ORAL MEMOIRS
OF
TERRI HAMER
An interview conducted on
April 3, 2020

Interviewer: Laurie Dickmeyer

Angelo State University
West Texas Collection
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DICKMEYER: Okay. So, this is Laurie Dickmeyer and I am interviewing Terri Hamer over the phone in San Angelo, Texas, on April 3rd, 2020. And Terri, I have a few questions for you. When and where were you born?

HAMER: I born January 24, '32, at Tokyo, Japan.

DICKMEYER: And did you grow up there, too?

HAMER: Pardon?

DICKMEYER: Did you grow up in Japan?


DICKMEYER: Ah, I see. And can you tell me a little bit about your childhood? What schools you attended, that kind of thing?

HAMER: Okay. When I was five, my father died with TB. And then my mother never married after that. I graduate girls’ high school, I don't know what year. And then I went another extra more to college. Uh, okay girls’ high school is four years.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: That's right, four years. And then after that my teachers told me that school system gonna be changed so you better take another more year. So more like I went to night school one year.

DICKMEYER: Mmm. And what did you study at the night school?


DICKMEYER: Okay, and so what year do you think this was? The year that you were going to night school?

HAMER: Well, it's gonna be hard. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: [laughs]

HAMER: I gotta go check that. Well can I call you back for this one later on? I gotta look at my papers.

DICKMEYER: Oh, sure sure, yeah. You can tell me later.

HAMER: Okay, okay.
DICKMEYER: Um, maybe you could talk a little bit about your experience during World War II, since you were...

HAMER: Okay...

DICKMEYER: ...a young person in Japan. So could you tell me, uh, what were - what you were up to when the war began?

HAMER: Okay when I - war began when I was in third grade which is about nine years old.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: And then I didn't know what was going on but my brothers so excited. Anyway, my brother, the oldest brother, about five years older than I am, when he was sixteen he, voluntary, he went to Japanese Navy. And the second brother, more like they’re twin brothers, one year different. Uh, he tried to go that Army, but they didn't take it because we don't have any father. He's only - uh, oldest one.

DICKMEYER: Mmm.

HAMER: And then I had one more young brother, three years younger than I am. And then I think that war started 1940, '41.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: And then ended in 1945. During that time I was at high, uh, girls’ high school.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: And then during the WWII, well, ready to go to school, on the way walking not - uh, to the school, siren. Uh, you hear the siren. Air attack. So you better go home. And so many times we had some like that. During at night, sirens start and then I couldn't - my mother was outside, we would throw clothes on and then doze off at the - near the bed. That was almost every day.

DICKMEYER: Mmm.

HAMER: And then toward the end, um, toward the end that, uh, my grandfather, my mother's father bought a house, he think that it’s a little bit of a quiet place. And we moved in. That was January the 24th. That was my birthday so I never forget.

DICKMEYER: Uh and this quieter place, was it outside of Tokyo?

HAMER: Uh, no, not outside. But the place I live was house-to-house and so crowded. And then this place is a little bit outside of the town, I should say. And quiet.
HAMER: But we don't know that time artillery, what you call "special mods" there. And then when start bombing, how this, this artillery airplane, attacking artillery. And then they messed up artillery and then came through to my house and burned house.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: And then we don't have any house that day so we went to grandfather's house. Which is grandfather, grandma, and then... and the kids, all moved out, outside of Tokyo, which is Nigata, which is the Northern part of Japan. And then when...

DICKMEYER: Did you say Nigata?

HAMER: Pardon?

DICKMEYER: Did you say...

HAMER: Nigata.

DICKMEYER: Mmm.

HAMER: Ni - Nigata. Nigata it's the Northern part of Japan.

DICKMEYER: Yeah, yeah, yeah.


DICKMEYER: Okay. I thought that's what you said, thanks for spelling it out.

HAMER: You're welcome. And then the house was empty. Nothing there. No furniture, nothing but uncle. Uncle was the only one living there so my mother and then I, we stayed there. My o- I mean older brother was more like a company dormitory at that time. And then he stayed at the dormitory all the time. My young brother at that time, um, old school moved out from Tokyo.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAMER: And then, uh, school isn't gonna take care of him so my mother and I, were there. About six days later, my grandfather's house was bombed.

DICKMEYER: Mmm.

HAMER: It was, I heard that real close bomb coming down. I never forget that noise. And then, well, you will say the house, you are - we are homeless. But I never felt homeless. We went, uh, my mother’s friend, we stay there but there at night it was more like sardines, everybody
sleeping. And I never forget I wanna go bathroom but so dark and I was ending of the room. I don't wanna go get up and walk at somebody's head so wait in the morning. That was awful. [chuckles]

DICKMEYER: Mmm.

HAMER: And we couldn't stay. Probably, we stayed a couple days at my mother's friend's house. And, uh, then my grandpa knows a guy, that have real big house. So we, we moved house and me moved upstair.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: But it wasn't comfortable because, I think a lady, a lady was there. Every time we come downstair, she come out the kitchen. She think that we gonna steal something or - I didn't know that time but that's how I felt. Every time we come downstair, she come in the kitchen and doing something. It was really uncomfortable so...

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAMER: ...I don’t, we didn't stay too long. And finally we moved up to that, my grandfather, where is, they moved Nigata, so we stay there. And then after that my mother went Tokyo again and then brought my young brother from school and then moved to that Nigata. But actually, we... You know, it's really uncomfortable to live in somebody else's house.

DICKMEYER: Of course.

HAMER: Yeah, even my mother and grandmother somehow they can’t, they can’t get along. So we moved again.

DICKMEYER: Mmm.

HAMER: Yeah, and before moved, my mother went to Tokyo, go back Tokyo and then look for that empty house. That took about a week or so, week or ten days, she came back and we got everything, what uh, we got... even, how you call, cooking utensils and everything. And we get on the air - uh, get on the train. That was August 15, which is US time August 16, that's when surrender. And then Hirohito was talking on the radio. But we don't know, we are already packed in at the train. And the train didn't move for one hour. It was hot and humid. And it was miserable but we don't know what's going on. So it was - we came back August 15 and then August 16 it, that was 12 o'clock noon, uh, train's supposed to be moved. And the next day, August 16, 5 o'clock in the morning, we arrived at Tokyo. It only cost, uh, takes about, well that days, now it's a bullet train it should be at four or five hours, I think.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.
HAMER: But it took that all night long. And then coming back on the train, well, how is it said, burn, burning that time. And then both side fire and the train go through that and then I told somebody I remember that my window was warm.

DICKMEYER: Huh.

HAMER: Yeah. What else you wanna know? [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Um, so I was wondering, during the war, was your mother working? How was she providing for you?

HAMER: Yeah, my mother was spoiled, actually. She doesn't do nothing when she would grow up. She had - grandma had a maid, so she doesn't have to do nothing and then she already married when she was 20. And then, she was bragging that those days women never go to high school but she did. Anyway, but after father died, she had four kids, no married, uh, no re-married, and then she work for that life insurance company. And then we survived.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: And, for you, you were a pretty young person during all of this...

HAMER: Mhmm, mhmm, yeah.

DICKMEYER: What was it like for you? Was your education disrupted by all of this?

HAMER: Mhmm.

DICKMEYER: How did you try to...

HAMER: Yeah, oh yeah.

DICKMEYER: ...adapt, I guess?

HAMER: Like I said, I was girls’ high school and then I try to go school, air raid telling us that the airplanes are coming so you better go home.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: Air attack. So, so, I don't have much of a good education during the WWII, which is my high school year, girls' high school year. But those, uh, after war finished, I tried to, I went to English class those days that, uh, girls have to do some kind of, where you call, more like sewing...

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.
HAMER: ...or flower arranging. I took those at night. Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Okay. Um, and going back just a little bit, did you remember hearing much from your brother who had joined the Navy? Uh...

HAMER: No, no. We didn't know where he was. He was a prisoner, some island. And he came home so many years later, after WWII. And then, uh, my - that's where the first brother went, Navy. Second brother, after that WWII, we - he came back home and we lived together.

DICKMEYER: Okay. Now do you remember much about how the rest of your community was impacted during the war?

HAMER: Mhmm, yeah.

DICKMEYER: Like, uh, you mentioned the, the air attacks but were there other changes that you noticed?

HAMER: Well, we have nothing to, um, nothing to eat. Because Tokyo, this is outside Tokyo, there is farmers and you may get some kind of rice or potato or something but we don't have nothing to lose, I mean nothing to eat, so I even went outside of Tokyo and then walk around farmers and then ask, we begged that, you know, sell some the potatoes or something. I done that.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm. And do you remember what it was like in the years after the war? Did it take time to come back from the destruction and from the lack of food?

HAMER: [coughing] Excuse me. Um, it was everythingrationed... Just a minute, let me drink water.

DICKMEYER: Oh, of course.

HAMER: Excuse me. Yeah, that's everything rationed. Potatoes, rice, I don't remember was that sugar or not.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAMER: But everything at, more like neighbors is one unit. I don't know how many neighbors. About ten or twelve neighbors. And then one of lady, or one of house, they divided for what they would, they bring. And then next time, next door neighbor gonna do that the same way.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm. And what was it like for your brothers when they came back from the war? Were they able to go back to school? Or did they work?

HAMER: Nope. Uh, yeah my brothers worked at, um, downtown Tokyo that Air Force. American Air Force. And for that Jeep driver or something. And then we supported my mother
and the young brother. Young brother have to go that school, I mean college, and so we all
donated money what we make and then, uh, we put my younger brother through the college. But
two of my older brothers, they don't have much time to go to school. You know, busy to make -
support my mother and support the house and the family.

DICKMEYER: What did your younger brother study at college?

HAMER: Uh, let me see... I think that... I - I don't know, I don't remember.

DICKMEYER: Oh that's okay. So, how about you? So after, after the war was over, you
were finishing up your high school, you went to night school for a year...

HAMER: Yeah, yeah.

DICKMEYER: ...and then what happened with you?

HAMER: Well, like my mother's advice, I went to sewing school, which is, uh, dress making.
And my mother wanted make a Japanese dress but I never wear 'em, maybe once a year or once a
two years. I don't like tied up with Japanese clothes on. [laughs] And then, so I - I begged my
mother, I'd like to go that dress making more like, uh, you know, European type. So, I went
sewing school two years.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: And then, meanwhile, I went to Japanese doll making class, Japanese flower
arranging, uh... what else did I do? And then I went to night school for that, awful night school,
for the English conversation class or something like that.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm. And what were you hoping to do with this extra education? What were
your goals back then?

HAMER: Well, those days I have no - I don't know. Oh, I went also to typing - no, not typing
school. I learned typing from at home. You know, practice typing?

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: And I became a typist. Yeah. My, okay, those goals was a Japanese airline opened up
overseas, a stewardess.

DICKMEYER: Oh, okay.

HAMER: That's what I wanted. But those days Japanese, when you try to get a good job, you
have to have both parents alive, together.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.
HAMER: And my father died when five years old. I go through the whole interview, history, English, everything, but the last minute I couldn't make it because I don't have any father.

DICKMEYER: Why do you think they wanted you to have the - both parents alive to hire you?

HAMER: Uh, hire what?

DICKMEYER: Why do you think they, they wanted that? Why did they want both of your parents alive?

HAMER: Okay, it's more like a, those days, good bank, good bank, good department store ladies. They never hire you if you don't have the parents together, both of them alive.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAMER: But anyway, I didn't know that those days but that's just a fact, yeah. Department store, bank, everybody work they have to have both parents.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAMER: Yeah, that was, I don't think anymore like that but...

DICKMEYER: Oh, I don't think so.

HAMER: Yeah. [laughs] Yeah.

DICKMEYER: And you said eventually you became a typist?

HAMER: Yeah, I went [unclear] downtown Tokyo and then they moved Fuchu. F-U uh, F-U-C-H-I.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: Yeah? Fuchu. But it's, train line takes an hour to get there in the morning. So, I thought I gonna look for that job downtown Tokyo. But there isn't any so I applied the job at the Fuchu and then sixth sergeant, transportation squadron on the Fuchu Air Base. Air, no, Fuchu Air Station. And there I met my husband.

DICKMEYER: So how - can you talk a little bit about that? What your work was like and how you met him?

HAMER: Okay, that was 1959. He came from Kentucky and then he came to the Fuchu and then he was a, how you say that, personnel. Staff sergeant that time. And then I was under him and what the first sergeant wanted draft and I typed. And my husband checked and then a mistake or something, he told me to correct it or something.
DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: That kind type I had. And then one year later my husband, his father was not healthy so he wanted to go home and then he went, uh, went home. And then a - a couple months later in a letter, asked me to marry him.

DICKMEYER: Aw.

HAMER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Uh...

HAMER: So...

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAMER: ...must be that 1958 he came to Japan and '59 he left. And we married 1960. January 9th.

DICKMEYER: Uh, where did you marry?

HAMER: Um, Tokyo. Saint Anselm Catholic Church.

DICKMEYER: Ah, I see. And I - I didn't catch your husband's name. What was, what was his name?

HAMER: Charles.

DICKMEYER: Charles.

HAMER: Charles A.

DICKMEYER: Okay. And after you two got married, what did you do?

HAMER: Well, um, okay married and then he can't stay too long so he left and he left money and then tried to come with a boat. But some mistake, uh, I couldn't get on the boat. American boat. And then my, those days I took at the... health, more like a health, you know, examination.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: More like a X-ray and this thing that's gonna be expired. So, friend of mine, uh, Walter and Jean McNutt, American people, put the money, what of my husband left and put more money and put me on the airplane. And then I came to the States. That was February... sometime first part of February.

DICKMEYER: And this is in 1960, right?
HAMER: Yes, uh-huh. Yes.

DICKMEYER: And you mentioned the friends who helped you out. What were their names again?

HAMER: Oh, Walter... R. McNutt.

DICKMEYER: Walter.

HAMER: Walter R. McNutt and Jean E. McNutt. Walter died oh twenty-some years ago.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAMER: And Jean's still alive. She's 93 years old. We still communicate.

DICKMEYER: Wow.

HAMER: Mhmm.

DICKMEYER: And can you spell their last name for me?

HAMER: McNutt. M-C uh, N-U-T-T.

DICKMEYER: Okay, thank you. Um, okay so...

HAMER: You wanna know how I met them, right?

DICKMEYER: Oh, sure, yeah tell me.

HAMER: Yeah. Okay, when I graduate girls' high school, I really wanted to try to study more English and I met a classmate one day on the street and then she told me, "If you wanna learn in English, why don't you gonna be a housemaid?" American families, they need housemaid. And then at that time the Japanese government paying for it, for those housemaid. And then I thought that that's a good idea. So, I applied and then I think it went one week, what are you supposed to do? What kind of money are you supposed to have? And this and that. And then after that class, I was waiting that room and then some lady came in, it's - she's a beautiful lady. I never forget that red overcoat she wearing and then carrying umbrella. And after she left, guy called me and he said, "You gonna go her house." Wow. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAMER: I went there, her house. Anyway, there was another maid was there. And then that was Jean McNutt. She's kind of, got kind of sick or something. And then she can't help that day as a maid so she needed one more maid. That was me.
HAMER: And then the other lady was so nice, very nice. And then also this Jean and Walter McNutt, they were Catholics. And then most of the maid eat at, lunch time, eat at the kitchen. But they put us on the same table. And we, like I said, housemaid, we clean house, wash clothes - there was a washing machine but the wringer type that time - and hung outside.

HAMER: And then whatever I nee- we need, you know, most of the time to clean house. And then that's why I learned a lot of English and then more like you never see that people put the maid in at that same table to eat together.

HAMER: And then after that, government, Japanese government, won't pay anymore maids, you have to - household have to pay the maid. And then Jean said, uh, McNutt said, "Well we never have a maid after, after we go back to America.” And so... “We can't pay.” So they let me go.

HAMER: That time I was uh, practicing the type, uh type, you know. Practicing type. And then become a typist. But the weekend somehow we communicate and then Walter wants to go somewhere, I went with them in the car. And then more like I'm translator.

HAMER: And that's, uh, they were Catholic also. I'm sorry, I should've said that, Catholics. And then I became a Catholic later on.

HAMER: Yeah. So, and then when we married at the, uh, my husband at, Charles, they were really... helped us and then for in, uh, at the Church also, after that. Anyway, at that time, Jean and Walter had one girl, she was five years old that time. Her name is Susie, Paula Susie. Paula Susie.

HAMER: Anyway, she's a very smart lady.

HAMER: Yeah. Later on she became a lawyer. She lived at, in... uh, where is that? Dallas Texas. After retired, she went her mama's house and she's still living with mother.
HAMER: Naturally, she married with uh, at uh, what do you call, after she, she went to college. I don't, I don't remember what that college name is... Connecticut. And then met her husband and then no kids.

DICKMEYER: Okay, great. Um, can you tell me, uh, we got to the point where you got on the plane to head to the US. So, did you move to Kentucky at first? With your husband? Or where were you guys?

HAMER: Um, my husband came from Kentucky but when I come to that States, my husband located at Alabama. Maxwell, Alabama. Is that the whole - what the question is?

DICKMEYER: Uh, yeah.

HAMER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: And how long did you two live there?

HAMER: Uh, let me see, Alabama, my son was about three years old and then Uncle Sam send us Alaska. And we went to Alaska, and Alaska to Neah Bay, Washington. Neah Bay, Washington to the Colorado. Colorado to California, and California to New Mexico. New Mexico we live about 20 years. And then that time I wanted to help my husband for income so I worked at General Electric, uh, aircraft engine. And then I involved at B1B part. Anyway, that time after that, I was 59? Yeah almost 60. 59 and a half, all technician was laid off, which is, I was one of them.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAMER: And then um, good thing I had unemployment a half year and the company give me early retirement. Which is, I'm the only one I think, that time. And then, uh, yeah. That only retirement and then I'm still getting...

DICKMEYER: Okay, and you said you, you had a son, too?

HAMER: Yes, uh he born 19 - November, 1960. And then he, he's 60 years old, this year. Right. Yeah he lives at Lubbock, Texas.

DICKMEYER: And when did you move to West Texas?

HAMER: Move to where?

DICKMEYER: Uh, to San Angelo.

HAMER: San Angelo is from New Mexico to San Angelo. Okay, I was age 60, so 28 years ago. Um...
DICKMEYER: And was this because of, uh, your husband's work that you moved here or...?

HAMER: He was Air Force and he retired that time and we are looking somewhere that quiet place.

DICKMEYER: Mmm.

HAMER: He, he wanted golf and fishing.

DICKMEYER: [laughs]

HAMER: So, my son knows this San Angelo area. He suggested, "Why don't you look for that San Angelo?" And we came down and then we like it because that nice and green those days.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

HAMER: And there is water there, we can put the, our boat. And then there's a golf course there then my husband really like it. So, we decided to move up here and then sold that house out in New Mexico. That time everybody wanted to come to the New Mexico and Albuquerque, and we sold the house in three days.

DICKMEYER: Wow.

HAMER: Yeah. And after I came to the San Angelo, my husband lived about 10 years, uh, 10 years later he died. Anyway, that time, uh, I volunteering, made a nun sister’s habit. They wear the brown.

DICKMEYER: Oh.

HAMER: Yeah. Well, friend of mine, she came from Ohio and then she told saw the sisters wearing one thin material, polyester clothes, summer or winter. And she thinks that this humidity high here so she - they should wear the cotton. So, she arranges so many people who can sew and we made a cotton habit. Which is they staying home and they - working at the yard or something. And then they wear the polyester at, when they go out. Anyway, that time sister was, uh, 6 or 7 sisters and we made a cotton habit and then so many people don't know how to sew straight stitches. Somebody makes a pocket, they know how to sew. And some of ‘em iron... more like a factory... [laughs]

DICKMEYER: [laughs]

HAMER: ...those days. Factory. And then after this lady, she go back to that Ohio and she dump on me everything what we did. And e- that time everybody go home and then nobody help me.

DICKMEYER: Aw.
HAMER: But I'm the only one about 18 years after that. I made habit, tunic, veil, whatever they need I sew for her.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: For them, I mean.

DICKMEYER: And...

HAMER: Curtains, cushions. [laughs]

DICKMEYER: Uh-huh.

HAMER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Um, which church or which place were you sewing these habits for?

HAMER: That, how you call, um, there's a name. Um, what do you call that... um, uh, Lady of something. I know, I just can't think of right now. That's Christoval anyway.

DICKMEYER: Oh, in Christoval, okay.

HAMER: Yeah, yeah. At... yeah there's Christoval there's a nuns it's a - and also brothers that live there.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: Yeah?

DICKMEYER: Yes.

HAMER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Okay, very good. Um, I guess another question I have for you is, um, do you have a sense of how WWII has been remembered differently over the years? Or perhaps, since you were in Japan, how thinking about Japan has changed over the years? Have you paid attention to that?

HAMER: Oh, yeah. It's so much changed. But it's nothing I know. Women’s taught obedience but not anymore. [laughs] My son went, I just wanted him to see where I live...

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: ...and then what my country is. So, let me see, about 30 years ago I took him to Japan and then show him where - and then met my brothers, my brother. Yeah brothers that time. One,
uh, oldest brother died when he was 28 after he came back Navy. But the other two brothers, my son met the two brothers that time. And then also my two brothers came to the United States, uh, couple times.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

HAMER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Have you only been back to Japan the one time or have you been back other times too?

HAMER: Me?

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAMER: Uh, I went many times, but my son is only one turn.

DICKMEYER: Mm-mm, mm-mm.

HAMER: When I was Alaska I went right after married I went. And after that, New Mexico two, three times. And after my husband died I went, uh, with Jean, I took Jean. Yeah. It's about 18, 19 years ago. That is the last time I went to Japan.

DICKMEYER: Mmm. And I think those are most of the questions I have for you but do you have any other stories or thoughts you wanted to share with me?

HAMER: Yeah, you know I was 14, almost, World War, uh, toward the end. I got to do something but I don't know what. That feeling, I never forget, I gotta do something but I never know what to do.

DICKMEYER: To do something about what was going on around you? With the war, you mean?

HAMER: Yeah, yeah.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

HAMER: Yeah. Just like Coronavirus.

DICKMEYER: Mmm.

HAMER: New York is crying. I'd like to help, but I don't know what to do. That kind of feeling.

DICKMEYER: Mmm.

HAMER: I'd like to help, but I don't know what to do. Just prayers I think.
DICKMEYER: [chuckles]

HAMER: Yeah. That kind of feeling that I...