RUTH GLADSTONE

This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri of the 1940s* program. The Nodaway County Historical Society Museum is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Today's date is March 11, 2009, and this interview is being conducted at the Worth County Senior Center in Worth County, Missouri. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. Today we are interviewing Ruth Gladstone and her birth date was July 7, 1920, and she served in the war in World War II during the 1940s and she was in the Navy and they were called the Waves,

WACS- that was what they called them back then.

Well, you'll have to explain that here in a little bit. Okay, first off, Ruth, I'd like you to tell us a little bit about your background. Can you tell us where and when you were born, some of you family, like your parents occupations, how many brothers and sisters you had ; tell us a little bit about them.

Well, I come from Wellesley, Massachusetts, with the Women's College is, that you may know about, but I was born in the city of Boston, and we moved to Wellesley, and I had three brothers and my mother and dad met on board the ship coming over and were married many years before we were born. Then we – I lived all my life in Wellesley, and I went into the Navy in 1942 as a WAVE with a physical therapy background. I became a physical therapist in the Navy, had a very happy time and I would recommend the Navy to anyone at that time. But I first went to Bethesda, Maryland, which everyone knows about because of the closeness to Washington, D. C. I was one of the very few WAVES that they got there, and I took training there and stayed there for probably six or eight months. We used to hop into Washington to see what was going on, of course. Then I was transferred to a new nurse center in Jamaica, New York, out on Long Island. At the time that I went to this post, or place, they had just the twelve of us WAVES and we were housed in the nurses' quarters with them, and we were new and novel to the hospital, so we got pretty much our come-up-ance; somebody might now like it. I stayed there and was a total of five and a half years in the service. While I was in the service, I had made up my mind I was not going to be like so many girls and marry the service that I met and not know whether his mother was what! I finally – Bill and I went together for a long time, and I came out here in the summer of 48 to a farm that his family had had. As a matter of fact, our farm is over 125 years old, and we are one of those that the Missouri Extension Office gave us a nice big sign. It was a new experience to come to a farm, and farm. Our first little tractor was a little eight end Ford that costs us a thousand dollars. Can you believe you could buy a tractor and then a plow for that? I had five children and only two of them lived to adulthood. Knocks Church on 169 Highway, which is a country church, is where we had our 130th Anniversary. There was a strong family connection there with my husband's relatives building that church, and I think that's kind of an interesting role. It's my mind jumps from one thing to another, so this might not be very good interviewing. Then I raised the children there and they both had went to college at Northwest Missouri where my husband went back to teaching after we'd farmed a while and he was at the college in Creston, Iowa, and in our local schools. Everyone knew Bill Gladstone; I don't know if it was by good or reputation. Not one bad; he was a wonderful guy. Any time any one says

would you like to go back to the city or the town? It only had ten thousand people when we lived there now it's got thirty-five thousand, so it's not really- it's just a little town, but anyway, I love Missouri. I like the people; I like everything about Northwest Missouri except the convenience for the Swishy stores. Actually, as I say, I had a very, very, wonderful Navy career, and it is where I did meet my husband, and came to Missouri. Let's see what else about the Navy?

Well, we'll get to that in a second. Can you tell us more about life in 1940 before you went to the Navy? What was it like?

I graduated from a local high school in Wellesley, and you know when I think back to those days, we had, and this might not go over very well; we had one colored boy in our class. There were still no colored people living in the town where I was raised. But do you know that boy was so outstanding that he was elected president for our class for three years? I think that's . . . . And I'm sure now. . . . I haven't been back in five or ten years, so I'm sure; but I thought that was interesting when, you know, because we've had so much history of the black and white and those kinds of things. He was just as accepted as ever there was. I went to school. At one time we lived quite close to the train that went into Boston and my mother's threat when we would be walking to school, which was 9/10th of a mile, is don't go on the railroad tracks. But three brothers and myself, we'd get up there and instead of crossing under the undercross, we would go over where the railroad track is. Doesn't this sound like typical kids? We went across – we would walk the railroad tracks to school. It was shorter, and it was more fun. But oh my mother! As I say, my parents were both British, and had met on the ship coming over. We walked 9/10th of a mile to school, though, and we went home for lunch, and we walked back and we got out of school at 3:30 in the evening, and we walked home again. Now the kids here can't walk two blocks! As I say, after that I went to school and then I had a job in Swanscut, Massachusetts, with a physical therapy doctor and physical therapy at that time forty-some was – I don't know how to equate it with something in today. It was sort of a new method and we'll try it and all. Of course it became and is today a big profession; a physical therapist is. I worked there and then two of my brothers had already gone to the service and then I came along and my dad; and I said "I don't want to go!" My dad had said, "Oh, no, the boys are gone" and that was when the WACs were at the time when we went into the service very early on but they would send them overseas. Promising my dad I wouldn't go overseas, I joined the Navy instead of the Army as a physical therapist.

So your brothers joined the Army?

Yes. And then one was in what they called the Ambulance Corp in Florida, which picked up the injured veterans and took them to the various hospitals. Actually I never figured out whether he was in the Army or he just worked.

Let's talk a little bit about propaganda.

Now what do you call propaganda?

Okay. Well, what were they saying about the war? What were they saying on the radios, and what was the government saying about the war in Europe and in China? What were they telling the people back home? What was going on?

Well, you know, I don't remember that we didn't have a get in there and fight and do whatever you can; we went through the depression, and the rationing, and the no gas and all those kind of things, but people just seemed to take it. That's part of the deal; we've got to win! We're big stuff here in America, and we've got to win. There wasn't this – and I had the feeling about this war: What are we doing here? And maybe you did to, but anyway, there wasn't the same feeling then. Of course we did have the draft back then too, and some of the boys had to go, which is has been in this current war they haven't but I never remember the animosity from people to the government or the services. Everybody was in the pot, it seemed like. As I say, I have only my pot from a small town to being in the service, but there wasn't that feeling. I never did get that attitude; even rationing. There wasn't all this mmmmmm; it was just a nice feeling okay, you don't have sugar? I'll share you two teaspoons of mine; which you doled out two teaspoons. I don't recall like having the same feeling about World War II that I've had about this recent one. I'm not a very good propaganda storyteller. I had such a nice career. Well, I was in with doctors, and one of our doctors and I was working with him very closely, and he developed the plasma grow force; putting nerves together and growing the boys when they'd come back, which was a burn center and it was very interesting and he developed the plasma to glue the nerves together. Of course, it all depended how bad the nerve was injured, but that was most of his development and he became a big surgeon in New York City. I feel as though it was kind of a privilege to be there and work with him in that. With the plasma glue was a great deal of physical therapy, but you know, physical therapy has come on to its own since then. We don't have; I go into physical therapy and somebody said to me the other day coming back to work. I said I wouldn't know how, now. We had Harvard tanks, and whirlpools and wax therapy and all kinds of things that they. . . . I think they have some whirlpool now in the thing, but I don't. . . . not very much. As I say, I was just one of the lucky ones that never had a bad encounter in the service. It doesn't give you a very glowing report that way, but it was an interesting . . . . I would recommend it to these children that are young people who are getting out of school now, they go to college, and it wasn't what they need, or wanted, they get in the wrong thing, and they just go ---------and that's the end of it. A year in the service and the discipline would help a lot of that because they would grow up and have more mature thinking. That's another story because they just, you know, it's just too bad that so many of them are lost in the education world, with misguiding.

How about Pearl Harbor? Do you remember the attack and what you were doing?

Yes, I do, and yet no I don't. Now that's a dumb answer, I realize, but I remember Pearl Harbor very well. We went there on a trip to Hawaii and went to Pearl Harbor because my husband, of course, is a Navy veteran, too. But you know where I was or what I was doing, I think I was riding the train to Boston to Wellesley where I went to school but I don't remember until the next day. Then I, of course everybody did, but just right the first news, I can't remember. My ticker's gone bad.

Let's get back to when you . . . were you drafted or did you enlist?

Oh, yes, and everybody in the women's part of the service was at that time was enlisted, yes.

Do you remember how old you were and what year?

You had to be to be in the WAVES at that time you had to be twenty-one years old. It was in 1941. The thing with my dad which I told a minute ago was don't go overseas, and that's one why I did, but it was an interesting life.

Could you tell us more about what the WAVES did? What was their. ...

Well, we went to a beginning training session; they had a name for it, boot camp. That was it. The one that we went to was Hunter College in New York, where I went. We stayed there to get indoctrinated into the Navy. Of course when you go into the Navy everybody – there's no liars, there's no cheaters, there's no stealers, there's no murderers, you know. Nobody is that way. Well, I got awakened with there were stealers and of course we had to label everything, you know, even your toothbrush or anything. Then it was from boot camp in New York that I went to Bethesda, Maryland, and that was more schooling and training for hospital work as I went in as, and then they transferred to me as one of the first twelve WAVES to go up to Jamaica, Long Island, New York, to St. Alban's Hospital, but it was an interesting thing in that there was so much to learn because, as I've said twice before, physical therapy was not a big thing. Of course there weren't too many WAVES at that time. It was just the beginning of the Navy taking women into the service. The WACS had been there for quite a while. Then the Marines came quite soon; the women Marines. What was their names in the service? What did they call the women Marines? The WACS and the WAVES and the Marines, and the Coast Guard started taking women into the service. It was a very broadening experience for me because I had been raised- I don't know if you'd call it sheltered, but you know, everybody was your kind of people, and then you got in with different kinds. I don't need to mention them. I learned a lot about people in the service. I had a nice career. The early part of the war, well, we were on trial by our shifts every day and then we'd get a 72, what we called a 72 which is Friday, Saturday, Sunday, then you'd go into New York City for a shower or something like that. You really don't know too much what is going on in the world because you're right there with your people, and as I say, it was a burn hospital; burn and nerves. Full to the capacity, and they're in the hallways. It was fun. Not fun, fun, but interesting fun. As I say I thought I had some much about the Navy and the service, but it seems when you retell it you forget some of the things, but I don't know as anything else happened in my Navy career.

What were some of the other duties that WAVES besides hospitals?

Well, in most of them, and you're going to interview one pretty quick. A lot of them did the secretarial work, the office work, anything that a woman could do that a man had done, they put them in the services, you know. We replaced men corpsmen, and then they went out, and when we first started going to the field to pick up the wounded veterans in the ambulance from the hospital, there were just men drivers, you know, and gurney men and those kinds of things. Well, it wasn't very long before the women were kind of into those kinds of things, and the men did more of the [pause] hard work I guess they like to think, and it was; it was.

Now was New York the only place you were stationed?

Five and a half years. Well, no – Bethesda, Maryland and Hunter College. Of course at the time they didn't let the WAVES go overseas. I don't know; Maybe Bernice whether they let the Coast Guard. I think that Bernice was in the Coast Guard, wasn't she?

I think she was.

And whether they went overseas or not, I don't remember.

Can you tell us a little bit about the servicemen that would come to your hospital?

Yes. They were sad, sad, a lot of them, sad, sad burn cases and paraplegics. A few of hemiplegics. Some venerable diseases, but a lot of them, you know, had come from one of the coast hospitals because they could get more care, better care, so they would bring them into out of the bigger hospitals like – what's the hospital in Washington, D.C. that they bring them up if they needed nerve or burn care, then they would put them into; they would bring them up to our hospitals. They would fly them in, of course, then we would go out with the ambulances from the hospital to get them to Bennett Field, New York. A lot of them were pretty sad and it was surprising how short a time they would be there and get care that they kind of mentally got better. You know, it's a very depressing thing to you physically and mentally when you were thinking: am I ever going to walk or they going to take my arm or my leg off and those kinds of things. But it wasn't very long we before they would be in a better mental state, if they were going to. Of course we had them that they didn't come back, but most of them did. Most of the things that we had at our hospital were burn and nerve injuries; you know, back injuries, broken arms and legs or very severely burned or . . . . Of course we had surgical units and a few of them were surgical cases, but they mainly put those. . . because the Navy kind of got them into specialist hospitals at that time, you know, this hospital was for orthopedics, this hospitals was for mental conditions, this hospital was for where I said ours was, the nerves and all.

Now you said your husband was a patient? Was he in there for a burn? How did you meet?

No, he was in there for back surgery. He was in tornado in Okinawa, and he had; he was skipper on a fleet of ships down there and they brought him back to California, then he was in one other hospital, then they brought him back. Anyway, back then when you had surgeries, some of them on the back, they use to take the discs out. Now they do something else. That was the third hospital he had been in for this back that got injured in this typhoon in Okinawa. Towards the end of the war, I don't know if it was politics or just what it was, but they were in no hurry to get you out of the hospital. I mean, he was there probably two years. I don't know, as I say he was the skipper on a ship, and a Worth County boy.

Did he see any combat?

Did he see? Yes, but when they put him as fleet commander for Okinawa, and that, he was – yes, they would mine sweep. He was in the mine sweeper area, so they would go in ahead of the

others to try to clear out the mines in the ocean, you know, so that the other ships could get in to land. So it was a little bit dangerous, but as far getting out there with a gun and shooting somebody, no, he didn't do that. He did this mine sweeping.

Let's talk a little bit about the end of the war and when all the men were coming home. Did you feel that President Truman did the right thing with the atomic bomb?

Yes, I do. I think it got to be the time when we played long enough. And I don't mean play in the literal sense, but this just didn't set our foot down and say this is going to be it. And I really am almost of the opinion that that's what we're going to have to do this time, of something drastic, I don't mean that, because they're trying to get nuclear energy out of the way. The end of the war in New York was kind of an interesting thing. You know you've all seen the picture of the sailor and the nurse – you know she's – anyway, it was; but there was such a peace came over the hospital after that; it was just oh! Just like that. Of course then everybody: I want to go home yesterday! But it wasn't ; there was a lot of celebrating before that particular day came, but you know, because of the boys as they'd come back why every ship was, or every train load was met with great crowds and joy and fun that they were back and they could. . . . I think maybe we saw a little different aspect of it than that because we were a hospital and most of our came in on gurneys or stretchers or in an ambulance or something like that, so we didn't have that same, but we went into New York every night. Have a good time, and bribes! Don't shut that thing off. You know the subways now in New York; I wouldn't ride those for anything! We used to go out at two and three and four o'clock in the morning, come out those subways by ourselves! I wouldn't do that now anymore than I'd fly to Guinea. Really! It's too dangerous. So we've gone from good to bad in that respect. There's so much crime.

Did you join the American Legion or the women's organization of the VFW?

Yes. As a matter of fact, I shouldn't tell this, but anyway, I was president of the VFW Auxiliary when it was established, and we had a lot of members and I stayed in it until oh, hot too long ago, I just sort of dropped out of the meetings. I think I was the first – wasn't I Opal? First president?

Probably. We were in it when it was first organized. I know Ernest and I were.

I never remember anybody else, particularly. . . .

I think you were one of the first ones.

I think I was. We do have a good VFW here, but and it's still going. I don't think there are any women connected with the American Legion, is there?

Not that I know of.

I don't know of any. As a matter of fact, come to think of it, all the veterans that I know that live in Worth County were not Army, they were – Bernice was Coast Guard, I was Navy, who else

was there? I can't think of them now, but Marines, but I don't know there was any Army. I'm a new person to town. Fifty-six years ago. New.

So after the war were you concerned about Communism? The threat of it?

No. It just wasn't that prominent at that time. I mean, Russia, yes, I mean the current news and stuff, but I think that all the service people were so glad to get home that you know, they didn't worry down the road. Plus the fact that when they came home they had to get a lot of them married, and homes, and jobs, and those kinds of things, and communism did not seem to come into play in our lives coming out of the service at the beginning. Of course as time went on, we got more settled down it became more of a problem but I don't know, I just have enough faith in America that we're just not going to let it happen.

Now, did you take advantage of the GI Bill for any of the – like education or housing, any of that stuff when you got. . . .

Yes, I did. We had a GI School here, up in our high school, which was right up there at the time, and my husband was coming to learn the agricultural field, because while he was raised on a farm, he was gone a lot of the time in the service, and I came too, and that's how I learned how to farm. We ended up with at one period of time we were raising chickens for the hatching eggs. My husband comes – you know how many eggs we're going to get tomorrow? And I said, no. Seven hundred. Oh! I almost dropped, period. Oh, it's been so; it's like I sent him for sheep. To clean up the yard, Richard knows that story. I said just get twelve or fifteen, just kind of a little thing to do; he comes home with fifty. I wonder why I stayed with him. No, he was – it was just some of the fun things that happened on the farm. It was a little bit of a shock to see fifty of them unload out of that truck. Then my son decided that he wanted to go to college, and wanted a car, but the car was more important, of course. So his dad said, "Well, you'll have do something to get you some money and get you a car, because this money's going to school." And he said, "Well, Mom could help me." Now this is this new farm girl, you know; anyway, he said, "If Mom would help me." So he was to feed them at night, and I was going to feed them in the morning, and that worked fine except he was quite an athlete, and night got to be way night. And guess who was doing it? Then they had to go to market. Where was my kid? School! I got so I could load them and take them to market and everything. Oh, I had fun on the farm. Those are just some of the funny instances that happen in farm life when you don't know. As I said, the farm is an old family farm, and it's been in the family – well, as a matter of fact, that's kind of an interesting story. My husband's relative who got the farm was in the Civil War, and he – when he came back, when he was getting mustered out, they said you can either have this plot of land, or $100. Now I don't know if you've been over where I live or not, probably have. Could you imagine that selling for a hundred dollars now? Huh-uh. So he says, anyway, he took the plot of land and that was the starting of course they added to it, but it was kind of interesting. A hundred dollars.

How many acres was this?

I think there was thirty or thirty-five at that time. Of course we had a little increasing since then, but that was what it was. Then as I said, I raised my children on the farm, and my great, great

grandchildren are coming back and starting cow herds and those kind of things now. It's been all this time since they had – well, this economy is a little bit shocking, and my daughter is a lawyer and an accountant, and she worked for a company; oh, they just had to have a lawyer and accountant, and sixteen years later they let her go. So, she said, well her husband said, "I don't want you to go back to work." So then they're coming into the cattle business and farming, and I think it's going to be quite an experience for them. And the other thing; and you tell Rick did that. We're going to try to clean up Worth. Yes, wow is right. My grandson's wife is real community minded, and she's studying to take her CPA exams. But anyway, she is working and she said the other day, "We're going to clean up Worth." When I came it was a pretty little town, oh, it was, and Saturday evening in Worth, now nobody in the town except the old people would know.