

History United: Memory Initiative

Interview with Evelyn Reynolds (ER)

Interviewer: Evelyn Riley (I), Amelia Grabowski (AG), Kathryn Bennett (KB)

July 19, 2013 at Dan River Crossing Senior Apartments, Danville, VA

I: I'm Evelyn Riley.

ER: Ok.

AG: I'm Amelia Grabowski, I'm from Baltimore.

KB: I'm Kathryn Bennett, I'm from Danville. I'm the only one from Danville.

ER: Oh ok, how old are you?

KB: Uh, I'm 20.

ER: I was just going to say, she's 26, she graduated [*unintelligible*]

KB: Where did she dance? At [*unintelligible*]

ER: No, No Martha Faulk's, who...Anne Flukestoph? I think is her name, Anne was her instructor.

KB: Miss Anne taught at my high school too, I went to Chatham Hall and she was the dance teacher there.

ER: Ok. Well here we go. *-all laugh-*

I: We're just going to ask you some basic questions to start off with. Could you spell your name for us?

ER: Evelyn, E-V-E-L-Y-N. Reynolds, R-E-Y-N-O-L-D-S.

I: And if you wouldn't mind sharing your birth date with us?

ER: 4/27/35

I: And what would you consider your occupation to be, when you were?

ER: When I was working? I worked at Belk's in cosmetics.

I: How long have you lived in the Dan River Region area?

ER: Well my husband, I was born here. I was born in Danville, as my husband was. Then he chose a military career, and I traveled with him. So he was in for 25 years. So we traveled quite a bit. And then we, we were still quite young when he retired from the military, I was 35 and he was 42. So we bought a home in Deerwood Springs and lived in the county until we moved here. I moved here eight years ago.

I: And when you say county, you mean Pittsylvania County? What part of the county?

ER: Blairs, We lived in Deerwood Springs in Blairs.

I: So how would you describe the neighborhood of where you grew up?

ER: I grew up in south Danville, and my mom and dad were textile workers, as many of our neighbors were. And there were a lot of children on the street, and we had a lot of playtime, which, what the games we played, the children today, not only have they not heard of them, but I don't think they would be content playing them. I enjoyed my childhood, I enjoyed my childhood.

I: What were some of the games you remember?

ER: Hopscotch, hide and seek, and oh, oh, we used to play all kinds of games and I could just remember...oh, tag, we would play ball, we would go out into this area and we'd all get out there and play ball, and it was fun. It was fun.

I: What kind of memories do you have about the area, and the people that lived there?

ER: Well to be honest, and you want me to be honest, I lived beside a bootlegger *-laughs-*

I: Oh well that's very exciting *-laughs-*

ER: He was a very nice man, he did not drink.

I: Oh, ok.

ER: And he, he would sell drinks, but I mean he wouldn't let anyone hang around his home because he had children. So really wasn't a bad neighborhood even though, but he was crippled. He had an accident and was unable to work, until that time that was the early 40s I guess that I can remember everything that he was into. And I think it was just his way of making a living for his family. And he wasn't a bad man, he was a very nice man and a good neighbor. And we all had gardens and we would share vegetables, and in those days you could even have chickens in your backyard. So we would have chickens and we would, whoever had the chickens would share their eggs. It was not so unlike anyone else's childhood in that time, mine wasn't.

I: Do you remember what the guy would make, what kind of drinks? [*Note: Phone rings*] We'll let you get that.

ER: It might be [*unintelligible*]. Hello? They hung up.

I: Do you remember what the guy would make?

ER: He would make mixed drinks, He would just sell them. Who would buy them mostly was the mill workers, and there was a lumberyard below me. They would come by for just a drink and then he would make them leave, he would not, or he would sell them a bottle. But he would not let them stay because he had children. And most of them were on foot because they would walk to work at the textile mill, and they could walk to work. So they would come by after work and have them a drink and he would never let them hang around so to speak. Because he did have children, and he was a good neighbor and a good friend to me as a child.

I: Do know if it was like whiskey or brandy or anything in particular?

ER: I don't know I was so young, all I know is that it was illegal *-both laugh-* But I'm sure it was just whiskey, I'm sure that's what it was, I don't think it was brandy.

I: Did you have to work in the garden?

ER: Yes, and I enjoyed it. And we had a goat and we had to keep the goat *-laughs-* out of the garden because he enjoyed the garden too. And we had a cow, and it wasn't too long after that that we stopped having animals in the yard. But yeah I enjoyed working in the garden, I did.

I: So that kind of leads into my next question. How do you think that the area has changed over the years?

ER: Oh my, well I think deep down people never change. Everyone wants the same, they want peace and they want love to give and to receive. And to make enough money, some make more

money than others, but I think we all, all through the years, if you are truly into family as I am, and so many people that I know are, that's the most important thing. So people don't change. I mean you know there are some people who might stray because of different things that have happened to them or whatever and I am fortunate that no one in my family that I have had to deal with anything like that. But I think people are all the same, they want the same. They just need to be loved and to give love, I think. That's just the way I look at it

AG: I have a question about your family. What do you remember about your parents' work at the mill?

ER: Well my father and mother divorced when I was five. Then I had rheumatic fever. So I had to go into the sanatorium when I was little, I might have been eight but I don't think I was quite eight. Do you know where Roman Eagle Nursing Home is? At one time it was the Hilltop Sanatorium. And on one side of the building were TB patients, and they built, the Kiwanis Club owned it at that time and supported it, and they built a Preventorium, and it was for children who had illnesses. And at that time, when I was there, there was about six girls and six boys and we had a hallway that separated us, and I was there for two years. So, I hated the place. *-all laugh-* But I know now, as an adult, and as after I became aware of why I was there, I just knew I was there because the doctors suggested it, but as I became an adult I don't think I would be as healthy or maybe not be living today had I not been giving the chance to go there, so and I also kept up my school work. I didn't miss time there, so when I left the sanatorium I went into the school system just as though I had not left. That, and as I said my mom and dad did divorce and he remarried, and my mom remarried when I was 12 and she moved to California, and I stayed with my brother and my sister-in-law until I graduated from high school.

[Timestamp - 10:57] **I:** Is the house that you grew up in still around, still standing?

ER: Yes, I drove by there, it was a mill house. In those days when I was quite young, when we first moved there I was only three. The Dan River Mills had built these homes for the textile workers, and I grew up in that house, we moved there when I was three from the farm, and was there until I graduated from high school in 1953 and I married in '54. It's still there, the house is still there.

I: So everyone around you, were they also mill houses?

ER: Yes. All the homes except, I think there were only two that had been built by private individuals the others were mill houses. And we would just walk the railroad track to go to the movie theater, at the time we had a recreation center was in Schoolfield, and there was a movie theater there, and we would walk there and go to the movies on Saturdays, we would do odd jobs during the week, and at that time you could go to the movies and 9 o'clock in the morning and

you could stay all day and they would just keep showing the movie, now you have to leave right after, then you could get your nine cents worth. *-all laugh-* It was nine cents to go in. You could buy a box of popcorn for a nickel, a bar of candy and a drink. So for a quarter you could spend the day at the Schoolfield theater, it was enjoyable.

I: So who all was in your household?

ER: Well my mom and dad had five children, I'm the youngest. So when my mom and dad were divorced there was only two of us living there, the rest had married, my sister, myself, and my mother because my dad moved away. My brother was in the military, and when he came home after the war ended he married. So and then my sister that was there with me at the time, she married. So it was just my brother, myself and his wife, and my mother until she remarried and moved away.

I: What kind of roles would you say that each of you filled in the household?

ER: Well they worked, my mom and my sister in law worked in Dan River Mills, and my brother when he came home he was manager of a cafe in Schoolfield, it was called the Midway Cafe and he was manager there for a number of years, then he went to work in Dan River. So I was kind of a little house wife very young. *-laughs-* I could prepare meals when I was very young and I would take a lunch, I would take my own lunch to school so I would make my own lunch, my own breakfast, and off I'd go to school. Mind you by then I was almost 11...
[Comments on noise in room] But I never really felt lonely or anything, that was just my life, and there were a lot of children who, I mean now of course it is nothing to have a single mom, but back then it was very unusual, divorce was very unusual, and our family was the only divorced family on our street, but I was just so young, and so most of them were my age and I would run round the neighborhood. I still like to cook, I have always liked to cook which is a good thing.

KB: You mentioned that your brother moved back after the war. How old were you during the war?

ER: Well I was born in 1935 so I can remember the war ended in '46 I think or it might have been '45 I was like 10. So I don't remember too much. I can remember curfew, but of course I was so young that that didn't bother me. But we would have to have darkness in our homes, and we would have what we call blackout shades, they were heavy duty shades, and we would have to have them pulled because after ten o'clock at night, it might have even been earlier that was curfew. And there were no lights, the streetlights were off and everything, because you know the dangers during war of invasion. It was just something we did, and I was so young, and of course there was rationing, which still didn't affect me because I was so young, and we had our garden, and our eggs from the chickens.

I: Right, did you have a bomb shelter or anything?

ER: No, no.

I: Or a place to go?

ER: We had a basement, but I don't think we were protected as much.

I: Who were your childhood friends?

ER: Well they've all passed away now but the bootlegger next door, his two sons and his two daughters, we were pretty close. They're all passed away now. And there were other children on the street, my sister, my older sister. There's only the two of us now my older sister and myself, the rest of my family has passed. But she married a neighborhood boy, and they lived there. So I helped her with her children, there's only five years difference between me and her oldest child, so we kind of grew up together. So I was just like a, not really babysitter, just like a playmate to her children. So we were close, my sister. We're still close, she still lives. She's at Roman Eagle. I visit her.

I: That's in Danville?

ER: Yes I visit her daily. My sister and I, and this is very unusual, have never had a disagreement. Never. We've just always, I think the reason is because she is so much older than I am that I would look up to her as a mother figure, and when I was growing up you respected your mom and your dad and all your elders, schoolteachers, you respected them. And we were taught to do so, and as my sister was so much older than I was, we never had a disagreement, and we are still very close.

I: What schools did you attend?

ER: Forest Hills, from kindergarten through the sixth, and at the time G. W. was on Holbrook, and it was junior high and senior high. So that's where, I went there for junior high and I graduated in '53.

KB: Where was it on Holbrook?

ER: Do you know where the condominiums are there? It was right there. They tore down the old school, later it became Robert E. Lee junior high, and they tore, they demolished that, to make room for the...*[pause in transcription for unrelated discussion]*

[Timestamp 19:48] **I:** So how was your school experience?

ER: Well, I enjoyed school. I was an average student. I never failed, I was an average student. But I enjoyed school, I did. I was, I enjoyed school.

I: How did you get there, did you walk or did you...?

ER: I walked, we didn't have a school bus to take us to Forest Hills, so we all would walk. We would have to take the city bus to go to G.W. and most of the time I walked, because there was a group of us living there, that were close to the same age, and we would walk. And we always walked home, we would never ride the bus home, we would always walk. And there was a soda shop close by the school and we would always stop in there, get us a soda and then walk home, the group of us. It was I think, different than it is now. We didn't have, I feel badly at times for children of today, because we could amuse ourselves, and I love to read, and I would just pick a shady spot, there was no air conditioning in those days, I would pick a shady spot and I would read. And children of today, they are on the computer. Probably don't know how to read -*both laugh*- And then I went to work at Woolworth's, around the lunch counter after school, I got a worker's permit, and I went to work there when I was fifteen, and when I graduated I went to work at Belk's in cosmetics and jewelry, and then years later after my husband retired, I went back to work at Belk's.

I: Could you explain what a Woolworth's is for me?

ER: It was on the corner of Main and Union. It's still there, the building is still there, I think they have a church there now.

KB: [*unintelligible*]

ER: I think so. But, I learned in working at Woolworth's, I learned to make a lot of different dishes. I can always remember her name was Annie, and she was the cook. And I had six stools that I would have to take care of at the end of the counter, and if I wasn't busy I would check with Annie to see how she would prepare this and how she would prepare that. So she was quite a lady.

I: And what was your favorite thing to make from your childhood?

ER: Well my favorite one was fried chicken. -*all laugh*- I'm a real southern gal. But I like a lot of, fried chicken and banana pudding. My husband probably got a little sick of it, but he never complained, because I prepared that often after our marriage. Because I could do that so well,

and biscuits, I've been making biscuits and cornbread and I still do, I love biscuits and corn bread, vegetables. Even though we moved around quite a bit when he was in the military, we were in Alaska and Germany, Italy, just different places, I never forgot my southern roots, I continued cooking southern, but I would pick up different recipes along the way that neighbors would give me and I would, offer them to my husband once in awhile, and he enjoyed them. But he was like myself, he liked his southern cooking.

I: So during all of your travels where was your favorite?

ER: Alaska

I: How long were you there?

ER: Four and a half years. I really enjoyed that. One reason we were there longer was because my, he was in a [*Strike?*] outfit, my husband was. And what that is, is they have to be prepared to go at any time. During those days, the families could not stay on post. Once he would get his orders, and I would have mine too, I would have to leave and come back to Danville if I could not travel with him, he was in Vietnam three times and Korea twice, so of course I could not travel with him there. But every other place, so we were like nomads. It's a lot different now, my son retired from the Air Force, he first went into the Air Force and then the Army and he retired. My grandson who is making it into a career is in the Army, and he's in the same company that my husband was in. Stationed in Fort Bragg, where we retired. So, we got military in our blood. It was interesting. I enjoyed the travel.

I: Did you always know that you were going to come back to this area?

ER: No, we bought a home on Puget Sound in Tacoma. We planned on living in the North West, because we really liked that area and that would put us close to Alaska, which we loved. But our children didn't like it. So the last six months of his enlistment, he had gotten orders for Vietnam. So he knew he would only be there for six months, so we made the decision to sell our home in Tacoma, and I moved back here, then when he came back after six months, for his last two in Vietnam, we retired in Danville, and we looked around for a home to buy. And we lived in Deerwood Springs for 28 years before he passed away, and I moved here.

AG: [*Asks an unintelligible question about the house in Deerfield*]

ER: Oh, it was lovely, we were some of the first few that lived there, and we had a tennis court, and we had a playground for the children, and we had a clubhouse, restaurant clubhouse, and there was a horse barn, and we got into horses, my daughter loved horses. It was really nice. We enjoyed living there. Times change you know, she was the stable master, when she married my

youngest daughter, she married her husband and they lived in the apartment above the stable. And they enjoyed that a lot.

I: How many children do you have?

ER: I have three. My oldest daughter Vicky, she passed away in 2006, she had viral pneumonia and it was quite sudden, so that was a sad time. My son is 57, well he is 56, and he will be 57 on his birthday. And my youngest daughter is 50. I have six grandchildren, and I have a sixth great-granddaughter on the way, she'll be born in September. So I have quite a family, and we are very close.

I: Are they still in the area too?

ER: My daughter lives here with me she shares this apartment, and my son lives here. And I have one grandson that lives with me. And the other grandchildren live, one of my granddaughters lives in Harrisonburg, and I have a grandson that lives in Asheville, North Carolina. And I have two granddaughters that live in Texas with their four children. We stay in touch. We are very close and I am happy for that.

I: This is backtracking a little bit, but what kind of organizations or clubs were you involved in in school if you were involved in any?

ER: In school? Well, I had to help my oldest sister with her children and my brother and his wife, they had two little girls. So I was kind of like a babysitter, and the afternoons I spent, when I could play outside I would, but most of the time I would be doing chores around the neighborhood, when I was young that's where you would earn money. Babysitting and doing chores, at the time we would have these sheers up in our window, we had a stretcher, a curtain stretcher, and one of my jobs was to go around the neighborhood and wash these sheers and stretch them. It was like a paddle, and you would put it out in the yard and these little bitty pins and would stretch these sheers. And I had forgotten how I would make a little extra money, but I didn't have time with school, for after school I was too busy, you know I didn't mind. I didn't mind at all.

I: Did your family attend church?

ER: Yes, my mom and dad were well, they were Primitive Baptists, and they originally were Quakers when the emigrated here, and then the family became Primitive Baptists, and I myself am just Baptist, not primitive just Baptist.

I: What church did you attend in the area?

ER: When I was young?

I: Whatever you want to answer.

ER: When I was young, we had a Baptist church just a block away, and I attended that. When I was baptized, I would try to, after I got a little older I would ride the bus to north Danville, to Moffett Memorial Church, and that's where I was baptized. Then my husband when I we married we just attended Chapel, and I was a Sunday school teacher for years in Chapel. And that was what we did when he was in the military, then I joined the Tabernacle here in Danville.

I: Do you still attend?

ER: Not as often as I did at one time, I used to teach Sunday school. I've had cancer, and after the cancer, and then I lost my husband and then my daughter and different things happen. I still attend church at times, but I'm not involved as I was. Because I had priorities, I had to beat this terrible disease, then I had to cope with losing my husband and my daughter. I still have a lot of faith and I always will, and it has kept me strong. I'm just a homebody. I will help anyone I can, but my family comes first. [Timestamp 32:58] [*Unintelligible*]

KB: I was wondering how you met your husband.

ER: Well I was working at Belk's, I had not yet graduated, I was working at Belk's. And he was in the military stationed at Fort Bragg, and he would come home on the weekends on weekend passes to visit his family. At the time there was no air conditioning in the stores, so the doors were left open, so he would walk down the street to this corner restaurant, and I'd be standing there, and he kept looking in there and he'd wave. And he was telling his sister, not really his sister, his cousin, they were raised as brother and sister, but she was his cousin, about this cute girl that he kept seeing, and she said, "Well I know her, we skate together." So that's how, she introduced us. So my mom had remarried and moved to California and I had already made plans to move to California, and I did so. And he got orders for Fort Ord California. And I hadn't been there long when he showed up on my doorstep *-laughs-* then we started seeing each other, then we were married. And he got orders for Korea and we didn't see each other for fifteen months. So that's where we began at.

I: Where did you go for dates in the area?

ER: Well there wasn't much in the here. He was my first beau. Whoever had a car, whatever young man had a car, we would fill that car up and go to the drive-in theater. Or ride out the country and have a picnic. So that was about all the dating I did, and then I met him, and we would go to the movies, he and I would go to a movie, then I would meet him after church on a

Sunday and we would go to another movie *-laughs-* and that's about it. And he didn't have a car at that time, so he would ride on the bus and take me home, then he would either walk home or take a bus back to where he lived. And in California, of course we had the beach. And we would go to the beach, then we married, and like I said he got orders for Korea. He was first sent to Washington for about three months, then they sent him to Korea, that's why it was fifteen months that we didn't see one another. And our oldest daughter was born while he was in Korea. I guess that in a way, that taught me resilience and being able to cope with, because I was still quite young, so I could cope with separations and I love to read, and everywhere we lived I was interested in the history of the area, and it was inexpensive, I could go to the library and I would take my children and we would just wander around old houses and the cemeteries, and so it just came natural to me. So when he retired we moved back here, I wanted them to know more about the history of Danville, so I delved into that so they would know a little bit about our hometown. None of the children were born here, my oldest was born in California, Steve my only son was born in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and Kimberley was born in Fort Leonard Wood, that's my youngest, that's Missouri. They were very good, they called themselves army brats, but they're not army brats, they were very good, they traveled well, and did well in school. We were a nomadic family, that survived.

I: So you mentioned earlier that your friend went skating with you, there was a skate park that you guys went to?

ER: Yes, right off Campbell Road is Mount Edmond's street but at the time it was called Luna Lake Road. [*Note: Air conditioner starts*] [*unintelligible*]

[Timestamp - 38:16] **ER:** There was a public swimming pool and it was called Luna Lake, and beside it was the skating rink, and there was a like a little eating area. It was really neat. I loved to skate, and that's where I met Nancy, Tune's, my husband nickname was Tune. I could street skate, but I wasn't much at skating in a skate rink. So she was very good, and she taught me to skate in a skate rink. She was three years older than I was but we formed a good friendship, and so at the time she was working at WDVA as a secretary when she introduced me to my husband. I mean we were seeing each other through the doorway at Belk's *-laughs-* but that's how we met.

I: What was the WDVA?

ER: It was a radio station.

KB: Was it roller skating or ice skating?

ER: Roller skating. Now in Alaska, this was really neat that you asked me about ice skating. In Alaska the fire department would come around to our, we lived in quarters, and we would have

playgrounds, each square would have a playground. Well they would come around and flood the playgrounds, and it would be like a little ice skating rink, and we would go out there and ice skate, and the kids could play around, and everything. It was neat. I wasn't very big on the ice skating. *-laughs-*

I: Do have a favorite childhood memory that you would like to share?

ER: I loved the farm. I loved to go, and it's still there. At the time it was a dairy farm, and my uncle was the manager of the dairy farm. I would spend weekends there and holidays. I loved it, and it was my most pleasant time, I really loved it, I loved everything about the farm

I: Where was this farm?

ER: In Chatham, and this I was telling you about the love letter that I found. I would attend church, we would walk to church, and it was a Presbyterian Church and that's where we would go to Sunday school, and I had this Sunday school teacher named Miss Rosa and I didn't know if she ever married. And the love letter I found was to her, and was such a sweet love letter, and I didn't know if they really married or not. And so through the years I did a lot of research, and I found that they did marry and she was a schoolteacher here in Danville and she would live here in Danville and go home to their grove on the weekend. And by the time I knew her as a schoolteacher, he had already passed away. But that's why the love letter meant so much to me.

I: Would you like to read that love letter out?

ER: Sure. I made copies of it, I also have her answer. And where she accepted his proposal of marriage, and he had been married before he was 49, and she was a schoolteacher, she was 32 I think when they were married. I even found her home, where she lived at, this was where she lived at during the week when she was at school. [*unintelligible*] It took me 20 years to find where they were buried, and when I found it I went over and put some red roses on their grave.

I: Are they buried together?

ER: Yes they're buried together, and the reason I couldn't find it, here is the original love letter, look at this handwriting, it's illegible? [*unintelligible*] [Timestamp - 42:50]

I: What year were they married?

ER: 1903 and that was written around Christmas time in 1902, because her answer had the date on it. I didn't know people loved each other like that. Let's see, this is the copy of her letter, and you can see the date on there. But they loved each other, and the letter says, "My own precious

darling Rosa,” I thought that was so precious. And I’ll read some of this too: “Just six and one half hours have elapsed since I said goodbye to the sweetest woman in the world, which is the saddest word in the English language to a devoted lover like myself.” Isn’t it precious?

“Although I say it myself, but I don’t believe there ever was any woman more devotedly loved by man than you are by myself, for I honestly believe I have the purest, truest, sweetest, and best woman who ever lived. And I hold her entire heart, soul, and body. Am I correct? I did enjoy every moment I spent with you last night to the fullest extent. And it does seem to me that I see very little of you because that I love you so much that I want to spend my entire time with you and when I separate from you time drags on heavily, and with you time takes lightning wings and flies away.” Isn’t that precious? I cried the first time I read it. “As hours with you seem to be only minutes, is the case with you Precious? The boys at the warehouse this morning remarked that Mr. Harriston did not get his morning letter, and another remarked his girl came in yesterday so there was no need.” *-laughs-* I just think that’s precious. It says, “I long for the time, when my entire time will be spent for and with you. Love me always, yours devotedly and always yours.” Isn’t that precious? I mean this is the original, and this was where her sister was doing some research on the family, she wanted to be a member of the Daughters of the Revolution, so that’s the copy you can read that better than on the original.

I: So what church did she work at?

ER: It was a Presbyterian Church. Now it’s a private home.

I: And he worked at a tobacco warehouse?

ER: It was Acres, well you can see this is what it looked like, and now, its’ across from the fire house, the fire department down here. And it’s, that’s where he worked. And he’s one of the Harristons, they were very prominent in tobacco. I finally found where they were buried, the reason I couldn’t find where they were buried, he was buried in Crew’s [?] family plot, and I was looking in Harriston.

I: What was his first name?

ER: Nicholas. He was born in 1853 and died in 1920. And she died in 1944, so she lived another 24 years after he passed, but at least they had those years together, and I thought that was nice. I did all this research on their family.

I: And she was your Sunday school teacher?

ER: Yes and I did not know that she had been married, because we all called her Miss Rosa, and she was at the time of course, because he had been dead for a number of years.

I: How did you get the letter again? How did it come into your hands?

ER: Ok, I told you I grew up on this farm, it was a dairy farm, and it was being sold, the Owens family owned it at the time and Boatwright [?] and Hawkers families were buying it. So Mr. Hawker, we did a story about him in the newspaper, and he knew me because I was always at the farm visiting my aunt and uncle. And he called my aunt and said that he was buying Belle Grove, and said that Evelyn was interested in old homes and graveyards and everything and said tomorrow the cleaners are coming, and she might be interested in papers that are up in the attic. So he left the door unlocked for me, So I went over with my oldest daughter, and my youngest daughter, and my grandson, and we went over and wandered through the house, and I was surprised at how small it was, and you think plantation and you cannot see it from the road, because it is down a long road and there are trees, so you can't see the actual home. I've got a story that I've got to have a book for, it's a Pittsylvania County book, and there's a story about Belle Grove in there. The developer of the southern railroad, William Tunstall, He built Belle Grove, and it's the oldest preserved brick home in Pittsylvania county, so it's quite old. So I went down there and the door was unlocked and we went in of course even though it was during the day, it was dark because the small windows and everything. So I went on up into the attic and the first thing I could hear was the sound of mice or rats or something, so I just grabbed one box and took off downstairs, I didn't care what else was up there. So I went in the back where the cemetery was and wandered around a little while and then we left. And at the time I was working so I put the box out in the garage because I was afraid that I had brought something home with me. So I put it out in the garage so it was weeks before I went out and started looking through there. And much of it was damaged so badly, but intact was this love letter, and her answer. And it was just like, meant for me to find. And I set down and read it and I just cried, and thought oh no Miss Rosa, no Miss Rosa, and all I could think about was that they didn't marry, because we didn't know that she had married. So I just kept checking and checking and checking, and I found this book about early marriages of Pittsylvania county, and there I saw his name, and he had married Rosa, and then I said ok, so I knew they got married and what year they got married, which was 1903. So that satisfied me and I just kept checking until I found his obituary, and the next thing I found was where they were buried.

[Timestamp - 52:10] **I:** So how do you think the letter ended up there?

ER: Well, she lived there see, she had two sisters and a brother that was living in the house. And like I said the teachers were, her sisters were also teachers. And she met him, she probably met him because she was working here in Danville. At school. And she just kept it through the years because after he passed away they were living in the Martinsville area, out in the county somewhere, it was called Rock Springs when he passed away. So after he passed away she

moved back to her home in Chatham. And they did not have any children, the two of them didn't. And that's how the letter ended up in the attic, and I found it.

KB: Would you like to read her answer to the letter?

ER: Okay, like I said the copy is much clearer, and because she wrote very...*[Note: Searches for the letter]*

I: And where were they buried?

ER: In Chatham, in a cemetery in Chatham. It says, "My own darling sweetheart," that's the way she started. "This has been another dark gloomy day, disagreeable even." I can read his writing better than I can her's and she's a schoolteacher -*all laugh*- "I have been cheered by the thought that I will see my sweetheart. I look forward to your visits with the greatest pleasure, for I am never happier than with you, in fact I cannot be content away from you again. I noticed from your letter [*unintelligible*] [Timestamp - 54:14] thoughts and feelings. You want to know my feelings for you? Well, you explained exactly in your last letter and in several instances, you wrote the very thoughts I had during the day, you've become so dear and near to me, that I now feel that I want to be with you all the time." I mean this was back in 1902 when they had arranged marriages, and these two had these feelings, but this is so cute, this is how she ended it. It says, I over looked this, didn't see it and saw the little note she made it says, "I breathe sweet thoughts of thee already anyway, don't chew too much tobacco tomorrow, please don't." -*all laugh*- I thought that was so sweet. But she goes on all through the letter, they're making plans for Christmas. And she's talking about her, the principal at the school, now this is a copy and you are welcome to take it with you. And I have a copy of the, here, here you go, here's a copy. *[Note: Hands out copies]* Here's a copy of the envelope. I even went to the house, no one lives there and it's in a state of disrepair. But it's still standing, her aunt lived there, and she would stay there during the week when she taught school.

I: So this is what the letter from him came to her in?

ER: I just thought it was just so precious

I: It is, that really, really is.

ER: Didn't you think the same? I mean people that lived, and he was not a young man, he was 49 and he had been married. I even found, he had married a Grasty [?] I can't remember her first name, I've got it written down somewhere. But they didn't have any children, and she, this was her first marriage to him, only marriage. Because, she remained single. I just thought it was precious. And here I'm living up the street so I stopped one day I was walking, I like to walk,

and there was a fireman out there, and I said, "Let me tell you a story about that building." - *laughs*- I said, "Used to be Acre's Warehouse," and you could still, through the paint and everything, you could still see Acre's Warehouse. And I said "I have a love letter that was written over there -*laughs*- in 1902." And he said, "Really?" and I said, "Yes." I just thought it was so neat.

I: I bet he enjoyed that.

ER: Well I don't know, you know how men are, they're not as sentimental as women. This man was, this man was very sentimental, I bet you would like to meet someone like that, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you three like to meet a man like that... I mean he loved her, and she loved him. This is true love. My husband and I, we were married for 51 years, He wasn't quite that romantic, -*laughs*- but he was romantic enough to keep our marriage together. But we had a lot of separations, you know with him being in the military. And it lasted, and I'm glad that it did. I was committed, and he was too. And I think that's the answer to any marriage. Just your commitment and your love for each other, just unstoppable.

I: Did his family know your family, your husband's?

ER: No, they. I called myself the country mouse, and I he was the city mouse. He grew up on Ford Street in Danville. He was older than myself so I didn't know him in school. And his family lived in town and we lived in the Schoolfield area, and I would spend much of my time on the farm. So we did not know each other during that time. I knew Nancy his cousin, from the skating rink. But the families didn't know each other.

I: So if you had to pick three words to describe growing up in the region, what would you pick?

ER: Different. It was a very different time than it is now. Even though we would in today's standard be considered poor, we never thought of ourselves as being poor. I didn't have the stability of a mother and father living together, but I had the stability of family life. So I had the love of my aunt, my mother, my grandmother, grandparents. And my dad, even though he remarried and everything, he did come around often, but my uncle was like a father figure to me. Family, family is so important to me now, and it was then. So I guess that would be family, and stability, not in the way that people think of today, not in the terms they think of today. I mean my clothes were handmade, in fact I started making my own clothes when I was 12, and they looked fine. I didn't have an unhappy, I didn't think it was unhappy at the time, when you talk about times past, to someone they'll say, "Oh, that's so sad," but I didn't feel sad, I mean you know it was okay. And the time I spent in the sanatorium, I mean it was scary but, I know now it was needed. It was something that was there and I'm glad it was.

I: If you could pick a local historical event that had the most impact on your life, what would it be?

ER: That had the most impact on me, in my life... I really think integration, because I grew up in the time there was segregation, but I never felt the way that many people felt. So I think that that was the most important time that I could think of in my life because there's so many people that I loved on the farm and from the lumber yard, I lived close to the lumber yard, and the families there would just... I think that was the most historical part, I really do. And I guess that's strange coming from someone my age. But I did and we were living, of course, away from here when it finally came about, but my husband and I both felt the same, I mean we were both just very pleased, I think that was. And some of my best friends today are black, or African American, and I don't even consider them anything except friends. I guess that was it, that was it for me.

I: If you were to choose an artifact that you thought that could represent you, what would you choose?

ER: An artifact... Well, I guess my life with my husband, I mean a lot of people now, and even back then the couples would break up because their husbands, I guess my marriage meant so much to me and it gave me stability that I had not had in that way, and I had always wanted that. And so I guess I would say that the experience I had being married, and he was totally military all the way, and I was like above proud, I just wouldn't take it for anything. It had its ups and downs but we were there for each other. Now I can't think of anything else. It has kept me strong through a lot of illness, a lot of death, a lot of disappointments. And I can look back on my childhood, that prepared me for my marriage, and my marriage prepared me for whatever lays ahead. And that's just the way I feel. I'm a simple woman.

I: Who would you consider to be your childhood hero?

ER: *-laughs-* You're going to laugh at this. Gene Autry. He was a cowboy, he was a cowboy star when I was a kid growing up, and I loved Gene Autry movies. And I yearned to be, I can remember there was some little girl that was on the ranch and I thought, "Oh I'd love to do that." So I guess that was my childhood hero. I know that sounds strange, and yet I went to the movies a lot, so I had a lot of movie stars and back then they were real movie stars. Now, they're like a bunch of clones. You see, really this is true, they want to be like each other, back then you went to a movie you knew who you were watching. You saw the name in the paper and this is going to be a Clarke Gable movie, *-unintelligible-*, John Wayne. I mean you knew you were going to go see these individuals doing all different kinds of stuff, so I guess I had a lot of heroes, from the movie theater.

I: Who would you consider your hero today?

ER: Today? My hero today...My hero today is my son. I won't say anymore.

I: What did your parents do in the mill again? You said that they worked there?

ER: Well my father was a loom fixer and a weaver. And my mother she was a weaver. And they worked there for many years. Then she remarried, she never worked anymore when they moved to California, and he was an interior, her second husband he was a painter, he called himself an interior decorator, but whatever. But they lived in Wilmington, California. When I moved out there I moved to Venice, until my husband came back from Korea, then we moved to North Carolina, Fort Bragg, and on from there.

I: Are there any other memories that you would like to share with us today?

ER: Well, I had an aunt who lived on the farm and she and I were very close. And I wrote a letter, I have, they were prepared stories about Pittsylvania County, see I'm a ninth generation, at the time I was living in the county. So they asked me to prepare some stories, I prepared this story about my aunt. I have a copy of that that I'd like to give you. Because she was what you'd call, I guess what you'd call a recluse. She did not care for anything other than home. And she lived on the farm, and she didn't do a lot of cooking, but then we had a lot of farm hands that she would always prepare different food for. She always had some pinto beans cooking. Always. But my favorite times were spent on the farm with my aunt and my uncle who gave me a lot of love, unconditional love. I was just their niece...but they were just precious times and all up till she passed away we were still real close. So in tribute to her I wrote a story, "Sundays with Aunt Mary." And her husband passed away, and after he passed away she had to move from the farm into a little house, and my mom and I, my mother was her older sister, and on Sundays after church we would always go and visit Aunt Mary. And then uncle Marin, he was quite interesting, so I'll give you a copy of that and you can... that was some of my fondest memories [Note: AC unit turns on again] [Timestamp 1:10:10] I did a lot of research on my family. My mom was a [unintelligible]. There's the pictures. I know I've got it in here, this is the brochure. Here it is. So here I am with my aunt Mary, and then my writing. They put that in the book.

I: We can't take your original.

ER: Well I've got it in the book, it's printed in the book, that's just my handwritten copy of it. It's in the book.

I: You're sure you want us to take this?

ER: Yes.

All Interviewers: Thank you.

KB: Which book was this printed in?

ER: Well, I had two, [*unintelligible*] this is the first copy, there are stories in here. You could only submit two stories with your name. But you could submit as many as you want, just put somebody else's name. So that's what I did. So I would submit different stories. It was just something I enjoyed. I had a fire, just after I moved in that's why it's in such poor condition. But this was, a story that, and this is my husband. [*Pause in transcription to show pictures*]. I didn't know they would do this, and when we had horses, this woman, she was a reporter. She had a horse, and she said she moved here from California and she wanted me to drive her around, through the county. And who knew she was going to do this. And I was just babbling on and I took her to this grave, and she just, it was on the front page, and my husband says, "Oh I'm so embarrassed," he said "Everybody at the club is asking me about my grave digging wife" - *laughs*- But I think it was in 1982 when that was. Later this lady that I knew, in Chatham wrote a fiction book about this grave. And it's pretty neat.

KB: Do you know what the name of the book is?

ER: *Ride into Darkness*. Helen Nelson wrote it but she used another name. She wrote under the name Kenyon McCann. I became friends with her, her husband Herman Nelson wrote many books about the mills and the county.

I: If we reference that book, should we say it's written by Kenyon McCann?

ER: Yes, [*unintelligible*]. I got all kinds of books, I've just collected them. History books, I'm always letting people come in and look at them, it's just something that's always interested me. I didn't know they was going to put it on the front page. My husband was playing golf and someone said, "Hey, I didn't know Evelyn was a gravedigger."-*all laugh*- I still, not as much as I did, because no one seems to be interested in it now, you know it's too dangerous to be wandering around by yourself. Every Sunday, my husband was a football addict, well any kind of sport, so I would throw the kids in the car and off we'd go, and I would pack us a little picnic lunch and we would go out in the county and drive around, it was just real neat, and I would find old homes, and I would know there were graves nearby. I would go and find them.

I: We still have a family grave area, most people don't have that.

ER: Well we have, some of my family in the county. They settled in the Gretna area. And we've got the family plot there going back to the 1700s graves. So when my mother was living she was

really interested in going, just about every time we got in the car, she wanted to go to the graveyard. And she's buried there of course.

KB: What do you remember about the county growing up?

ER: Well like I said, I would spend weekends there. And it was a dairy farm. And I would go up to the farm and I loved the milk as it would come down to the cooler, straight from the cow. It was come down to the cooler and I would stand down there with a cup, and I would drink it, before anything got put in it, and that's the best milk in the world. It really is. The kids would help my uncle clean up the cow barn, and we would go out and help him get the cows, and we would sit outside, and it was dark, and we would sit on the porch and, my aunt would love to tell us spooky stories, and we would sit out there and she would tell us spooky stories, and then we'd have to go in and go up to the attic and go to bed. But I enjoyed being out there. We'd go fishing, there was a little pond, down not too far from where she lived, and we'd go fishing in the pond, and it was just a good time growing up, I enjoyed my childhood.

I: And you were saying that this place reminds you of the attic?

ER: Yes well I found this when my husband and I were selling our home. And we had looked at several apartments, newer apartments than this of course, and we had a cat that we had had for many years, and a lot of them didn't allow animals. We had that cat at that time probably sixteen or seventeen years, so we weren't about to part with the cat. So I was walking, I have walked on this street since, ever since... So I saw them over here working, and my niece and I were curious so we wandered over, and the manager was over here in the parking lot, and he invited us in to have a look-see. So I wandered around and I said, "I love it I love it I love it." So I went home and told my husband about it and he said "No, that's a bad neighborhood we don't want to move down there," but I said, "You have to see it, you're going to love it, the walls are brick walls," and he says "Oh." So finally we found a buyer for the house and we were sitting at the kitchen table and he read an article in the newspaper about it, and he said, "Ok, to please you, you can call up and make an appointment. And we can go whenever you make an appointment." So I called and the manager at the time made an appointment for us to come up the next day, so we came down, and they were still working up here. They had three apartments occupied at the time. And he said, after he left he said, "I will consider this, but only on the third or fourth floor. No first or second." He said, "The first floor is like a basement, and the second floor is too busy." You know with the offices and everything, and I wanted up here anyway, so I said, "Ok," and we chose the fourth floor, and we had an appointment on the 23 of May, this was in 2005 to come and pick up the keys for this apartment. And my husband and I were going to bed and he just turned around and he looked at me, and he just put both arms around me, and just let out this sigh and he went back, bringing me with him, and when I raised up he was gone. It was awful, and I called an ambulance. So next morning I had called over here and told the manager what had

happened, and said I still intend to move over there, so I had a funeral and everything, and I had to reapply as a single resident. So he had to rent the apartment we had chosen up here. So I was temporarily on the third floor, the editor to the newspaper was living in this apartment, this is the one I wanted, the one we had chosen. So as soon as he moved, I transferred from the third floor up to here. And I've been here ever since. At Christmas I like to decorate, I decorate all the trees on every floor, and I like to put the ones on the breezeways facing the street, so that people drive by and see the trees. And we have two on each of the floors, except the third floor, which is the only one with one.

I: Would you say there is a good community of the people that live here?

ER: Well I enjoy, it's a different, well the quarters are similar, but not quite. So it takes a little adjusting. But basically we all get along, we're most of us are seniors, but some of us are on disability. Like the daughter that shares my apartment she's on disability, but she's fifty. But most of us are seniors, and we have bingo and we play card games every once in awhile, and we'll have dinners, just whatever anyone wants to do. And we have bands that play over here all we have to do is sit outside and listen, we like salsa and you can hear it from here.

I: What do you think about the downtown, warehouse district, revitalization stuff going on?

ER: I am very, very pleased because when we moved here, this was it. This building was it, and when we moved here we had The Purple Onion, which was a nice little, and I really hated it when it closed, The Purple Onion, and the coffee shop downtown, that was about all we had when I moved here. But next door there are going to be apartments, and on Craghead street they've got The Golden Leaf, so downtown is really looking nice. I just wish they had done it sooner, when I was younger. I still walk on the trail. I'm out there every day, I try to walk my three miles. Oh, that's not bad, I used to walk seven miles, and then no one wanted to walk with me, so I got a little scared walking to the boat landing by myself. So I just restricted it to three miles, which it isn't bad. I go early in the morning or late in the evening cause the middle of the day is too hot, so I enjoy that. And I enjoy living here, everyone seems to get along. And I love my apartment, because as you can see its very quiet, except for the noises within. [*Pause in transcription while interviewee talks about the apartment*] [Timestamp - 1:26:08]

KB: Do you know what this building was used for, before?

ER: I have something else I can give you, and I've got copies for you too. Let me find it, its inventory of the building and it was built in 1892. This is the history of it, well, early history. Different things about it, but you can have that too. As you came in, you noticed the glass enclosed, that is the newest portion, that was I think is 1926 it was an old printing company that they built that. The rest of the building is from 1892.

[Timestamp 1:30] [Note: Interviewers explain History United: Memory Initiative and conclude portion of oral history interview. End of transcription.]

[End of transcription]