Edith Page – Life during WWII

By Edith Page

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Oral Interview conducted by Karen Wilding

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Brigham Young University – Idaho
EP: Where I was born?

KW: Yes, where were you born?

EP: I was born in Pleasant View, Weber County, Utah. That is near Ogden and west of North Ogden. February 24, 1928 a home delivery. Grant K. Bartlett from Ogden delivered me. Okay.

KW: And how old were you on December 7, 1941?

EP: I was 13 years old.

KW: And where were you living then?

EP: I was living at 449 2nd street in Ogden. We had just been through the depression and we had lost our home, our farm in Pleasant View Utah. And I can remember my mother and father losing their cattle during the depression time. In fact, they lost everything they had to move to on 2nd street because that was the only home they get with what they had left. The gatherings of taxes during the depression era.

KW: And what do you remember about December 7th 1941?

EP: I was listening to the New York Philharmonic. It use to come on every Sunday at 1:00. And they broke into the broadcasting system to announce that Pearl Harbor had just been bombed. And so, but at the time my mother was bedfast she had stroke, a massive stroke, five years before that when I was eight years old. She had taken us up to the hospital to have my sister, Sally, and my tonsils taken out. No one came to get us the next day we stay over night. Dad finally came. He says mother had had a stroke that night and was in bed really sick. At this time December the 7th, this was six years before December the 7th, and December the 7th she was laying in bed bedfast in our living room on an old leather davenport. That folded down into a bed like the modern day sofas that folded down into a couch. She was very helpless. She had strokes periodically, they didn’t have physical therapy like they do today, that they get them up and start walking, she’d just lie in bed and every once in a while she’d have a new stroke, another stroke. It took her left side… her right side and her speech. She’d get better and we would walk her around and take her for walks up the street then she’d have another stroke. And then during that time when she did become ill like that my dad would just scream; you could hear him scream. He would wake up during the night; she’d had another stoke so that was about it. My first four brothers were away from home there were just four of us left at home. Well, five of us left at home because my fourth brother, fifth brother was going to Weber College at the time. He joined the air force and became a pilot officer and served as an instructor down in Texas.

KW: So what did you think when you heard about the attack?
EP: Well, it was very upsetting but I didn’t realize that it was going to incur around the Ogden area. People were just sort of dumbstruck; at first they didn’t know which way to move. We didn’t have defense areas in Utah at all. Now that goes to the next question what happen to… let’s see?

KW: What was your image of Hitler and Mussolini?

EP: We hated him terribly. First to Hitler, about that time I was taking German in high school. I wanted to take German instead of Latin because I someday wished that I could go over there and see the country and listen to the Beethoven and the other Symphonies I had heard for years on the radio. And then our German teacher had served a mission in Germany and he told us how beautiful it was over there before war. And Mussolini, I thought he was just a scrumpy little man that didn’t have too much sense. Then later one of my fourth brother went over there serving in war time was an infantry man. So, we didn’t think much about the Italians.

Leann Page: Didn’t he serve in North Africa then he went over and served in Salerno?

EP: Uh-huh and he went to Beach Head. Kay, what’s the next one?

KW: What is your opinion of Japanese or Germans now?

EP: They’re just like we are no problem now, but during the war there was a lot of indifference with the Italians and Germans both. When the war started we got the Italian prisoner of war and the German prisoners of war in the Ogden area. They took them down to the army depot, the ordinance depot they called it, and they worked for us. Making army supplies but the United States, Ogden city especially were very kind to them. They would let them get on the bus. They earned their money working and they go down to Ogden for shows and go up to the White City to dance. I think we were pretty good to them.

KW: But they were Prisoners of war?

EP: Yes.

KW: So did they stay in a prison?

EP: No, they stayed in barracks. It wasn’t a prison situation. It was no different than the Japanese internees. We had both camps there. We had a Japanese interment camp and it seem like they had barbwire all over there.

LP: Were they were worse off than the Germans?

EP: They were. They really were worse off, the Germans internees, I mean the Japanese internees. The Germans and the Italians just had it real easy. And later on the Japanese eyes… when I went into training at Holy Cross hospital we had one of the students from
one of those Japanese internment camp. She was very bitter; she just wouldn't participate in much because she felt so ashamed. But she later graduated and went on to marry a doctor and they live in Hawaii. But you could see the bitterness. The differences between us. And then later when I was married and my husband was at Travis Air Force base the first subject of first credit I earned was in political science. And this teacher was from Arkansas and he said that was the worst thing we could have ever done to the country was to put those Japanese people in internment camps and take all their property away from them.

LP: Was this when you were going to school in... was it in Nampa or was it...?

EP: No, it was in Fairfield.

LP: Solano?

EP: Solano, where the Air Force Base was.

LP: They were having courses up on the base?

EP: Yeah, they didn’t have school facilities so we went at the beam hall.

LP: Extension programs.

EP: Extension... The college, Solano College was in Halayo. But we had more courses all in classrooms.

KW: I didn’t realize they had Prisoners of war right in Utah.

EP: Didn’t ya? Oh yes, they were all over. And then also I added on the seventh page we had Bushnell hospital there in Brigham City. It was a huge military hospital, where they were sending the boys that came home from the front with limbless, amputated arms and legs. There were a lot of these boys that would get on the bus and come down to Ogden to see shows and participate in our society. Bushnell was a huge, huge hospital where they’d send all the boys from overseas especially in the south pacific. It was later turned into a museum. Now just, there’s nothing there but a few buildings. Plus, there was something else that they had in Ogden that I forgot about. The internment camps, relocation centers, I’ve told you about that. Okay next.

KW: How did your life change as a result of WWII?

EP: Well, it changed so darn much. I can’t believe I had to dig through my mind. I had to get all these memories. And yet it was the most exciting time of my life really because the world was, was close. The people wanted to fight this war and they get it over with. So, we could have peace. They were really concentrating and supporting the war effort. First of all hill field came to Beam and army depot was there, navy depot was there. And these were all built right after Pearl Harbor day so they were busy, one busy day.
KW: Were they built in time to use before the war ended?

EP: Oh yes, they were built within a year because they had to have supplies and they had
to have planes and everything to fight the war with. And how did it affect me? It affected
the whole country because see all the big ship yards were in California. And after my
mother died, she died ‘43. Because the boys came home, the four boys were in the
service. Four brothers, I had six brothers and four were in the service so they came home
in uniform to come to the funeral. They didn’t have money because they were just getting
ready, you know new uniforms and their new coats that they had. So anyway, where am I
at? Senior moment, I can’t remember where I’m at. Oh, they came home to mother’s
funeral and then after that my dad married, mother died in February. My dad married
another woman that he worked with down at defense ordinance depot. He was married by
spring. At the old home he decided to make three rooms out of two with his new wife. He
wanted more room, so he took out the partition in the middle of two bedrooms to make
three. But he and his wife, new wife decided that they wanted to go to California and
work in the ship yards to make more money so they could open a store up Grand
Junction. So, he left me; I was fourteen by that time and my sister was sixteen and my
brother was eighteen, the last boy was twenty-one he was going to Weber College. So, he
left us alone those years.

KW: So, did you continue living in the house?

EP: We continued living in the house. That first winter was kind of hard because the
snow came down through the open. He hadn’t closed the roof, so it came down right into
the house. My brother came out and put tin up. But the next year in ‘43 my one brother
moved out to take care of us. He was newly married had one child. But he didn’t like it
out there so he moved. Then the youngest brother came out fixed the roof and remodeled
the house and he and his wife and family lived with us. By that time I was working at the
hospital, Thomas Dee Dee hospital, after school and my sister, Sally, work at Austin
Jacks. That was a restaurant in Ogden. The third youngest was working on 2nd street by
ordinance depot. And my fourth brother was going to college. We all had jobs after
school. Something like the Harts right?

KW: Yeah.

EP: So, let’s see what was the next question?

KW: How did you contribute as an individual in your community to the war effort?

EP: Oh goodness. We saved tin cans and string and all these different scraps. You know
another war project effort and we contributed to that. My dad always had a pile of things
around the house. You know that he torn apart. And my brothers had cars that they torn
apart. I worked in the hospital when I was fourteen started for 35 cent an hour. And I’d
go after school and worked for four hours from four to eight or four to ten. Four to six
hours making 35 cents an hour and at that time, the time I started working at fourteen
they had a lot of war brides that were having babies. You know every one was getting married before they went over seas. They had wards up at the old Dee hospital, seventeen or eighteen women in these wards. The woman had a nursery, well this was after the war. Later on they built a new part and they had three floors of women who’d just had babies and nurseries at each end. So, there was always a new baby and a new mother. But they kept them in bed for ten to fourteen days so you had to go in and give them prairie care. When I got there before we’d have to give them what we could. So, it took all we had to take care of those women. They had T-binders and breast binders. We use to have to pin the breast binders with safe pins, the old type. So then their milk would come in and they’d have support. Then the t-bone binders would hold the. I worked there until I graduated from high school. What happened at high school, Miss Ballinger, we had only one woman teacher. She was very good. She took me one day and asked me what I wanted to do with life. Because she could see what was happening to my personal life. My sister who at that time, there was no supervision, so she was going out with the boys and didn’t know what she wanted to do and she almost didn’t graduate because she wasn’t ready too. She was just a party girl having too much fun. So she (Miss Ballinger) said,” Why don’t you take some extra classes and graduate in a year so you can get into nurses training class in January?” So that’s what I did. I took organic chemistry before inorganic chemistry and it really fooled me up. I never did understand chemistry. So, I did that and by January I was ready to go on to nurses training. We had to have $250 for tuition. Then we were sent to St. Mary’s the Wasatch College up in the foothills of Salt Lake to go have our first 6 months for oh, what do you call it?

LP: Your class work.

EP: Yeah, class work.

LP: As opposed to clinicals.

EP: Yeah, we went to clinicals at Holy Cross hospital six months after. It was really a different culture. That is we’d been raised in an LDS church and this was you know masses and ‘Hail Mary’s.’

LP: You stayed in dorms?

EP: In dorms. Yes, Dorms consisted of six of us in each dorm. And there were only I think eight of us in the total class. We second part of another class that started in September. But see that was a college and an academy. They’d have children first grade and up through high school and then the college. And these little children were boarded there you know they were sent from Nevada, all parts of the western area. And there would be a nun or sister in each dorm then five other young students. Anyway.

KW: What did you do to entertain yourself during war time?

EP: Oh gosh, we went to dances, movies, dances. There was always some dance going on. They had the… people went to the jazzy bands and enjoyed them in that day. I know
my brothers; we didn’t have television in that day. We depended so much on radio. In fact, that was the big band era. In fact, my brothers would wash their cars outside on the front lawn and have their portable radios out there with that swing music on all the time. And that was quite often because they were just young and dating then. What else?

LP: Did you date?

EP: Oh yeah, but I was trying to think what else. Oh swimming, hiking. We just did a lot of hiking. The foothills of Ogden were just close. So, we did a lot of hiking, skating, sledding down 2nd street hill, because it was so steep. Oh, what else? We just had a lot of fun. There a group of us on that block. We were all about the same age and we just had outdoor fun. There was a hot springs up near Brigham City that we went to. It was it never got dull, it was never dull in Ogden there was always you could always pick up a job. We always had part time jobs in the canning factories or in the frozen food companies. There was just a lot to do. And before that the big, I worked for a when I was five. My sister use to kid me. She says “Edith she had a job when she was five years old.” She earned 3 dollars. And how many days in a year?

LP: 65.

EP: $3.65 a year working for this neighbor.

LP: A penny a day.

EP: A penny a day. But Wandgsgard store is still there at Five Points in Ogden. So, we were kept busy. We had fun.

KW: What kind of food did you have?

EP: Food?

LP: Not as much as Dad’s family.

EP: No, not as much as my husband’s family. Dad when he left to go to California, we four that were left at home, then three, then Sally and I were left alone the last years before she married and I went off to school. We ate where we worked. Each one of us had a part time job where we could eat food where we worked. I ate hospital food a lot. If there was a tray that wasn’t eaten, we’d eat the tray or off of the tray. I can remember coming home and our cupboards were always bare. We never had, we might have had bread and butter, but it was things like that. But it was mostly bare. My brother would get a can of Franco American spaghetti and eat it. It was just more or less. I’d even boil bread and milk when we were out of everything. Boiled bread and milk was good. You ever had it?

KW: No I haven’t.
EP: You just you know boil your milk and let it boil with the bread for a little while. It’s delicious.

KW: I’ll have to try it.


KW: Yeah.

EP: In this marriage.

KW: So, were you affected by rations?

EP: Oh yes, sugar. Of course it didn’t affect us too much more. Getting hosiery at that time because we were rationed for that. Tires, it affected my father and brothers because they had cars. I took the bus all the time for five cents. It took me everywhere I wanted to go in Ogden. It was the hosiery. They would have little areas in Penny’s where they would patch hosiery, believe it or not. You didn’t throw them away you took them down there and they had a little, it looked like a shoe horn, round, oval, it was more egg shaped, and they’d put the sock up in there and patch it with a little needle. They’d patch the runs.

KW: So, the next one was.

EP: Does that about answer that question?

KW: Yeah, the next one was what do you remember about rations but I think we’ve covered that. How did the war affect your community?

EP: Oh my goodness at first when all these military bases started coming in we thought oh my gosh this influx of people; they’re going to be like the Oakley city arkies and they’re just going to ruin our community. You know, we were a peaceful religious, well not as religious as Salt Lake, community. And we didn’t want the trash to come pouring in you know. But later on it was the best thing that ever happen because everything opened up and the people turned out to be better than they thought they were going to be. We got new friends in school and they were interesting; it worked out fine.

KW: Did you know any young men that didn’t return from war?

EP: Not in our immediate family they didn’t. All my brothers returned, cousins returned. I didn’t have a boyfriend then; I was too busy working and going to school. But after the war in 1950 the Pilot brother, the brother that was a pilot went on to, well, I had two brothers go back to Universities after the GI bill came out. Morgan went to University of California and became an architect.

LP: At Berkley?
EP: At Berkley and the pilot brother went on to Purdue to become an Aeronautical engineer. When he graduated he was still in the reserve. He was in Indianan by Patterson in Ohio where he received his reserve training. He was flight engineer on the first jet, the Canberra jet, that came over from England. He was a project engineer and he went up the canopy didn’t open. So, he well he actually drowned over Chesapeake Bay in the Boston area and he died.

LP: Do you mean Delaware?

EP Yeah, Delaware sorry. So, he died. He left three children expecting his fourth.

KW: And he was still in the reserve?

EP: The reserve uh-huh.

KW: So what was it like having all the young men gone, your brothers gone?

EP: Well, it was just really, not normal. But like I say the stream of people coming from the hospital up there, there were always people at dances, you know intermittently. It was strange because my brothers were all gone. And like I said mother had died by then and Dad was in San Diego. And then they started, the boys in high school starting signing up for the service. So, I was a junior by then and the seniors it seemed like most of them were signed up to be in the service of some kind. My yearbook shows the number of students, number of boys that signed up. It was a different type of a situation.

KW: Did four brothers serve in the Military?

EP: Yes.

KW: So, two of them did air force?

EP: Yes.

KW: So, what did the other two do?

LP: One was infantry, one was Army Air Core, well three were Army Air Core.

Inaudible.


LP: Uncle Inaudible… war administration. Didn’t he work in Washington DC?

EP: Yes, he worked in Washington DC. So, he was deferred by that time. They had a child that was mother and father’s first grandchild. I guess they could get deferred because they had children. I know your grandfather got deferred because he had two children. They were deferred if they had children.
KW: So in what ways did you keep in touch with your brothers?

EP: By letter, when Don was in England he sent Email believe or not. It was cute it had a little cartoon of an Army man. They started Email then believe it or not. It was about ‘43.

LP: Was that Western Union?

EP: No, it was email it was just a cute little card with little cartoons around it. He could write on it but it was copied with a copy machine, believe it or not, way back then.

LP: Didn’t he send you and Sally handkerchiefs?


LP: ‘Cause I’ve got one that belonged to Sally.


LP: Yeah.

EP: So, we communicated. Phone wasn’t, we didn’t communicate by phone very much. Because I know my German neighbor she had a telephone first and she let me use her phone all those years.

KW: Did you share a line?

EP: No she just had a line, I went over there and she just let me use her phone. We couldn’t afford one. Sally and I couldn’t afford one.

KW: How did school change?

EP: School change?

KW: Yeah, like the subjects. Did they change what they were teaching?

EP: No, they didn’t change the subjects, but they did change like I said, they change me getting done faster. Your generation has gotten out midyear and even before, now and going to college classes now. So, that was a new idea for that time. Not many quit midyear and went on to college. There was hardly anyone that did that. So, that changed. And school of course, there were always current events. We always had to bring current events that was happening in the war, which was good, for our first class period. And we had pledge of Allegiance that meant an awful lot to us then. Maybe not now but it meant a lot then.

KW: It should but it doesn’t.
EP: What else?

KW: What was work like for women?

EP: Oh goodness, they could get any job they wanted in the Ogden area, Salt Lake area. Most everyone had a job. They took them at the ordinance depot, the army depot, to make you know uniforms and tents and all sorts of things down there where my dad was employed. At the navy depot goodness any secretary in the world they would hire. And then see they got good wages they got retirement. Let’s see there was arsenal on 2nd street. So, there were four large companies there to employ people. There was no need to move out of Ogden. It seems there was enough in the surrounding areas, Brigham City and Plain City in all those areas. So, they all got work Rosie the Riveter I guess. I mean we didn’t have big airplane or shipyard type.

LP: Like they did in California.

EP: Yeah, like they did in California. So, there was plenty.

KW: So, I think we’ve kind of talked about this, how did your town change because of the war. It’s kind of like how your community.

EP: Yeah uh-huh, New people coming in, building, construction. They put in a lot of government housing in those days. We got married in ‘47 so we lived in government housing area in Clearfield.

KW: So, your husband served in WWII?

EP: Yes.

KW: Did you know him then?

EP: No not until ‘47.

LP: Dad got drafted in 1943 with eleven other guys that only had one eye. And initially when the war started he was turn down to be adducted or drafted. And they gave him his physical and it was, was it 4F because of his eye?


LP: He was blind in one eye it had to do with a childhood accident when he was five. And so he only had one eye so they 4Fed him. But later on they called him up along with eleven other guys with only one eye and they drafted them in ‘43. They didn’t call them to serve over seas and so they sent him to inaudible where pacific students boot and when he was finished with his boot camp. They sent him across to Felltesswa field and put him
through school to become an airplane mechanic. Then I know he went to Washington, and to Air Field, Colorado. And all those, wasn’t he finishing in Colorado?

EP: Yes.

LP: He served in ’43 and ’44. Inaudible… he had a brother-in-law, his youngest sister’s husband that went over seas and was in the marines for two years. And was in the first waves they sent in to Iwo Jima. He was one of only five that survived the first wave into Iwo Jima, that first wave onto the island. And he was the only one that didn’t get a Purple Heart because he wasn’t wounded. He was the only one of the five that wasn’t injured. He went on, in that two year period, to serve in Tarawa, Okinawa, and Nagasaki.

EP: He served in the south pacific.

LP: Yeah, he saw some pretty unbelievable fighting. After the war my father worked at the base at Travis, my uncles Joe and Uncle Don both worked at Inaudible… Mom’s oldest brother was an administrator.

EP: We covered all the background of airline. I guess everyone did that wanted a decent job. That’s about it isn’t it?

KW: There the last one. What are some of the most vivid memories of the World War II experience that stand out?

EP: Well, the people were very close and very united in that war. It’s not like the Korean or the Vietnam War. There was a cause and people responded. There was no argument about going into the service then you know when they were drafted. It was a fair, it wasn’t a fair war but the people thought it was. They wanted to do what they could. See, we losing the war the first two years because we hadn’t built up for it. So, it took awhile for all these bases to come in all over the country and get started.

LP: They had to rebuild ships; they had to rebuild the air force.

EP: Yeah, yeah, after they got the best part of our defense you know at Pearl Harbor. So, yes it was a very learning experience. A very personal experience because of my mother being so ill and the family sort of disintegrated after she died. We never did have that closeness again. My dad married three times and he was never a father after he left. We sort of managed our own lives.

LP: Your first security was Dad.

EP: My first security was my husband.

KW: How did you two meet?
EP: We met on a blind date. See, they use to call up the nursing dorms and ask for dates, no fooling. All these young men coming home from the service they were in boarding houses up in Salt Lake, you know, getting a job. Because there wasn’t anything in Roosevelt to speak of then it wasn’t the oil boom time. Like every ten years. Who was it? Some other fellow called me and I said no, I won’t go with you but have you got a friend?

LP: Was that Walt?

EP: Yeah Walt or Dave?

LP: Dave?

EP: Yeah it was Dave.

LP: See Dad and Dave grew up together in Roosevelt.

EP: See, they were buddies in Roosevelt and had come out to Salt Lake to get work. And Dave called me up and I said no have you got a friend. The next thing I know my husband, we went the University use to have the most beautiful rose garden. We didn’t a car or money so we use to sit there and talk about things. Then he took me out to his family and introduced me to them out in Roosevelt. I thought I was going to New Mexico for sure. Roosevelt was ugly. I didn’t think I was still in Utah. I met his folks and they were all so kind to me. There was never any hassle, his mother just took me and trained me how to cook and clean and sew. And make coats out of old coats that they had. She was Relief Society President for how many years?

LP: Seventeen.

EP: Seventeen. See they didn’t.

LP: During the depression.

EP: See, they didn’t terminate them at five. They were a nice family they treated me with respect. It was just nice to have a family again, that were so normal. Well, anyway that’s how we meet and we were married 49 years. He died six months before our fiftieth. One good son got all mixed up and sent us a fiftieth anniversary present, crystal; it’s in there the vase. I had a very secure life with him. We argued a lot. But we were both so poor. But we worked hard. What we did was we came up from Roosevelt when his youngest sister, who was my age, got married. And we came up to Salt Lake and when they left to go home to Roosevelt we walked pass a bus depot. There was a sign up there that said Los Angeles $12 or something. And Morris just happened to have $50 so he says I’ve got a sister down in Santa Monica. So, we got on board this bus to Santa Monica and stayed with his sister for two weeks. And got a job at North American Aviation, he got one in sheet metal for $1.25. And I got one in the blueprint area for $.90. So we got our first
apartment, had our first baby the first year, Maureen. But first moved into a home with a Jewish family after the two weeks with his sister.

LP: Is this where they…

EP: Peeked in through the.

LP: Also boiled the chicken feet.

EP: Oh yeah with legs on them, feet. We moved into this, they had a room for $40 a month and we were both working so. We paid for the room that had a ¾ size bed in it and a chest of drawers and we were happy at work. There was an ocean park and this little Jewish family that said that we could have kitchen privileges. They use to boil chicken you know for soup and leave the feet in the pot. I guess it’s their culture. Let’s see it was actually a back room off the bathroom and they had a young boy and a young girl there she was rising. And this boy was in high school but he use to peek in. There was a window there and the curtain didn’t quite fit the top. I don’t know how long he peeked in on us before I realized he was peeking. So that was our life, we worked and made enough money to get a house full of furniture and move to Roosevelt in three years. Then we later went back to the temple before Ruth was born, our second child. We got busy going to mutual. The church was, the churches are just nice out there in the mission field. So, we got active, went to the temple, came back to Utah, lived in another house that didn’t have a bathroom in it.

LP: You had an outhouse?

EP: Yes, now this is 1950. The same time Verga and John didn’t have a bathroom with their seven children.

LP: Well, they didn’t get one until the ‘60s. I remember that, we use to bathe in number three tubs with all their kids.

WP: We did. See we’d go out to see grandma and grandpa every month it seemed like and Morris didn’t let me stay home with the kids he’d make me go out here with him. But they’d send some of the kids to John and Verga’s. Verga graduated with your grandpa from BYU. She was a math genius. She’d married John because they went to California to work at Douglass but she did not want to raise her children in California. So, they lived like until they had the seventh in the ‘60s then they got their bathroom.

LP: But, I remember when we’d still use the outhouse.

EP: When it’s would get busy. You don’t want to know any more do ya. Oh please. It was up hill all the way after that. So, that the story of my life.

KW: Well, thanks I appreciate you taking your time.