a year.”

Sincerely,

Eleanor Kniffin

June Hogblom Mackay

Born: April 24, 1935

Family name: Hogblom

Married: John Mackay

June says:

“I was born April 24, 1935. I lived on Canal Street in the Weatogue section of Simsbury. My parents bought a former one-room schoolhouse from the town and remodeled it into our home.

On December 7, 1941, I was six years old, but remember hearing on the radio that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. My parents were visibly upset and not understanding where Pearl Harbor was, I remember going to the window facing the mountain to watch for airplanes. The men in Weatogue all gathered at the Pringles’ gas station to talk.

Shortly after war was declared, Ensign Bickford contacted my father, Lars Hogblom (he was a building and had a woodworking shop), to made wooden spools to hold the Primacord (explosive) the company made and was used in the war. Lars built a building to make the spools and a large cylinder to tumble the spools to make them smooth. At the beginning of the war the men worked around the clock making the wooden spools. Each spool had to be inspected by hand to make sure they were smooth so that the Primacord would not get caught on them.

The summer of 1942 an Army company set up a camp on Stratton Brook Road in Weatogue. The men would march to Nod road every morning and return every evening. In the evening, the kids would stand at the edge of the road waving flags and sometimes saluting them as they marched by. They would sing cadence songs and we learned some of them. They were only at Stratton Brook Road for one summer. It was a somber reminder in the village of Weatogue that America was at war.

When the war ended, August 14, 1945, everyone celebrated. In Weatogue, a large metal barrel was used as a drum and rolled through the streets. The kids made signs, “The War is Over Be Happy” and as the parade went by houses, the people came out and joined it. It ended with everyone at the gas station. The kids were given ice cream and soda. It was a wonderful day!”

Thelma Tetro Messenger

Born: September 11, 1926

Family name: Tetro

Thelma was not interviewed. The information comes from JoAnne Boehm.

Thelma’s nickname = “Sooky”

Thelma’s mother was from the Dewey family of Simsbury (a relative is Pat Wills).

Thelma graduated from Simsbury High School. Thelma worked for Mrs. Fannie Ellsworth helping with afternoon meals and supper. She also worked at Ensign – Bickford as a secretary.

She married Ralph Messenger, a Marine from Simsbury. After their marriage, they lived in Simsbury, Granby and Westfield, MA. In later years they lived in Edgewater, Florida.

Thelma’s husband had a cleaning supply business and worked for Martin Marietta aircraft corporations.

Thelma was one of 12 children in her family.

Mary Pringle Mitchell

Born: February 19, 1924

Family name: Pringle

Married Walter Mitchell June 7, 1947

3 sons

My WW2 Memories

“My name is Mary Pringle Mitchell and I am 94 years old. I live in Simsbury, CT and I am recording this for Barbara Strong of the Simsbury Historical Society.

I was a civilian during WWII and these are some of my memories.

I remember so well the day of Pearl Harbor in 1941. I was sitting in our living room with an old boyfriend listening to the radio and I heard the words of President Roosevelt saying, ‘This day will go down in infamy’ and told us about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I don’t’ think we really realized what was happening. Then my parents came home and we talked about this terrible event.

In school that is all we talked about and many of the boys quit school and signed up to go to war. Eventually men were drafted into various branches of the service.

Our lives all changed. I remember my dad being an air raid warden. No lights could be visible and we had black out shades. If the warden on duty that night saw any lights he would knock on your door and tell you. My mom was a plane spotter and she was stationed at Central School. I often took her place.

Then everything was rationed such as food and gas and we all had ration books. Due to the lack of gas you really couldn’t go anyplace for pleasure. I was going to Mount St. Joseph Academy in West Hartford and I was allowed enough gas to drive there and back, period. The nuns found out I had a car and they were always bumming rides.

After I graduated in 1942 instead of going to college I worked for various companies that were involved in war work. A division of Pratt and Whitney was one of them. I was a ‘parts chaser.’

That is when women first left their homes and worked as Rosie the Riveter.

My dad was in the automobile business and no cars or parts were produced. The factories all manufactured products for the war. My dad said he kept the customers’ cars on the road by the Grace of God and Elmer’s glue and bailing wire.

We saved everything and had scrap drives. I remember my dad gave a special course for women so they could maintain their cars. How to change a tire and how to take care of their cars while their husbands were away at war.

Bradley Field was not the field it is today. It was an army base. Everything was for the war effort and they had USO dances to entertain the servicemen.

I must not forget to talk about our Victory Garden. It was my job to do the weeding but we needed the vegetables.

I remember the day the war ended. Church bells were ringing and everybody was celebrating. The lights came on again on Broadway. Let’s hope we never experience another war.

After the war, I went to the Lab Institute of Merchandising in New York, and that is when my life changed for the better. After the war in 1945 New York had Navy Day (note: an annual celebration, October 27, 1945). The big ships that were involved in the war came sailing up the Hudson River. The city was nonstop sailors.

A friend met some sailors from the USS Enterprise. She called me and other girlfriends and said she had invited a bunch of sailors over to her very small apartment and needed help entertaining them. That is the day I met my future husband, Walter Mitchell. The rest is history.

Eventually the men and women came back into civilian life and slowly we were able to buy things we had had to go without. When they first started manufacturing cars you went on a waiting list. When you got to the top of the list you could get a car. People didn’t care whether it was blue or black. They took it. Same with all appliances and everything that was rationed.

These are just a few of my memories of the war which I have been glad to share with you.”

Helen Puchko Muszynski

Born October 2, 1925

Family Name Puchko

Married: John (Nick) Muszynski August 6, 1949

Four Children

Helen said:

“I was born in New Britain, Connecticut on October 2, 1925. My parents moved to Simsbury when I was about four or five years old. My father took a job at Ensign Bickford Company and we lived in a company house. My mother passed away and father and I lived with a family who took care of me while my father worked. A short time later my father remarried and we lived in another four room factory house.

I attended South School for grades one through six and then went to Central School for seventh and eighth grades. I finished my schooling by attending Simsbury High School and graduated in 1943. During my high school years I worked one summer taking care of two young children, who had their grandparents also in the house, while the parents vacationed at Martha’s Vineyard for two weeks. School started in September, 1942, and we had a visitor come to our house, Mrs. Henry Ellsworth, who offered me a job after school and on weekends at their home. A lovely bedroom was assigned to me and my parents and I were told that if the weather was bad or there was a party I would stay overnight. My job was to assist the downstairs maid with serving tea and dinner. The Ellsworths were very kind and I learned how wealthy folks lived.

Many Simsbury families invited the men, training at an air field in Windsor Locks, for dinner in their homes. The Ellsworths had about six men for dinner one evening. Mrs. Ellsworth used her best tablecloth, china, and silver. The table was beautifully decorated; a red, white and blue ribbon ran the length of the table with a beautiful flower arrangement and candles. It was a lovely dinner for these servicemen.

During the war a group of men from France came over and stayed at the Ellsworth’s’ home. They were in the area collecting money for Free France to help with the war.

After the war the Ellsworth’s house on Hopmeadow Street was removed (1969) and the Bank of America is now at that location. I enjoyed my time with the Ellsworth family.

During my years in High School war broke out in Europe and when Pearl Harbor was bombed by Japan the United States was at war. Our life as we knew it was changed, food was rationed, gas and tires for automobiles and many other items were scarce.

In High School we were limited in activities. There were no longer sports with other towns, because of the gas shortage, instead we had intramural sports during school hours. The Senior Prom was cancelled. Many of the High School boys enlisted in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps and many of the men were drafted or enlisted leaving many more girls and women than men in town.

The women wrote to servicemen and knit hats, socks and sweaters to send to the troops. They also worked for the Red Cross making all kinds of bandages and went to work in factories and offices. Ensign Bickford Company offered employees garden plots, which helped our food supply, and let employees keep a few chickens. The gardens were called Victory Gardens and vegetables and fruits were planted to be canned or dried for winter. Everyone had a Victory Garden. Ensign Bickford would have their employees clean up the woods during working hours, to keep the threat for fires down. They gave the wood to the employees to use for heating and cooking. Salters would cut the wood into proper lengths and Bourgeois Trucking would deliver it to the employees’ homes.

There were air raids practiced during the night, Ensign Bickford would blow their whistle and men and women would walk the neighborhoods to make sure no lights were showing. Our houses had blackout shades that were put down during the practiced air raids. School children were taught how to keep safe in school.

We listened to the radio every night for news of the war.

I graduated from Simsbury high School in 1943 and got a full time job at Travelers Insurance Company in Hartford where I did typing and printing of auto insurance forms.

During the morning we would hear one of the stores: G. Fox, Safe-Allen, Brown Thompsons, Stigers, etc would have stockings, shoes, dresses or other things that were scarce. During lunch hour everyone would go to the stores as fast as they could to buy whatever was there. Because stockings were so hard to get, the ladies would put tan colored lotion on their legs and draw a line down the back of the leg to look like (the seam in) stockings.

Many of the soldiers stationed at the Air Base in Windsor Locks (now Bradley) would bum a ride to the Simsbury Restaurant in Weatogue to dance, visit and sing songs. I learned ‘The Yellow Rose of Texas’ from them

The end of the war came and everyone was happy, the men would come home and our lives would be normal again. We drove to Hartford that day and it was a great sight, everyone was waving flags and hugging each other.

In 1949 I married a local young man, John (Nick) Muszynski. During the war John serviced in the Navy on the island of Luzon, repairing air planes. We built a small house on Hopmeadow Street next to Nick’s parents and had our four children, three boys and one girl. It was a wonderful place for the children to grow up and they had the South School playground, the brooks in the woods and part of the Farmington Valley Canal, which all the children in the area cleaned every fall so the ice would be smooth and hard for ice skating in the winter.”

(Attach photo from 1942 or 1943 which shows the following people: Paul Barnett and his mother Susie, Paul Orlosky and his mother Rose, Grandma Barnett and Nick Muszynski and his mother Elizabeth).

Gloria Calcagni Pereira

Born: 1936

Family name: Calcagni

Gloria says:

“I was born in 1936, lived in an Ensign-Bickford house on Bushy Hill Road near the intersection of Bush Hill and West Street. I had just turned five when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. I recall that we (my mother, father and younger sister) were celebrating my aunt’s birthday in Waterbury, CT. It was December 7, 1941. We were getting ready to sit down for a Sunday dinner and the radio was playing in the background. My mother called my father and uncle to the table and when my father came into the kitchen, he said that on the radio they announced “la Guerra” (the war) had started with Japan.

The mood of the adults around the table was very somber and remained so for the rest of the afternoon, where usually it was very talkative and joyful wherever we were together, especially to celebrate a birthday or holidays.

My father worked at Ensign-Bickford and because the company was manufacturing war materials, he did not get drafted.

We had to deal with rationing which meant gas rationing so we couldn’t visit our relatives in Waterbury very often since it was a 70-mile round trip and we didn’t want to use our gas stamps all up for the trip.

Also we had to eat less meat, butter and sugar because of the rationing, but we never felt deprived because most of our food was home grown by my mother and father.

Everyone had a Victory Garden and canning and drying food was popular and everyone did it. My meat, my father hunted and we had rabbit and squirrel made in every manner, homemade pasta, lentils, soups, stews, polenta and home-made bread. Three neighbors got together and raised a pig from which roasts, sausages and lard was made and used. My father made wine every autumn and the wine press was passed around the neighborhood and every family had the use of it for one week to grind the grapes that came from California and the farmer’s market delivered them in one trip.

When we heard the whistle at night we had to pull down the shades and turn out the lights and then wait for the all clear whistle. If you showed any light you got a visit and a scolding from a warden.

We spent a lot of time sitting in our little living room around the big console radio listening for news about the war.

Both my mother and father had close relatives living in Italy, a country that was also at war, but allied with the Germans, and they worried about their families. My mother was so happy when she received a letter from her sisters living in Italy. Both my aunt and my mother sent packages to their family in Italy and never knew until some time had passed if the packages got through or not, but they still sent them.

Other than these few memories, the war didn’t affect my sister or me in a bad way.”

Patricia (Pat) Dewey Wiles

Born: August 13, 1934

Family name: Dewey

Married: John Wiles

Pat said:

“I was born on August 13, 1934 on Massaco Street, delivered on the kitchen table by Dr. Murphy and VNA nurse Mrs. Avery.

In December of 1941, I was seven years old and after church, we heard on the radio about Pearl Harbor, and that the President had declared the United States was at war. We lived on Phelps Croft Road, at that time, and moved back to Massaco Street sometime during the war.

My father was Burton Dewey, a pharmacist at Doyle’s Drug Store, and my mother was Ruth Fay Dewey.

In Central School we had air raid drills, where we would either duck under our desks or go into the hall and sit by the wall. We collected any tin foil we could find, even from our gum wrappers, and milkweed pods for the silk and brought them to school where they were collected. The school children saved quarters in folders and when they were full, they were turned in for War Bonds.

Everything was rationed, we had stamps for gas and food, we saved and saved enough gas for a trip or sugar enough for a cake. Clothing was in short supply and many mothers made clothes for their children out of whatever material they could find, even grain sacks.

My mother spotted planes and her post was a small building on the corner of Firetown Road and Plankt Hill Road and I would go with her. They were pictures of all the American planes so they could be identified and recorded in a folder along with the direction they were coming from and heading to and I believe we called information in to a defense headquarters. We had blackout curtains on all the windows at night. Simsbury was considered a prime target for bombing due to Ensign Bickford making Primacord and explosives used in the war effort. These were stored in the Powder Forest prior to shipment.

Everyone had a Victory Garden and since we did not have a good place for a garden the town had plots on River Road and that was where our Garden was. Seeds were sold by school children for vegetables and flowers for the gardens. Everything was grown in the gardens: celery, potatoes, carrots, peas, turnips, anything you could think of and everything was canned. Before the war was over, Doyle’s Drug Store bought a new freezer for the ice cream, and the old freezer was put in our basement and we froze a lot of vegetables and fruit. We also bought baby chicks to raise and when the hens stopped laying eggs, the hens would be slaughtered and also frozen or canned.

On V-J Day, August 14, 1945, we drove to Hartford where everyone was blowing the horn on cars, cheering kissing and hugging. Our horn got stuck and blew all the way home!