ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

MARY LOU HAND

An interview conducted on

April 5, 2022

Interviewer: Dr. Laurie Dickmeyer

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

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DICKMEYER: This is Laurie Dickmeyer and I’m in San Angelo, Texas speaking with, um, Mary Lou Hand and today is April 5th, 2022. [background noise] And if we could just have you tell us your full name and when and where you were born.

HAND: My name is Mary Lou Hand. I was born in Aleppo, Pennsylvania, southwest of Pittsburg ‘bout ninety miles. And actually about a mile from Aleppo. [laughs] Actually.

DICKMEYER: Okay.

HAND: My dad had like twenty-three acres of land.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm. And what was he doing out on that land?

HAND: Well, he- he, uh, worked for an oil company- worked for Abibleine [spelling unsure]. And his days off or if he weren’t too tired when he came in, he- he always had a huge garden.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And we had it all. We had- we had cattle.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: Not- y’know, I mean, not milk cows. And we had, uh, chickens.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And we had pigs. So, pretty much raised what we ate.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Yeah, and Mama sewed a lot.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm. Um, and did you sell some of it at market when you- 

HAND: We ate it- five.

DICKMEYER: You had some- 

HAND: Mama- I had five- five. There were five in my family- 

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAND: -and I’m next to the youngest. So we ate. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: [laughs] It was, uh-
HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: -for your subsistence, then.

HAND: Sometimes we gave milk to the preacher at the church. We carried it. When I would go to the high school I would carry some for him.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: So, that’s about it.

DICKMEYER: And, uh, do you remember your- your life, uh, as a child there?

HAND: Oh, yes.

DICKMEYER: Did you go to school? What was that like?

HAND: I went to a- I went to a one-room school that had eight grades.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And I think probably I was the one who was kinda rambunctious. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: [laughs]

HAND: I would get my work done. I would listen to the classes over me.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And when I got to the fourth or fifth grade, my teacher promoted me. I skipped a grade ‘cause I was caught up. That made me graduate one. I went to high school when I was twelve. Started when I was twelve.

DICKMEYER: Wow. That’s early.

HAND: Yeah, a- an- and in the- in the winter time that’s what people don’t do. Well, we had bonfires. We went ice skating. We went sli- snow riding, sledding and Dad made us sleds. And, uh, we had a wonderful- and we had ice cream in the winter ‘cause we had ice. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: [laughs]

HAND: Heh, so, anyway, had a wonderful childhood and got along really well with- the family got along well.

DICKMEYER: That’s great. Um, and what was high school like? Was that also in, uh, Aleppo, or?
HAND: Yeah, that had a high school. [laughs] Well, actually, had two floors.

DICKMEYER: Oh, okay, yeah.

HAND: And we had a big upstairs and two classrooms and we had a basement. And the elections- when the elections were held in the basement and we served hamburgers 'n stuff to them to make money. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Ah, really? During the- the city elections, or?

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. Interesting.

HAND Yeah, yeah. Anyway, [sighs] everybody knew one another and they knew one- their families and all that.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: Yeah. I, um, I done alright in high school. I got- I was second in my class when I graduated.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: So, then I was too young to go to college or I was going in nursing school. So I- I- my sister had a baby and I didn’t know anything about babies.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: [laughs] My sister-in-law had a baby, I went there. And my aunt had a heart attack.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And I went there. And I really didn’t know how to cook or anything. In those days, we would wash the diapers. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: D- doesn’t sound like pleasant work, right?

HAND: [laughs] Anyway, I didn’t- I didn’t complain. I did it.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. Very good. Um, and so, I know that you were interested in becoming a teacher? Is that right?

HAND: At that point?
DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Yeah, I wanted to be a teacher, yeah. But my dad. Oh, he wanted- he wanted to- me to be clocked-in when I, y’know, in college you just sorta come and go as you please but in, uh, nursing school they- they. I came in one night- late one night.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: We went to Kennywood [spelling unsure] Park in Pittsburg. And I had to have to ask for a late leave and the people I was with said, “oh that’s alright”, I said “well, let’s call in.” “No, that’s alright, we’ll get you.” Well the teacher was standing at the doorway. [laughs] Probably ten or eleven o’clock.

DICKMEYER: Oh, goodness.

HAND: I got in trouble for that. But, anyway, I survived. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Yeah, that’s good. And- and how long were you in nursing school, again? You were-

HAND: They have a three year-

DICKMEYER: Three years.

HAND: -diploma before they asked and started degrees.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: But you got other credit for two years.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm. And were you able to work as a nurse right after that, or?

HAND: Oh, yeah.

DICKMEYER: What did you do for work?

HAND: I worked, uh, I went to Pittsburg and worked in a maternity hospital. I like maternity. And I stayed there for a while, then I joined the Army. [laughs] And, you know, the Army didn’t take me. No, not the Army- the Navy.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: They didn’t take me because I had this calcified spot on my lung, which I still have. It’s that size.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.
HAND: And I went back home and done private duty for a while. I took care of a, uh, Jewish family- Jewish lady. Yeah, they owned a hotel and I stayed in that hotel, one of the- one of the best in the country. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAND: But I didn’t have to pay rent. [laughs] Anyway, ah, then from there I went to join the Army.

DICKMEYER: Uh, why were you interested in joining the Armed Forces?

HAND: I have a sister that’s a nurse. And she was, uh, she’s a- she was in Santa Barbara. But she done mostly Psychiatry.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Yeah, she and I were always really close. So I, uh, I couldn’t let her get ahead of me. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Did you- You grew up with a lot of brothers and sisters.

HAND: I grew up with one brother. My favorite brother, yeah.

DICKMEYER: Yeah, were they also, uh, joining up during the war?

HAND: No.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: Uh, no, Frank was married and my sister, mar- the oldest one was - was the one I took care of- had the baby.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Didn’t mean it wasn’t [unintelligible]

DICKMEYER: Yeah, well, that makes sense, right? [laughs]

HAND: [laughs]

DICKMEYER: They have, uh, [laughs] they have, um, uh, duties at home, right?

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: That they have to take care of.
HAND: Yeah, yeah.

DICKMEYER: Um, you were better positioned to go and serve.

HAND: I think I probably made a better nurse than I might’ve a teacher ‘cause I’m real- I love people.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: And I’m kinda empathize with ‘em. I mean, I’m compassionate.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm. That’s really good. Um, so even though it wasn’t your chosen profession, you ended up liking it?

HAND: Yeah, I- I think my sister done more industrial nursing and to me I’m a people person.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAND: And I think I’m better.

DICKMEYER: That makes a lot of sense. Um, so, when you joined up in the Army, uh, you must have had some training that you had to do, specifically for that-

HAND: Had to do. I- Hut, two, three, four.

DICKMEYER: [laughs]

HAND: Whoo! We had to do all that marching.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Yeah, that was the most- [pause] most that we did.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: They would do the exercise.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm. Do you remember any of the other training that you had to do?

HAND: No. Uh, I was on top of everything, don’t you know.

DICKMEYER: [laughs]

HAND: [laughs] I did go back to college though.
DICKMEYER: Okay.

HAND: Went into banker sales. [unsure]

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: At Chapman College when I was fifty-five. But my husband moved along with the oil company and so I lacked six months; I didn’t finish.

DICKMEYER: [sighs] Yeah, um, so, when did you- do you remember what year or what date it was when you joined up?

HAND: ‘44.

DICKMEYER: It was in ‘44.

HAND: That- in the Army, yeah.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: Mhm-hm.

DICKMEYER: And, was there anything that you found particularly challenging about your service? Can you tell us a little bit about what you did, um, where you went during your service?

HAND: Well, I wasn’t in very long. I, um, I think I told ‘em I didn’t want to go overseas but overseas I went in five-five weeks or five months. Uh, I mostly took care of people that had gunshot wounds or- and they- they were ambulatory. I did play ping-pong with ‘em-

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: -or some of ‘em. And I, if- when they got their purple hearts they made me- they made me say it, but you couldn’t let on.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: So I, anyway, I know- I- I enjoyed the boys.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And you wrote letters for ‘em for their parents and for their sisters, and you were just sorta like family with them.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Really.
DICKMEYER: It’s a very close relationship you had.

HAND: Yeah, it is. And I look at all these gray haired men around and I, “when did I have him for a patient?” [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Yeah. Um, and you said that- I believe you told me at one point that you went over to England, right?

HAND: I- Yeah.

DICKMEYER: What was it like being in England during the war?

HAND: Well, we were right across from an airstrip that brought patients into our, uh, hospitals. There were five hospitals there. We got- that- I gotta say, I mostly took care of the people that were- were too bad off. I guess they thought I wasn’t the personality they cared thens. [unsure] That, uh, and they came in from the front, there, and, uh, I enjoy- uh, I can’t- well, I mean felt bad. That, I mean, you don’t let on- you can’t let on. You just go to the bathroom and cry. So.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: But they were all- they were all good guys.

DICKMEYER: Uh, did you make good friends with the other nurses that you were working with?

HAND: Oh, sure.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: We had the- we had- we had the- we slept. We were on a, uh, a unit in- in England where Field Marshal Montgomery was real popular then. You probably never heard of him.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: Ah- Anyway, he had trained his troops in this area where we were.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And there were five units there. Our hospital, then, uh- their town was about a mile I guess- we went- and when we went to off-base we had to wear gas masks. We- in fact, back then we wore gas masks we went in a room, we put the st- I can’t remember what that stuff was- uh. [pause] But you had to wear gas masks.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.
HAND: But anyway, we would- we would leave our gas masks at the [unintelligible] and pick ‘em up when we came back.

DICKMEYER: Oh.


DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm. And did you interact much with, uh, any people from the United Kingdom while you were there or not too much?

HAND: No, one time. This was- I was in- I don’t know where I was. I- I dated a British Officer. Yeah, yeah. They’re- they’re okay.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

[Both laugh]

DICKMEYER: Did you learn anything about how the British saw the war, or did you experience any cultural differences?

HAND: Oh, at that time, it was so- they were so poor. England was so poor. And the people didn’t have teeth. Yeah, there were really- but we more or less stayed in an area. I did later move back to England, and I did associate some with some.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. And did you think- when were you in England when you moved back? What years?

HAND: Uh.

DICKMEYER: Roughly speaking.

HAND: [sighs] It was in the seventies.

DICKMEYER: Okay. Yeah.

HAND: Yeah. ‘77 or somewhere in there.

DICKMEYER: So I imagine things had changed quite a bit. Yeah.

HAND: Oh, yeah! People had teeth! [laughs]

DICKMEYER: [laughs]

HAND: And, uh, my British neighbor had a coffee for me.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm. That’s nice.
HAND: So, I could meet the neighbor’s- yeah. I enjoyed the British people. [pause] But you always knew you could come home.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: One time, you- you know, Madame Tussauds?

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Been there a couple, three times. I went there one time- one time this girl that- a nurse in our outfit dated one of the officers and he couldn’t go. And they had tickets to go to Edinburgh, Scotland. And he said I could go with her. He told her- I- she told me. Anyway, Madame Tussauds and she was very prim and proper.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAND: She walked up to this doorman and it was wax and asked him for a program. And I couldn’t tell that back to him.

DICKMEYER: Aw. [laughs] That’s pretty good.

HAND: [laughs] It was funny.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. [pause] I know that you also met your husband while you were-

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: -over in England too, right?

HAND: The officer’s club, yep.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Yeah, he was- he had a date with my roommate. But yeah, I had a date- I met him and then they had dances sometimes on the weekend and he had been shot in the foot. He sank low, I think like that in France where he was shot.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: He was carrying his captain off the field. He had been shot. And he was crawling- about six four- but then they shot him in the foot. Anyway, he had a cast on so dancing was sorta out of the question.

DICKMEYER: [laughs]
HAND: [laughs] But we saw each other pretty much every day after that. If I worked night duty he would- he could come to the unit. And- so that’s how- how it went.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And- and he had- he his- his dad came from Scotland when he was twenty-five so he had cous- first cousins that came to see him in the hospital.

DICKMEYER: Interesting. Yeah. And where in the US was, uh, your husband from?

HAND: Texas.

DICKMEYER: Texas, that’s why-


DICKMEYER: Baytown. Okay.

HAND: He went- then we went- we finished at A&M.

DICKMEYER: Great.

HAND: [sighs]

DICKMEYER: So were the two of you engaged while you were over there?

HAND: No, no.

DICKMEYER: Or when you came back? Yeah.

HAND: When we came back, yeah.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: He was- got out of the army and he was- he was starting in already [unsure] when I got out.

DICKMEYER: I see.

HAND: So I came to Texas and moved to Bryan and got a bedroom to sleep in. [laughs] And worked at St. Joseph’s when it was a thirty bed hospital.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. [pause] And let me ask you a couple more questions. Um, how about, um, the rest of your family. When you were abroad in England, um, how did they feel about you being overseas, about serving in England?
HAND: [laughs] I think my Mama was probably proud but probably scared.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Yeah. They were- they were excited about it but then I went back, y’know. [sighs] Yeah, and then they- I think we wrote free on our- when we wrote letters, you could put free on there and not have to buy stamps.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: That was great. So I probably wrote about every week.

DICKMEYER: Oh, yeah.

HAND: And Mama- yeah. They- they- they wrote- they wrote to me often too.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm. So you were writing to your parents and your siblings too.

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Um, I’m also wondering, uh, how you thought about kind of the broader picture at the time, uh, so how did you think about the United States while you were serving abroad.

HAND: Well I was, uh, I used to go- they had a- I have a lot of, uh, oh, rubs- what do you call them? You rub the- you rub this over, um, old statues or any other. Oh, Brass rubbings.

DICKMEYER: Yes!

HAND: That’s what- I have a lot of those. If I was feeding my husband for dinner or something I would go to this brass place for brass rubs. But I- [sighs] and I had the- I- I, uh, I know when I got back to California I was kinda watched what I said but I didn’t like the Americans come in. Some of them would be so loud-mouthed and ‘look at this!’ they had this- just irritating me. And I got in- [laughs] That’s so- I was proud to be a United States.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: I was.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: I got to see Arnie Palmer in play over there.
DICKMEYER: Oh really.

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: How exciting. And do you think after your service your idea of the US changed after your time serving there.

HAND: No, I was loving the United States.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: I think now it’s changed more than it ever has.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: It’s really bad right now.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. Well, you have a long perspective, right?

HAND: [laughs] Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Um, so, yeah, how has your conception of the US changed over your lifetime then?

HAND: It- it, uh, my conception has been- I think I like the United States, what they do, but I don’t like it right now.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. Yeah, that’s fair. Do you have any other kinds of vivid memories about your service? Oh, like, whether you were in England or I know you served in a couple places in the states before you had to go over to-?

HAND: Not really.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: I dis- I- uh, it was hard.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And, uh, that you had to take care of the boys. [pause] And nothing I didn’t have anything- nothing exceptional happened to me.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.
HAND: ‘Cept I loved my boy. Ha. One time I wondered where I had to- I think I was off-duty and the boys had all left the ward and then I recall where the boys and they wrote letters to stars and stripes for me on. I have the letters out like they had a crush on me I didn’t know. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: [laughs]

HAND: [laughs] But- [sighs] They were neat. They all were neat.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. Sounds pretty nice, right?

HAND: [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Um, maybe we can talk about more of the work that you did while you were a nurse so you said you were treating gunshot wounds-

HAND: Oh yeah.

DICKMEYER: -at the time. Um, so what- what kinds of tools were you using in- in your nursing or how did you go about that kind of work? If you recall.

HAND: Well, I just used a regular- I’m sure of they still use some of it to this day just the same instruments that they use now. Fact, I have a set. [laughs] We, uh, everything had to be sterile, used a lot of forceps and [pause]. You had to be- you just had to be careful. I had one- one man we were- he was so worried he thought- shot his thumb off. And we were all being real sentimental with him and everything and found out later that it was self-inflicted.

DICKMEYER: Oh. Did he do that to get out of serving?

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: And he was a violin player, too.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. Oh, so that was a big sacrifice-

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: -to do that.

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Wow. How did you all find out that he did that to himself?

HAND: I don’t know how we found out but it was self-
DICKMEYER: Yeah. Interesting. Did you find that when you returned to the United States when you were done with your service that you faced any particular challenges reintegrating or starting up normal life again?

HAND: Not really, I, uh, my girlfriend was doing private duty and she had to leave this case and I- I, uh, took over for her so I sort of fit right in right away. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: And what kind of work were you doing when you came back?

HAND: Uh, I done- first I done private duty.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: In the- in the home.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And I- I enjoyed that. That’s the only private duty I ever done. And they were real nice. Yeah, had- I have some of her recipes. [laughs] She was a good cook and she was not ever nice- they were nice. After that, then I from there, y’know, I joined the Navy.

DICKMEYER: Mhm.

HAND: No, the Army. I get my people mixed up.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. [pause]

HAND: We used a lot of iodine back there. I don’t think they use a lot of iodine now. I still got a iodine bottle at home.

DICKMEYER: It’s good for sterilization-

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER -right?

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: It- a lot of things on that have changed- different antiseptic stuff that they use. Yeah.

DICKMEYER: For sure. Um, [pause] so, is there anything else that you want to share about your- your service?

HAND: [sighs] That’s about all really. [pause]
DICKMEYER: Um, could you-

HAND: I-

DICKMEYER: Oh, sorry, go ahead.

HAND: I prob- no, I probably was fortunate that I didn’t get to take care of ambulatory people or nothing. They were- ‘cause I- I’m too tender-hearted to take care of the really bad ones but.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. Do you remember any of the specifics boys that you- you took care of.

HAND: I took care of this one fella- if we got ‘em- if we- if we- if their wounds healed well enough they would go back. And he said, “I”- he said “I know I won’t come back”. He did- ehh, it’s kinda heartbreaking. But they, if we got ‘em well enough, they went back.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. For sure-

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER -that’s tough, right?

HAND: They had psychiatric wards and intensive care and all that but I- I didn’t have to- they just put me with people who were- were up and gone.

DICKMEYER: Sure.

HAND: And I got promoted. I went in as a second lieutenant and came out as a first.

DICKMEYER: Hey, that’s great.

HAND. Yeah. And we got- we got our promotions pretty well off. Captain would have been next. But got married.

DICKMEYER: [laughs] You got married, that's what put an end to your service?

HAND: [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Yeah. Um, can you tell us, err, can you talk a bit about your life after you came back? What you did? Where you went? After getting married.

HAND: Oh, we were- went to A&M.

DICMEYER: Yeah.
HAND: And Bob made a hundred and fifty dollars a month and I think probably they were paying nurses sixty-five or maybe ninety-five. That’s all we- and you really had to watch your pennies. We lived- one time we lived in one apartment, you could see dirt through the cracks in the floor. But that’s all they had, number one and number two we couldn’t afford. And we weren’t the only ones doing that. There were other students there with us. But I- well, I worked [sigh] at St. Joseph’s and they had two floors but you took care of- I had- one night you took care of, uh, the floor and- and the OB department. And that was after the war. One night I had five babies. I had to set up the operating delivery room. I had- I had to give the anesthetic that I did not know how to do, nitrous oxide I gave most of the time. But the good Lord looked after me ‘cause I- I never lost anyone and the doctors never complained. But the doctors sometimes lived like twenty-something miles away and you had to call them and say ‘they’re ready’. You had to keep ‘em so they didn’t have the baby before the doctor got there.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: But now- that was the- and then I had to clean up the delivery room. And this night something when the last patient came in, I think that I went to the doctor, and I cried. I was so tired- just that's a lot of babies.

DICKMEYER: [laughs] That’s a long shift. A busy shift, right?

HAND: Oh, my.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: The nurses right now couldn’t do it. [sighs]

DICKMEYER: Did you have other people working with you, then?

HAND: No!

DICKMEYER: No, it was just you.

HAND: Just me.

DICKMEYER: That’s a lot.

HAND: I had aides out on the floor. If anything happened I could, well I couldn't while I was giving anesthesia. Isn’t that awful, I didn’t have- they had another nurse and she was a registered nurse but she gave anesthesia. But that’s just- that was back in the day.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: Oh, my.

DICKMEYER: Goodness.
HAND: Give you nightmares. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Yeah, right? Um, and so that was when you were living in-?

HAND: Yeah, it was in- yeah- it was in like, I guess. [unsure]

[clicking sound]

DICKMEYER: Yeah. And, so, you and your husband- you moved around quite a lot, right? Uh. during your married life?

HAND: Oh, we did move around and we had. Oh, I had in the meantime, uh, first year I had a baby after we were married and then she had a hernia.

DICKMEYER: Mhm.

HAND: And it would only come down when she cried a lot. So Bob took care of her at night and I worked nights and slept when she slept in the daytime. Which was not very much. I didn’t dare close my eyes standing up at night or I would go to sleep. [laughs] And we had Bob in the, uh, we had the same before he graduated. But the doctor- OB doctor said he would deliver him for nothing. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: There you go. Um. [pause] [paper rustles] Another question I had for you was that, um, I know your service was during World War II-

HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: -but do you have any general advice for young men and women who are going into service today.

HAND: I think that- I think that it should be required a year. Uh, it gives ‘em discipline and maybe two years. My husband wanted our sons to go and I didn’t want to. Now I regret it. ‘Cause I have one that something in trouble- not that in trouble with. But he made a lot of bad choices. So I think they should require one year. Really. Let ‘em learn the Hut, Two, Three, Four. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Yeah. Okay, anything else that you would like to share?

HAND: Well, I moved- we moved to England.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And that was in, what- well. [pause] There, uh, I went “I’ve seen everything I want to, London.” They had walking tours there.
HAND: I went ten down the street, I’ve been there a number of times. Changing the guard at Buckingham and the queen has a gallery- a picture gallery in the back of the- where they live. And I went to see all that and that was interesting. [sighs] That was fun. And then we moved to Africa.

HAND: And I played golf, but I didn’t play golf all that well. And they have, uh, these things that tumble. Tumbleweeds. They have tumbleweeds over there and the caddies work for like twenty rand a day which is twenty cents a day for rent a day. And- And I had a bad idea to play golf.

HAND: Oh, I’ve only maybe gotten to like one time.

HAND: Yeah.

HAND: Yeah.

HAND: Yeah, and anyway I had a slice and go off to the right. And he go in the woods and he’s got- they didn’t have any shoes. They were barefoot and the ground was sting-y. And he said, “Madam, you sure does play bad.” [laughs] But we played golf a lot over there.

HAND: Huh. And you- you were over there because of your husband's work?

HAND: He was drilling out in the Indian Ocean.

HAND: We lived right on the Indian Ocean. In a house right on the Indian- Seal Island was there, an island full of seals. And the kids learned to surf there but they spoke Afrikaans and our kids- my one daughter and two boys were there. The daughter, uh, I had- some- we had the wives- American wives were close. They were, uh, airline stewardess and they spoke English really well and they knew French as well. One of them was German but she spoke French. And they helped Dana [unsure] in- in her language and she caught up when we came to the states. But the boys lost out on that time. And I had coffee over there. [laughs] Had the- the townspeople were nice to me and I had coffee down and I fixed cornbread muffins.

HAND: Little ones and those you put bacon.

HAND: Mhm-hm.
HAND: And just different things that we eat here. And, uh, the town people came and it was nice.

DICKMEYER: That’s good. Did your children go to school there?

HAND: Yes. And they had to wear uniforms. Yeah, yeah. The one boy that- that oh was in I guess like junior high or freshmen. They hazed him in front of that whole school, they asked him all these questions and it’s bothered him to this day. I went to the Principal the next day or so and told him ‘don’t do that to my children.’ But he didn’t understand what they were saying and if he didn’t do it then they made fun of him.

DICKMEYER: Mhm.

HAND: And that’s- he was the age they shouldn’t have done that.

DICKMEYER: About when were you over there in South Africa?

HAND: [sighs] I wish I had my son.

DICKMEYER: Yeah. [laughs]

HAND: He could remember all this.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Let’s see. He was born in sixty-one- ‘70. Probably the late sixties.

DICKMEYER: Okay.

HAND: In the sixties. Yeah. But every- I- I- I moved to an ostrich farm. The kids rode ostriches. [laughs] The boys. But it was- it was- it was a good experience.

DICKMEYER: Mhm.

HAND: But we were there ‘bout- about a year.

DICKMEYER: Okay.

HAND: We got a dry hole and met the people that owned the, uh, paper in Johannesburg. The boys' pictures were in the paper on the [laughs]. So anyway, it was- that was a good experience.

DICKMEYER Yeah. So-

HAND: And this was- and it’s in the s- their winter- their summer is our winter.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.
HAND: So we were there during June.

DICKMEYER: Right. [laughs]

HAND: Yeah. And, uh, for our, uh, Christmas Tree, the kids strung popcorn. The boys strung popcorn. Uh, we had- And I made decorations where, um, y’know colored candy that has the wrap in cellophane or somewise. I made those for our lights [laughs] on our tree. We had a good time over there.

DICKMEYER: Mhm.

HAND: And I went to, uh, Groote Schuur where Bernard- Chrisitan Bernard done the first heart transplant. It was interesting.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAND: And there was a lighthouse there which I forgot to take a picture of. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Oh no. [laughs]

HAND: It was fun. We were riding- there were three beaches where we lived. It was fun. The sun was hot.

DICKMEYER: Sure. [laughs]

HAND: And you got sunburned. Yeah.

DICKMEYER: So you were taking care of the kids mostly while you were in South Africa?

HAND: Yeah, yeah.

DICKMEYER: Yeah, you weren’t trying to work during that-?

HAND: No.

DICKMEYER: No, for one year right.

HAND: Yeah. It was fun. I don’t know, I just visited- I was surprised and the people were friendly- I think the people who were there ahead of us, the Americans, left a bad taste in the mouth so I didn’t want to do that.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And I think we left in good graces. So, and they were surprised the boys were as polite as they were.
DICMEYER: Mhm.

HAND: Oh.

DICMEYER: And, um, how did you end up back in West Texas was that again because of your husband’s work?

HAND: Uh, yeah, Chevron.

DICMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: Yeah, we moved- I lived in Iraan, Texas.

DICMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: Fort Stockton, Texas; Midland and La Porte. We lived in a lot of places. And I- I- I enjoyed everyplace I lived in and I had good friends everywhere I lived.

DICMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: So, piece of cake.

DICMEYER & HAND: [laugh]

DICMEYER: Um, and- and what was your impression of West Texas when you first moved out here?

HAND: Oh, I- [laughs]

DICMEYER: [laughs]

HAND: We moved to Snyder when there was- it was the oil boom we saw in there and the road were- they had mud roads. It was awful. [laughs] I- I- that didn’t- then we moved away from there and we went back.

DICMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And I cried but Bob didn’t know. I didn’t want to go back to Snyder. But it's a good place, I met some good people there.

DICMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: Yeah.

DICMEYER: Just a little undeveloped at the time.
HAND: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: It sounds like, yeah.

HAND: And I didn’t work there at all.


HAND: [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Do you- have you thought about anything else? Or, um, we could also, if you have any, uh, photographs or documents, like that’s something we could talk about as well. Um, if you’re interested in sharing those with us to take a look at.

HAND: [laughs] You wouldn’t want to see. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: [laughs]

HAND: I have so many- they have a, uh, at my party-

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: -they had, uh, what you call ‘em, videos.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: Of- of all through my lifetime. Had that there.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAND: And then, I watch this soap opera- bowlin’, no, no it’s calburn- hallenburn [unsure] so I watch their shows a lot. And this Paul Greene, I sorta had a crush on him. [laughs] And Debbie wrote and he wrote me and sang happy birthday.

DICKMEYER: Oh.

HAND: And then, this last- he- [laughs] he last sent another one and sang a song to me.

DICKMEYER: Nice. For- for your- this for your most recent birthday, right?

HAND: Yeah, yeah.


HAND: Thank you, can you believe that. I made it to a hundred- Anita’s a hundred and two.
DICKMEYER: Oh, is that your- that’s your older sister, right?

HAND: Yeah and my other sister was a hundred-

DICKMEYER: Good genes.

HAND: -and three when she died and my brother was a hundred when he died.

DICKMEYER: Wow. Long-lived family, right?

HAND: Yeah. Mama was ninety-three, I think and Dad was seventy-seven.

DICKMEYER: Mhm-hm.

HAND: And he had a brain tumor. [laughs] I get a pain in my head and I think, oh dear, brain tumor. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Okay, well, um, I think that we can conclude our interview.

HAND: Okay.

DICKMEYER: So thank you Mary Lou Hand-

HAND: [laughs]

DICKMEYER: -for sharing your experiences with, uh, the Oral History Project, um.