

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

Edith D. Jensen— Life during WWII

By Edith D. Jensen

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Box 1 Folder 10

Oral Interview conducted by Ben Hoffman

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

BH: Let's start with your name, when you were born and where.

EJ: My name is Edith DeMont Jensen. I was born May 14, 1912 in Burton Idaho.

BH: So if you were born in 1912 how old were you during World War II?

EJ: I was about 28, I think.

BH: You said you were living in Idaho Falls at the time?

EJ: Yes.

BH: Were you married at the time?

EJ: Yes. I had four little girls.

BH: Oh yeah?

EJ: Two of them were twins so that added up fast.

BH: (Laughs) What was your husband doing?

EJ: We were running a dairy, and we supplied about half the milk required to keep Idaho Falls going. It was a modern dairy and we would gather up milk from the producers, from the farmers and bring it in, and we had a place where we homogenized it and we bottled it. It was in bottles then not cartons. Then we took it every day and delivered it to the café's and the houses. It took about four delivery trucks and during that time, labor was so scarce there weren't very many men to work. So we employed one lady and she was strong. She could handle the bottles and the crates and that worked. And my job was to check in the drivers. I checked their money and the times they got back. During this time, we needed a car bad. Everywhere we went we had to go in a delivery truck and it was inconvenient as can be. We waited about eight months for a car that we'd ordered. The reason why was because the whole country was geared up to produce airplanes and tanks and war things. The women stepped in. I think that was the beginning of women working here in the United States. They even worked on the airplanes. They called those ladies "Rosie the Riveter." Do you remember that?

BH: Yes, I remember hearing about that.

EJ: We didn't seem to want for anything, only this car. We would watch the railroad cars that would come in and often go down and see if it had our car. No, they said, just wait a few months; maybe we'll have it for you. We had radio then, we didn't have television. And I can remember December 7 in 1941. That was a terrible shock to the nation and to every household. Our president of the United States was Franklin D. Roosevelt, and he was a wonderful man. The day before, this envoy from Japan came back over and was

just talking to him as if they were very friendly, and here behind our backs they attacked with airplanes. Did you see that?

BH: I've seen clips of it.

EJ: It was early on a Sunday morning, and they just flew over and bombed and killed way over a thousand sailors and sunk one of their battle ships that were in Pearl Harbor.

BH: How did you hear about Pearl Harbor?

EJ: Over the radio.

BH: What was your family doing? Were you getting ready for church?

EJ: No. I think we were at my mother's place and that is where we got the news. I suppose it didn't come over just the same minute that it happened. It came over in the afternoon.

BH: What were your reactions?

EJ: We were heartsick. But my husband didn't have to go because he was a productive man. He wasn't drafted. Right across from where he worked on First Street, there was a Japanese school. It was a one-story building and you know we didn't trust those Japanese people. We knew in our hearts that they were our neighbors, but just to look at them made you sick. We just didn't trust them. So they were impounded in these places like that school. Right there in Idaho Falls. They couldn't go anywhere because they weren't allowed—over on the west coast that happened a lot, in California as well.

BH: How did that make you feel? You were telling me that it was hard because they were your neighbors yet you had a hard time trusting them. How did it make you feel that they had to be impounded?

EJ: I felt that it was justified. How could we fight back? Anyway, after the war was over those Japanese were so radical. They just fly intending on giving their life for their cause. They would just bomb anything they were after and kill themselves and think nothing of it. They were doing it for the great ruler over in Japan. They were hard to deal with. So our President was on his third term, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and he knew he had this atomic bomb, and he didn't really want to use it but on the other hand if they didn't use it they would have to go into Japan and they were such radical people that he knew it would cost a lot of American soldiers lives so he chose the atomic bomb. They bombed two cities, that brought the Japanese to their knees, and they had a peace agreement.

BH: How did you feel about the bomb?

EJ: I thought it was wonderful. It brought an end to the war, and we were sick of the war.

BH: Did your family and friends feel the same way?

EJ: Yes. So this president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, did a lot of good things for us. There was a lot of unemployment after the war was over. He established work because people were out of work. He established the Public Works Administration, the PWA. That employed people of all ages—mostly married men. They would go out and build roads or whatever the government wanted them to do to improve the country. He also set up the CCC. That was a group of young men and boys that worked in the forest planting trees and stuff like that you know. Then he established the Rural Electric Administration and bought electricity to far out places, farms. It was much appreciated. Then he set up the Social Security System as well which has been a benefit ever since. He met with Churchill and Stalin and agreed how they would divide up the countries. His wife was an interesting person. She was well educated. Her name was Eleanor Roosevelt. She would go out and be his eyes and ears. She would go out and mingle among the people and find out their needs. Then she would come back and report to him. She was a public relations lady also. She would meet with high ups of other countries. To tell you the truth, President Roosevelt was crippled from polio and he was in a wheelchair, but he never would let on that he was crippled. He always had someone by his side that kind of supported him, and he didn't even use a cane. He just stood up to the microphone. He had a weekly fireside chat that encouraged the people and I remember him saying, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." He was always encouraging that way so he built the moral of the country as well. He was just a wonderful president.

BH: During the war, for instance, you were talking about how there was a shortage of labor so you had women come to work for you in the dairy. Did you notice with the business, did it slow down during the war or did it pick up or was it pretty much the same?

EJ: Pretty much the same. People had to have milk.

BH: That's true. Did you notice any differences in Idaho Falls during the war besides the shortage of labor?

EJ: No there were no plants there.

BH: Did you notice any difference on University Campuses?

EJ: Only that young men were drafted. It took a lot of young men to help England. We were fighting two fronts, the Japanese in the east and over in Europe. It was a terrible time. There is one thing I want to say before I stop. This war between right and wrong has never stopped. Today we have an insidious battle going on with Satan. He wants to invade our homes through television or through the network stations and wants to put bad ideas into the minds of our children. We have a different battle going on right now. He is after the souls of men harder than ever before. We are not through with fighting for the right. We have to keep that in mind. Be constantly on the alert for this terrible, bad

influences—pornography and whatever else. Bad movies and bad music is all Satan's work.

BH: That is true. Did you know anyone that fought in the war? Did you have friends or family members that fought in the war?

EJ: Yes. Owen's nephew went over there.

BH: Owen is your husband?

EJ: Yes. He came back with hearing difficulties because of the big noise with the shots and the cannons and all that.

BH: Did you hear from him while he was out?

EJ: Then we had a brother-in-law who had a helmet that he brought home and there was a mark from a bullet in his helmet. That is how close he came to getting it while he was over in France. But I didn't have any brothers in the war. My husband didn't have to go,

BH: I bet that was nice.

EJ: Yes, he was needed more here.

BH: Do you remember learning about the concentration camps and what Hitler was doing over there? Do you remember your reactions?

EJ: Yes, that was horrifying. That was about the worst that you can imagine. Those poor Jews just starving them to death and then putting them in box cars and taking them to a place where they were gassed. Isn't that awful? It was the American's that went in and rescued them and opened up that secret. I hope we don't have to go through that in the world.

BH: I agree. Did you notice any changes in the country after World War II?

EJ: No, it seemed like we recovered. The president did everything possible to help the poor people and it just seemed like we had resilience. And we just came back and were an industrial country again. I can't remember any of that except that we had been through a terrible thing.

BH: How did your religious beliefs help you during this time?

EJ: Well, the soldiers were in our prayers. We felt like the right would prevail.

BH: Is there anything that you wish you would have known during World War II that you didn't find out until afterwards?

EJ: I think we were pretty well informed. We all depended on radio.

BH: Now the radio brought you news on a regular basis?

EJ: Yes, and when you go to the shows they had current news there on the screen. Every picture show had that news so the people were well informed.

BH: Are there any on those newsreel that stand out in your mind?

EJ: Well when the three leaders met they had that on the newsreel. I thought that was pretty remarkable.

BH: Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin?

EJ: Yes.

BH: How did you talk to your kids about what was going on?

EJ: Oh, they were pretty little.

BH: So you didn't have to talk about it much?

EJ: No, my family was young. This is different than the First World War.

BH: How was it different than the First World War?

EJ: We had to go without sugar, and we were gathering up tin foil and pieces of metal for them to make flack with you know. It was different. I think we felt the lack of things more in the First World War.

BH: Did you look at the enemy different in World War I? Was it the same kind of feeling?

EJ: The same thing.

BH: You had more material goods during World War II?

EJ: Yes.

BH: How about food, did you notice a difference?

EJ: We didn't lack for food.

BH: Somebody mentioned to me that they used to have tokens that you could turn in for food. Was that in World war II?

EJ: I never had food stamps. I never had to deal with that. I suppose that we had to have something to get sugar because it was rationed.

BH: All right, I guess we will close this up and thank you for allowing us to talk about your experiences during World War II.