Eric Walz History 300 Collection

Beverly Walz Ricks – Life during WWII

By Beverly Walz Ricks

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Oral Interview conducted by Danny Ricks

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Brigham Young University – Idaho
DR: Mrs. Ricks … Grandma… where were you born?

BR: I was born in Madison County.

DR: What day?

BR: December 10, 1926.

DR: How old were you on December 7, 1941?

BR: I was in High School … a freshman in High School, so I must have been about 14… 13 or 14. And it is one of the days of my entire life that I remember very well. We came home from church, and turned on the radio, found out that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. And we just listened to the radio the rest of the day. Our hearts were broken.

DR: What were some of the thoughts and feelings of your parents?

BR: Oh, my father was a veteran of the First World War, and of course, he was really struck by this incident, and the thing is we lived in a rural community where we had a lot of Japanese families and Japanese friends, and it was almost inconceivable to us that the Japanese would do this to our country.

DR: Did a lot of people in the community feel any differently toward the Japanese families in your community?

BR: I didn’t see a great deal of difference in our community, in fact in the early years we had young people coming from California, high school students, would stay with the families, local families, and go to school here. And we would accept all of them completely. They were our good friends. I had gone to school with these three Japanese boys since I was in the second grade.

DR: Wow. How did your mother feel about the news that we were going to war?

BR: Oh, I can’t really remember a great reaction, although she was just as distraught as any other American, you know, but her sons were younger. She had of course – had a lot of nephews and so on; I lost my favorite cousin in the Second World War. He was a navigator on a B-17 over Bristeldorf, Germany and shot down. He was such a wonderful young man. And then of course, the boys in our high school eventually all started going into the service. I was close to a number of older boys in our school. And they all joined a Naval B-12 program. Right after graduation. I was close friends with him.

DR: What did you do while the war was going on?

BR: Went to school, helped my father on the farm, just like always, when we were seniors, we had a special drive at our school, to raise money to buy a, well when we were juniors actually, even earlier maybe, we started a fund raising drive, to buy a P-51 fighter
plane. And I have pictures in my yearbook, of me manning a bond and stamp sale, you know, every week at school. We raised quite a bit of money and bought an airplane.

DR: Wow.

BR: It was all for the war effort.

DR: Would you say, that for the most part, the community was very united with the war?

BR: Absolutely, absolutely. I didn’t feel like our Japanese families were ostracized. The community was 100% behind the war effort. My mother was very active in bandage rolling for the Red Cross, and I would go once in awhile. And in the summer time we would do some canning up above down town stores, they had a place set up where we could go get corn off the cobs, do beans and stuff like that for the war effort.

DR: Did you notice a big difference in the rationing?

BR: Oh, yes.

DR: Really?

BR: That was very visible, but you soon found out you could go without. I mean, we were having to… you had two pair of shoes a year… coupons. And the gas ration was strict, but Grandpa could tell you more about that, because I didn’t drive a whole lot anyway. We’re very careful with everything. Just tried… and we couldn’t buy a lot of products. I have to tell you that when Grandpa came home from the service and we got married and went to California, we went to a store and I bought Jell-O, and tuna fish, and coconut, which we hadn’t seen for years. Jell-O!

DR: That’s so neat though, how the community was so united in that way.

BR: Totally. Tremendous support. When I was a senior, I was an assistant editor of the yearbook. And it was my assignment to go to the county officers, and write down the name of every student that had been at Madison High School that was in the armed services, and kind of their branch of service, and it was really sad because some of them had already been killed, you know. And you had to put a little mark by their name and that meant they had lost their lives in the service of their country.

DR: How did, how did their families deal with that?

BR: Oh, I know how my Aunt Eliza dealt with it, when her son was shot down over Bristledorf. She wouldn’t accept it; she knew that somewhere he was ok and that he would return home. She just couldn’t – she just had three boys… couldn’t accept it. And locally of course, you knew the flag at half mast. You had little programs and honorary services and so on. Hard, it was hard.
DR: What was your image of Hitler, and Mussolini, and Hirohito during the war?

BR: I hated all of them. Totally. We heard a lot about them. They were always vilified. And I didn’t see any support.

DR: Which ones did you learn most about?

BR: I’m sure we learned more about Hitler, my father, was born in Germany, you know. And like I say, he came over here when he was a baby. And he was sent to Europe at the very end of World War I, and he was always told us he ended that war because when the Kaiser heard that he was back over there in Europe he said, “Let’s surrender!” (laughing) But of course my father was a humorist and that was just a story. But, we all loved our country very much. I just feel like rural people in particular, maybe, have a strong… a lot of them are immigrants and come from immigrant sources. And they have strong feelings about their background. And they loved the old country, but they couldn’t accept that a man like Hitler, could do what he did. It was terrible. And of course they used the term ‘Jap’ a lot, which was difficult, I’m sure, for our friends. But they stayed with us and stuck in school and went to the service just like everybody else. These Japanese boys from our area served.

DR: Do you feel like… you mentioned before that, a lot of the families were from immigrant families, do you feel that it, maybe, solidified their minds as being more American?

BR: Well, I’m sure it does. War either brings out the very worst or the very best in you, yeah I think. And now days we see so many people who are totally against any kind of war. And the media publicizes it so much. But if you get down into the ordinary, common citizens of the United States, which most of us are, you find such a deep, strong allegiance to this nation.

DR: What things did people do here on the home front during the war?

BR: Well, like I say, we went to school and carried out our ordinary farming activities and everything like that. Church became very important, because, you went to church and prayed for your servicemen and very few servicewomen in those days, there were a few, buy very few. But so many of our people left, if they didn’t go in the service, they went to war plants, for instance in California and took jobs. On the assembly line. Because production was so, you know, forced all the time. More, we want more, we want more of this. More trucks, more ships, more.

DR: How did it affect everyone not having any men around?

BR: Ohh!! It was hard. I finished high school and my boyfriend went into the service, I went to Ricks College, and there were maybe two boys the first year, the first semester. They soon left. And then the second year, the war ended, when I was a sophomore up there. And they started to come back and there was probably six, eight, ten boys by the
end of the second year there at Ricks College and it was wonderful! We even had one
dance. (laughing) We had never had a dance!

DR: How many girls were there at school?

BR: About, nearly 300. I use the term 300 students. And probably five or six boys.

DR: In your role at the school, did you have any… I guess, what activities did you
participate in at the school?

BR: At Ricks College? Oh, I was very active at Ricks College. The first year I joined
what they call a sorority, it wasn’t like the sororities on the major college campuses. But
we had little parties, the girls did. And did service activities. Just as many of them do
now. But I really loved school. And I was very active, and at the end of my freshman
year I was elected Student Body President. And President John L. Clarke was the new
President of Ricks College. I got to know him really well. And I had so many wonderful
professors. And I was very active in drama. I did plays. Journalism, that is what I thought
I would go into before I got married. And I have to say that my English teacher was my
future husband’s Aunt, Edna Ricks. For which one of the dormitories is named over there
on campus. And she really gave me a wonderful English education and every opportunity
if she needed someone to go down to the radio station in Idaho Falls, to give a little talk
of blurb, I was the one that got to go. I think she was promoting this romance! But my
college years were wonderful, wrote lots of letters to Jay, and to other servicemen. I had
other friends that were in the service.

DR: How do you feel that… how do you feel that, I guess the student body as a whole,
the three hundred girls, how did the war affect them?

BR: Well, they didn’t go on dates. Rarely, it was a rare thing. One of my roommates was
dating a senior in high school from Driggs. She got to go out once in a while, but most of
us didn’t have dates, but you know you make your own life and we had a wonderful time
at Ricks College for those two years.

DR: What did you do to entertain yourselves? With no boys around, no dating!

BR: We went to movies. I used to go to a movie every week. Which, this year I’ve been
to one movie this year. These movies were, a lot of the time, centered around the war.
And we just saw lots of movies. On campus we did plays, we were actively engaged in
making a yearbook. I was working on the yearbook staff at Ricks College, too. And we
had a school paper. We just kept busy, and I got good grades. Ok? I studied hard.

DR: What was it like getting letters back from your boyfriend?

BR: Wonderful! He wrote much more than I could have expected, knowing him. We
exchanged letters frequently. I’m sure we had five letters back every week, which was
wonderful. You know he doesn’t write letters anymore, Danny. Maybe, you know your Grandpa.

DR: What kind of experiences would he relate back to you?

BR: Oh! Ok, the first year he was at Camp Robertson, California and it was all about his training. And he would be able to call his folks once a week on Sunday and I would go up to his parents place to talk to him, too. And he would tell me about the marches they took, and the severe training they took. The option was given to him to apply for Officer Candidate School, which he did. He was able to go to Fort Benning, Georgia and take Officer Candidate Training. He graduated as a Second Lieutenant, just as the war was ending. And so our letters were just full of how much we missed each other, and how soon he would be home, and we could get married.

DR: Did he have an opportunity to go over to Europe?

BR: Yes, he did. At the end of his training in Georgia, at Fort Benning. He was assigned to go to Fort Stuart, was it? Fort Stuart? Camp Stuart. Anyway, he did some more training there, and then he was sent to Europe, to Germany. To the Heidelberg area, there were a number of small towns around Heidelberg. And he was in the army of occupation for a whole year. And he wrote to me then about how scarce food was, he didn’t have a drink of milk, I’ve told you this, he didn’t have a drink of milk the whole time he was over seas. He did have some interesting opportunities. He took the convoy to Paris and saw the Eiffel Tower. He had a week, about a weeks leave and went to Switzerland and had a wonderful tour of Switzerland. In the mountains, and Alps. And met a fine young man that he became friends with, with whom we still correspond. Every Christmas we get this long newsletter from them, and they visited us a few years ago. He enjoyed his tour in Europe very much I think. He took every opportunity he could to acquaint himself with the castles, and the culture.

DR: What are some of your vivid memories during World War II?

BR: Oh, I suppose saying goodbye to my boyfriend, I remember that night very vividly. Getting word that John, my cousin, that was killed, had been killed. That hurt a lot. You were conscious all the time, because the media being very active at that time, too. Of the battles going on. And it was hard those first, two or three years of the war, Danny, there wasn’t much gained for awhile, we were on the defensive all the time. But as the war progressed and we became more able to initiate action. As well, as defend ourselves better, it became easier to listen to the news. Then of course toward the end, I vividly remember the bomb being dropped in Japan. That was horrific to all of us. But it also meant that the war would probably end. And my fiancé would not have to fight in that Asian area, which he did not have to do. He got to go and serve in Germany in the army of Occupation. So, you know, every week we were intensely involved in what was going on in the war.

DR: What were your feelings toward the President at that time?
BR: Oh, support. Whatever we could do to support. You know Franklin D. was elected many times, and served as long or longer… and I always been raised a Republican, but I still supported the war and the President.

DR: How did your life change as a result of World War II?

BR: I’ll be honest with you; I think I probably got married sooner than I would have. I had a scholarship when I left Ricks College to go to BYU, but we both wanted to get married. And Jay was almost 21, and I was almost 20. Which is very young, I think. But we married. And started our life together as a farm couple. He wanted to farm. Being away from home for two years, you know I don’t think he has wanted to leave for any length of time again.

DR: How do you think it changed the lives of women as a whole?

BR: Oh, terrifically. So many of the women had went to work for the Defense Camps and they came home and had all these abilities. And even in those days women started to take jobs. Especially, in the first few years of marriage, before the children came and so on. I wasn’t very bright; I’d had a job all summer before Jay came home. When he came home I thought I was just going to be a wife, so I quit my job. I’d never had done that had I thought far enough ahead. I made some mistakes, but he started school. And of course what we did that winter. We fixed up the apartment. We painted and papered and cleaned. And so we were kind of busy. You know I should have kept my job! For instance, Danny, that was a mistake. But women did. They, I think they realized they could do things that they never realized before. And they changed toward feminism.

DR: How did the men feel about that?

BR: Well, I don’t think it bothered them. A lot of men like their wives to work. I’m sorry that when Ricks was a four year school for a few years there, that I didn’t go back and get my bachelor’s degree. So I could teach or something. But by then I had, probably, three or four children. And we were thirty miles away on the farm. It just wasn’t too feasible. But I should have done it anyway.

DR: What strengths did you see in the women on the home front during World War II?

BR: Oh, I thought they were wonderful. I mean they rallied behind every effort that was made. To support the troops. To support the country. I don’t recall seeing anyone that wasn’t willing to do whatever they had to. People didn’t worry about not having pretty clothes and extra shoes and things like that. We were all just so anxious to win the war and have it over. I mean this was the feeling. “Let’s get the boys home.”

DR: You mentioned before that you remember vividly when they dropped the bomb on Japan, what were… you mentioned some of your feelings… what about the country as a whole? What do you think they thought about that?
BR: Stunned. Absolutely. I don’t think we knew enough about it, maybe we shouldn’t have, but we hadn’t. But I was totally unprepared for something like that. But so… almost wildly happy that they had something that could end the war. And as the years have gone by, I read a lot about the men who were involved in the creation of the bomb. And how a few of them, the men who were really instrumental in producing the Atomic weapon, wish that they almost hadn’t. And yet others are so grateful and glad that we did. We would have ended up with losses, thousands and thousands of lives.

DR: What was the general feeling around your community, and in America, how long did they think the war would continue to go had they not dropped the bomb?

BR: Oh, I envisioned another year. At least. Which was hard, but it seemed like this… was truly a bomb shell, and just in a matter of days it was over. It was a totally stunning time. But we were all so grateful. Big celebration.

DR: What was it like when the boys started coming home?

BR: Wonderful! Even, like I say, some of the boys had been discharged from the service at the end of my sophomore year at Ricks College. And they had one dance… the girls would dance with each other, though. They did a pretty good job.

DR: Well, I guess is there anything that, is there anything that really stands out to you, that you’d like to mention right now? About your feelings about World War II, or anything in general?

BR: Well, I think having gone through World War II as we did, in our teenage years pretty much – we learned to really hate war. The disruptive influence of war is overwhelming when it’s a long term thing like it was then. It is today even, with all the young people being lost. Day by day. Slowly. In Iraq, I don’t know. Long term I think because I’m as old as I am now, I’ve mellowed a lot in some of the ideas I might have. And I do accept what those who are in a position to know what needs to be done, I have to trust them. To do what’s right by our country. But every day of my life I’m so grateful to be an American. We are so blessed. So blessed.

DR: Well, thank you.

BR: Thank you, Danny! Thank you for the opportunity.