

Tape Transcription

WWII Experiences

Interviewer: Tina Bell (TB)

Interviewee: Mrs Rose Mary (Farmer) Zenti (RZ)

Date of interview: November 17, 1994

Length of interview: Aprox. 70 minutes

TB This is Tina Bell doing an interview with Mrs. Rose Mary Zenti, who was born on February 19, 1919. And today's date is November 17, 1994. Um what was your, what is your full name?

RZ Rose Mary Farmer Zenti.

TB And, uh, where were you born?

RZ I was born in Clayton, New York, which you probably aren't aware of its existence even. But, um, it's in up state New York on the Saint Lawrence River. And I went to school there my first year at Saint Mary's Academy. Ah, taught by French speaking nuns who taught us everything, numbers, um, colors in French as well as English. And then we moved from Clayton, New York to Watertown where I went to school at Sacred Heart School, and then in high school to the Immaculate Heart Academy.

And from there I took a year off because I couldn't quite decide what I wanted, most wanted to do. And my father was ill at the time so I took some courses from Syracuse University, and took organ, all the, the things I couldn't take in high school, typing, short hand, that kind of thing. It, it was a privilege that you had in that school of taking what they call the post graduate program. Which I think many young people need when they graduate from high school because the don't know what they want to do. I found that in my own family. Then I went to Nazareth College in Rochester, New York where I majored in music with my major being piano and my minor being harp. And later, much later, after I was married and had a family, um, I attended the University of Michigan and started work on my Masters degree, which I didn't finish until I moved here to Marquette in '66 and

then I completed my Masters at Northern. That's the extent of my graduation.

And after graduating from college I returned home. That was in 1941. And since my father was ill, I found it necessary to consider staying at home and trying to find work. Uh, you were not allowed to teach in Watertown unless you had had previous experience outside of the area. So there wasn't much choice. And I applied for a Civil Service position with the War Department. And, um, began working in what was a military installation near my home at Pine Camp, New York. Ah, Pine Camp currently has come to the fore. It's now called Camp Drum. In that the unit, the 10th Mountain Division, which has been stationed in Haiti is, um, emanated from Camp Drum at Pine Camp. So it's still in existence.

Um, I worked, um, for the, a, War Department and the Department of Engineering. And, um, at that time Pine Camp was the home of the 4th Armored Division. And that was a period in history where the concern was that, yes, we would become involved in the war. And, but it was felt at that point that the focus would be on the European front. And, so it came as quite a shock when all the anxiety and the fear had been related to our entrance into the war. But it was quite a shock when, ah, Roosevelt, on that famous day of infamy, December 7, 1941, when he announced that the Japanese had attacked us at Pearl Harbor. That was a, a stunning blow. Well, especially to the United States, but to the whole world. Um, and it was something that hit home very realistically driving out to Pine Camp the next

day, and seeing all the armored equipment, the tanks on road getting up and going out to the planes to continue practicing their maneuvering. But it had a whole different significance that day because we all knew it wasn't, if, it was when, how soon, would all these young men be sent off to fight the war.

And, I guess I continued to work. Well I did continue to work, um, um, at, a, Pine Camp. And I guess one of your questions that you had posed was, how did I happen to become involved with the Red Cross? Well, it was because I was working so closely with the members of the 4th Armored Division. I became aware of the extent of the Red Cross work. And usually, before the war, it was very simple. Um, I would get called by the chaplain's office. "Um, going to have a wedding this afternoon. Will you come over and play the organ?" And that was my role in the wedding. And then the Red Cross picked up and usually had a little reception for them. These were very -- very small, ah, weddings. And I came to know the personnel better, and the extent of their work. And it, it, looked very interesting. I was really quite bored with the work that I was doing.

TB What, what work were you doing?

RZ I was an accountant clerk. Which was (*laugh*) really out of my realm of experience or interest. And, um, we had very slow times working. And, um, it was really boring (*laugh*). And I complained to the engineer in charge of our department that I found there wasn't enough work to do. And he said, "Well, you do have busy days, don't you?" I said, "Yes, but they're, you know,

about five or six days a month." And, um, so I didn't get anywhere about getting a transfer. And at that time my father was deceased. And, I had stayed home a year and my mother felt I should get on with my life.

And so I applied for the Red Cross Position. And, I was called to be interviewed in New York City. Um, and then waited for the news that I was accepted. And in October of '42, I started my training at the American University in Washington, D.C. At, ah, where I spent six weeks. At the, and, that was a very interesting experience because there were young women from all over the United States. Um, who were in training at that time. And it was interesting meeting so many people with so many different backgrounds. Of course, Washington its self, was a whole new experience for me. Hopping with excitement at the time. Um, but at the end of that training period, I was asked -- what was my interest in my future assignment? And I said, "Well, I think I would like the Army." Because I'd come from camp, or ah, Pine Camp and was familiar with the Army. My father had been in the Army. My brother had gone into the Air Force [*Army Air Corps*]. "And, I guess I would like a small hospital." I guess I thought that might get me back to (*laugh*) Pine Camp. And, um, so I was called and told that, ah, the assignment would be made out of the New York City office. And I was to go to New York and receive my assignment.

I got to New York. Went into the office. And the gave me the Navy. The largest hospital on the East Coast, 5000 patients in that hospital. It was hard to conceive in our minds, of a

hospital that could serve 5000 patients. And when you walked around to the wards in the hospital, the corridor to go around once was a little over a mile. So you didn't need any walking exercises (*laugh*) as we need today. Um, the hospital had 76 wings, and served, ah, with the top-notch doctors in the country. Um, patients of all types of conditions, from rather minor; because, in the service, a serviceman could not go back in to assume his duty until he was as good as he was before his injury. So some were very lucky and went back rather soon. Ah, others were suffering from life time disabilities. Some were amputees, double amputees. Ah, some were, -- many in the Naval hospital became paraplegics; they were paralyzed for life, from the waist down. And so, not only was surgery a primary concern in that hospital, but the rehabilitation program. And the Red Cross was very involved in that rehabilitation effort. Particularly from a social services standpoint, and from the recreation standpoint. Um, and my work, of course, was in the recreation area

And, I think you asked at one point, what was a typical day in, in my hospital like? We didn't come in until One in the afternoon, because, um, patients were being taken care of in their wards for their medical needs or their surgical needs. But the afternoons were the free time for them. So, many were confined to bed, naturally; and some were in the re, recovery stage and able to, ah, not only come to the recreation department, but could also, ah, profit from, um, entertainment outside of the hospital. And the hospital was rich in resources for entertainment. Everyone, it seemed, in New York, from the

American Theatre Wing, to, um, the individual clubs, the, um, Lamps Club New York, the Athletic Club, um, the, ah, Metropolitan Opera Guild, the Town Hall Guild. And of course had we had a tremendous number of Red Cross volunteers, who were -- some were gray ladies who served in the hospital itself and were very helpful in the arts and crafts department. Ah, we had, ah, top-notch musicians come to the hospital. Um, we had top-notch writers because we had a write, a group that was very interested in writing. And they would come out every Monday night. The artists in the area responded beautifully; and they had their night at the hospital, where they encouraged patients, and, and, helped them with whatever field of art they were interested in. We had -- there were cartoonists that came out. Um, just many in the field.

Then we had Earl Wilson, who's a columnist for the New York Post. Who provided entertainment one night a week. And really, the patients could request most, not only most ANYTHING they wanted, but any PERSON, any Theatre star that they wanted to come out; because if Earl Wilson asked them, they didn't say no, because they could get a favorable write up in his column, or a negative (*laugh*). And so they were very happy to be helpful and cooperate with him.

And many of the, ah, top-notch entertainers, um, seemed to delight not only in coming out, but in coming out again and again. For instance, Eddy Cantor, with banjo eyes (*chuckle*), he came out. In fact, the first T.V. -- when his first T.V. program originated from, um, St. Albans Naval Hospital. And, um, he came

out t -- twice there, and once when I was at Halloran General Hospital later. And I'll talk about the difference between the two hospitals a little later. Ah, Jimmy Durante was another one. And, of course, we had been given two lovely Steinway Spinets so that we could take them to the wards for the patients. If we had a singer, or the patients themselves who wanted to play and were not able to come to the recreation room. Ah, but with Jimmy Durante, part of his act really was to ruin a piano. And so we had to acquire an old piano that didn't matter how beat up it got, when he came.

Ah, one of the people that I most admired, um, was Glenn Miller. He brought his whole orchestra. It was his last show that he did before he went overseas. And if you recall? He was lost at sea. And he came in the late afternoon and did an auditorium show for the patients. And then, afterwards, he split his group into three sections; and they covered the wards for the patients who were not able to attend. And, I had -- my duties were related mainly to the auditorium at that point. And, um, so it was my responsibility to, ah, take him to dinner. So I told him the Captain would like to have him, ah, join him in the officer's dining room. And, of course, he was an officer and entitled to that. And he said, "I'll be happy to go, under one condition. That Ray McKinley, my drummer, can also join us in the officer's dining room." He was an enlisted man, and of course that was unheard of, but I didn't question. I said, "certainly, if that's what you want." *(TB and RZ laugh)* And he

was a, ah, very gracious, a wonderful gentleman. Memories are good.

And, ah, one of the other interesting things. We had available to us all kinds of theatre tickets for the Broadway shows. And one of the patients had expressed an interest in, ah, the performance of Zazzu Pitts. You probably don't remember her, but she was a movie star, and then had the show called Ramshackle Inn on Broadway. So when I requested that, through Earl Wilson's office, ah, they sent me two tickets. And, I was in the mean time -- the condition for her bringing her show was that if we could duplicate the stage set. So I finally found a patient. Oh, he could duplicate anything. So, I took him in with me; we sat through the show; and I was dumbfounded when I saw the set. It had the main floor and a balcony, seven doors which were swinging, it seemed, one or the other, all the time, getting a lot of hard usage. So we went back to meet Zazzu Pitts afterward. And on the way back I said, "What do you think, Earl? Can you duplicate that set?" And, ah, "No problem, no problem, Miss Farmer." So when we went back and met Zazzu, he examined the set very carefully and made some sketches of it. And, um, and of course Zazzu Pitts raised the question, "Do you really think you can -- did you see how hard the doors were slammed?" And so she gave us, um, she didn't give us a date that night. Later her agent called and gave us a date. And, ah, so work began on the set. She came out the night of the show with her whole cast. And it looked just like the set on Broadway. And after the show when we talked to her she said, "Do you know this

set is better than the one on Broadway?" She just loved it. And of course the patients just loved having her in the show. It was a wonderful evening. I often wonder what happened to that patient, because he had such talent. And, he was able to get others to help him, you know, with the hem; but he was responsible for the whole thing. All I had to do was get materials for him, and the paint and the hardware. But, ah, it was very successful.

One of the most embarrassing ones was the actress, Katherine Cornell; and I imagine that that name doesn't mean anything to you either. But she was, ah, a very well known actress, very admired. But she came out through the American Theatre Wing. Sometimes we would just get a call. "Katherine Cornell would like to come out and spend some time with the patients." So I took her to the wards and the patients didn't know her. I didn't have -- tried to introduce her. I tried to make them aware of her performance history. But, um, they just had never heard of her before. So I felt badly over that particular effort.

But it was interesting. Later she went overseas with the U.S.O. and took the Barrets of Whimble Street. The show, which was later, when she returned, ah, was showing on Broadway. And I was transferred later to Halloran General Hospital, which was an Army hospital. Again an extremely large hospital. And the patients were asking for Katherine Cornell. "Could we bring the Barrets of Whimble Street out?" Well, at Halloran hospital, Ed Sullivan was the big manager, so to speak, of Broadway entertainment. Because he also wrote for a newspaper at that

time. Later he had his own show. Ah, but, um, anything you asked of Ed Sullivan's office, it was done. And so when I asked for the Barrets of Whimple Street, yes. They set a date. She came out on a Sunday night. And it, it was just amazing. The auditorium was jammed. We had litter patients there. Everybody that could manage to be there. And there were some patients on the ward who could just not leave their beds, who really wanted to see her. And I asked her before the show -- could she spend some time with the patients? And she said, oh, she'd be happy to. She was there 'till midnight. The Red Cross driver who drove her out was getting a little anxious (*big laugh*). Was everything all right? [After the interview, Mrs. Zenti told me that Katherine Cornell did, indeed, remember her from the Navy hospital adventure.]

So it's interesting. And some of the other people we had at St. Albans was, um, Cornielious Odus Skinner, who did monologs. And, um, patients weren't that excited about that, but they enjoyed it. And one of the very special people, in my book, was Mildred Dilling. She was a well known harpist. Um, and she came out to the hospital through the American Theatre Wing. And she enjoyed her first effort at playing for patients on the ward. I think somewhere here I have a picture to show you of her when she was playing for the patients. Here she is.

TB Wow.

RZ Mike Samuel described her as "the harp on earth, as it is in heaven." And, um, she would play -- take her harp play on, ah, at the bedsides of the patients. She enjoyed it so much, she

asked if she could leave her harp and come out on a weekly basis. So she came out on a weekly basis for a number of months. And, in fact, she knew my interest in the harp and she said, "Now I want you to feel free to play the harp any time you want to." I didn't have much time for that kind of thing. And, um, second time she came out -- I usually opened up the harp case for her when she came -- and, um, a mouse came running out. She said, "Well I can tell you haven't been practicing the harp." *(TB and RZ laugh)* But she oh, she taught Harpo Marx, ah, harp. And, ah, she appeared at the White House. I think she said seven different times. She was well known throughout the music world.

And, oh, one of the other interesting ones who come out was Milten Burl. *(laugh)* Um, I was called into the field director's office; that's the top person in the Red Cross, in the field. And, um, and this was the day that Milten Burl was to appear in the auditorium. And, ah, the field director said, "Now I've had a call from Capt. Pratt." Who was the officer in charge of the hospital. "And he wants you to be sure and tell Milten Burl not to tell any fairy stories." I said, "OH." She said, "Now you will be sure to tell him that." I said, "Well, if that's what he wants, I guess I have to." So I left the office; and I was out in the hall. And this elderly, gray lady, that, um, I'd become quite friendly with, said, "You look puzzled. What's the problem?" So I said, "Well, come here." So we went to the recreation hall. And I related to -- I said, "I was told, um, that Capt. Pratt wants me to tell Milten Burl I'm not supposed to tell any fairy tales -- ur, Milten Burl's not supposed to tell

any fairy tales tonight. And I'm supposed to convey that message to him." I said, "Why do you think he can't tell any fairy tales? I couldn't see any harm in that." I said, "Do you?" And she said, "No. That has me puzzled too. But, I guess if the Capt. told you that, you better tell him." "I guess you're right." So I went, met Milten Burl backstage that night. And I said, "Mr. Burl, the Capt. has asked that I convey a message to you. And that -- it's that you must not tell any fairy tales tonight." And he went into hysterics. And I didn't know, I guess for years after, why that was such a *(big laugh)*. But, ah, *(more laughing by TB and RZ)* anyways *(still more laughing)*. He did, ah, oblige; So I was told afterward.

Um, then one of the others, who was very temperamental, but I was just so thrilled that he was able and willing to come to the hospital, Jose Eterby. Again, the name perhaps, means nothing to you. Jose Eterby was the director of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra. Which I had heard many times since I went to school in Rochester. AH, and also, a renowned pianist. And, so the welfare and recreation officer was responsible for planning this particular, ah, appearance. But he called me about an hour before, and asked if I would meet Eterby when he came. Well I was thrilled. But, um, I later found out that the reason he didn't want to meet him was because he wanted to play pool with my future husband. And, but I very willingly went and awaited him. And when he drove up in front of the main door of the hospital, I went out to greet him, and thanked him for his coming. And he said, "And where is the commanding officer?" And

I replied that he was in the in a meeting. And, ah, he said, "Well, I think you better drive on." Well I was shocked. So I quickly spoke to the driver of the car. And said, "Don't you dare leave. I'll go get an officer to greet him." And so I went in and explained the situation to the executive officer, Captain Blake. So he came out to meet him. And graciously escorted him into his office. And then he was very willing to have me take over at that point. And when Captain Blake asked me, "Where is Lt. McKinley?" I said, "I believe he's in a meeting." *(laugh)*. And so we went on; and Eterby gave a beautiful concert in the auditorium. And, again, um, with the break as it was, he was willing to go on the wards, and.

But we had dinner together in the officer's dining room. And I said to him, "I really, ah, was impressed with the movie, A Song to Remember, and the music you played in it." And he turned to me in complete surprise. He said, "How did you know that I played that, the music for that?" Because it was Cornell Wilde was the star of that movie. And of course they just showed the hands, as they do, you know, in films when they aren't playing themselves. And they were Eterby's hands. And, to this day he *(laugh)* he does not know how I found out; and neither to I. But I found out that he was the one who played, ah, all the music for that movie. And it was beautifully done.

Ah, there were many others who came out. Ah, Shirley Temple was a (unintelligible), came to the wards. At that time she was very young, and, ah, lovely to look at; and the patients just enjoyed seeing her. Because it was someone who they kind of grew

up with to. And she was, I don't think much more than twenty years old when she came. We had a security guard coming with us. And she made a lot of the wards rather rapidly because she didn't have that gift of interacting in a conversational way with the patients. I think she was just a little too shy to get the words out.

Um, I don't know if you want to interject here? Um, in terms of programs for the patients, other than the ones I've mentioned, we had, ah, talent shows. We had a great deal of talent. Ah, in fact, um, one of the first -- initially when I came to the hospital, I was assigned the psychiatric wards. And it was very hard for me to believe that the doctor in charge of the psychiatric wards was one, Doctor Benjamin Spock. The author of the great baby book. Which was -- I guess he's in his nineties now, and I think he's revised it again. But that was hard to understand, how the baby doctor became the officer in charge of the psychiatric wards. But we got along beautifully because he had a great appreciation for music. And felt that it was an important part of the therapy for the patients. Particularly on the locked wards.

And, ah, so I had a program, music program, twice a week on the locked wards, for the patients who were there. The open psychiatric wards, ah, I had started a music appreciation hour. And, ah, they were able to come to that. And then, as a follow up to that program, for all the patients in the hospital participated in the music appreciation hour, I kind of operated on the requests of the patients. And we would get tickets to the

opera. Tickets for the symphony. I always remember Leopold Stykofsky, who was conducting at that time. And, it was a wonderful opportunity for some of the patients to get special training; because top-notch musicians would come out to work with them. Particularly those that, ah, had excellent voices and, um, were interested in developing and learning more about music. And people from the guild, the Metropolitan Opera Guild, in town, would come out and work with them.

I don't know if there's any other questions you had about that particular aspect at the Naval hospital. I was transferred in 1942. No nineteen forty-ah, late '44, to Halloran General Hospital. Now, Halloran General Hospital was quite different than the Naval hospital. Um, Halloran was the point of debarkation for patients who where, ah, injured. They would come in on hospital ships. We would receive 24 hour notice of when the hospital ship was due in. And you had to be ready. Um, everything -- everyone worked very quickly, um, to gear up for the patients coming into the hospital.

Um, the Red Cross would meet the ship if it came in at night. Whatever time of day it came in, the Red Cross would meet them, go on board, and greet the patients. And remember, these are the first people for home, so to speak, that they have met since they left. And here they are; returning injured. Some of them very seriously. So it was a wonderful experience for them to be coming back to the States. And then, if they came in at night, they didn't unload the ship until morning. And it seemed

as though there was an endless stream of ambulances coming in at that point.

And all the Red Cross staff, volunteers included, ah, and the telephone company. That was a critical group. And they had volunteers. They had telephones, any number of them by the beds, so the first thing patients could do, who were able to do it, most of them were able, was to make a telephone call to whomever they wished. But there was also a heartbreaking side to that. You saw so many who were so happy to be here, so happy to be able to make that first call, and then to find out that the girl that they had called, that they thought was someone that they were engaged to, or possibly married, no longer were interested. And that was a cruel blow for many of those patients. Thank God, it didn't happen to the majority, of course.

And then, um, they were only there for three or four days, maximum. Um, then they were sent to the hospital which was their particular need in terms of specialty. Or they were sent to hospitals closest to their home, if that was possible. And this was all done very quickly.

And the one thing that bothered all these patients when they came, was the fact that, carrying their litters from the ambulance to the bed, were German prisoners of war. And later, um, when was that? D-day, May 7th, '45, I believe it was. We had had a hospital ship come in. And we were listening -- a group, they'd been there for a couple of days, and I was with a group of about ten patients. And where they were so excited about talking to you, they were very quiet. And I assumed it was

mainly listening to the President's message. But then, afterwards, they were still very quiet. And I thought there would be, you know, lots of discussion. Well, the object of their distraction and unwillingness to talk, was up on a ladder replacing a light fixture in the room. And he was a German prisoner of war. Um, so I asked if he could leave, and come back later. And then they unloaded. They couldn't believe how beautifully these prisoners of war were treated. They had good sleeping quarters, good meals. And that was hard for those who had been at the European front to deal with it.

Um, I think one of my thrills, um, when I was in the Red Cross, was when I was commuting from St. Albans to Halloran General Hospital. I had always hoped, when I took the Staten Island ferry, which I don't know if you're familiar with. But you pass the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor. I was always hoping I'd see a troop ship come in. Well, I found this letter that I had written to my mother in September of 1945. And in it, I'll just read it to you. If that's alright?

"Another thrill of a life time. For weeks and weeks and months and months, especially since I've been at Halloran and getting sea duty regularly crossing the harbor on the Staten Island ferry, I've been hoping and str--straining my eyes that I might see a troop transport ship sailing into the harbor. At long last, bright and early yesterday morning I was driving along on my way back to Halloran, and as usual, when I got on the ferry, I started looking. I couldn't believe my eyes, when I looked again our ferry had stopped. And there was a troop ship

overflowing with faces and faces. But, hurled over the side of the ship, and ever so gently fluttering, was the insignia of the thunderbird. Yes, this was the old 45th division which had been stationed at Pine Camp, just easing their way into the harbor. Easing, well not exactly. Fortunately the ferry had stopped in mid harbor. And the excitement as the ship sighted the Statue of Liberty was unbelievable. It was a roar of voices that I will never forget. Little did I think when I saw this group of at Pa--Pine Camp, that I might see them as a troop greeting the Statue of Liberty on their return. What a feeling. They Harold Tribune, the next morning, in describing their return, mentions one Lt. Col. Briggs. Who was a favorite at Pine Camp."

So, um, I don't know what other questions you had for me. Or whether I've covered. I haven't referred to your --

TB Oh, that's fine.

RZ Um

TB Let's see, um. Actually, I was gonna ask you too, about, um, especially at, at Halloran seeing that you saw the, the men coming off the ships, um, maybe even the first time. How did -- was that different then being with some of the men that were at your other hospital that had been there for a while. I mean, you were seeing them just after they were. -- Was that hard sometimes?

RZ Um, Yes. Because you saw them -- see at, at the Naval hospital you never saw the patients being brought in. That was never something that we experienced. You know, we were told about the new patients that were in, but we never actually saw

them arriving and getting their first impressions of being greeted by people from home. And so at Halloran, to be there, and to be a part of this first experience of theirs, of being home, ah, was entirely different. It, it was a very dramatic experience. Especially the first time. And, and heartwarming in many ways because they were so, so excited and so anxious. Although, some of them -- you know we did have double amputees. I think the amputees were the hardest to try to, to help. Because of the seriousness and the traumatic meaning for them, in terms of their life.

And you often wondered, for instance, I was never aware of a strong rehabilitation program; such as there had been at St. Albans, in the Naval hospital. At St. Albans, the patients who were paraplegics, they were given the greatest opportunity in the world for being rehabilitated physically. They had a swimming program. Um, and they had an intensive physical rehab program.

And, ah, there was a car dealer in Long Island who had the Oldsmobile cars. Chris Nergaurd was his name. And he would come out to the hospital when the rehabilitation officer felt the patient was ready to be trained on driving of an automobile. And they would raise the funds to give a car to the person, to the patient when they left the hospital. In addition to the training that they had, they had a car. Wh--which is wonderful.

Um, money was no object in terms of the volunteer organizations. You really only had to ask. I remember on young fella, he'd always played the guitar and he wanted a guitar. And he said, "But I want a Gibson guitar, Miss Farmer." And I didn't

know what a Gibson guitar; but he got his Gibson guitar. And at Christmas time the presents that would come out for these patients were unbelievable. Um, Boliva watches, um, anything that they had specifically asked for, they would get. And, um, it was wonderful to see the willingness of the citizens in that area, in terms of helping these patients. But, ah. It was unbelievable.

And now, to think, that hospital doesn't exist anymore.

(unitelligable)

TB St. Albans doesn't?

RZ Yes.

TB Ok.

RZ Halloran, I understand, has become a V.A. hospital. But, um, I hope there's never a need again for the hospitals of the size they had at that time.

TB How long, um, were you in the Red Cross? And what years?

RZ Uh, I was in the Red Cross for four years.

TB Starting in '41, right?

RZ Um-mun *(no)*. Starting in '42.

TB Starting in '42. Ok.

RZ Through '46.

TB Um, back to some of your personal background. Um, what were your parent's names?

RZ Oh, Joesph Peter Farmer and Therisa Swift Moore.

TB M-O-O-R-E?

RZ Swift. And What?

TB M-O-O-R-E?

RZ Yes.

TB And, um, well you're Mrs. Zenti, so I assume you married.
So, um.

RZ Oh, yes.

TB Where did you meet your spouse.

RZ That was one of the big rewards of being in the Red Cross I guess. And, um, being assigned the direct opposite of my request. Um, I was eating in the dining room, but I was very tired. And so I didn't want to sit with anybody else. And I was reading something in front of me, and all of a sudden, my elbow went off the table. And I looked up, and this gentleman said, "May I join you for dinner?" Well, he was so handsome I really couldn't refuse. *(laugh)* And then when he introduced himself, he said, "My name is Rico Zenti. My friends call me Rick. You may call me Rick." And so we were married, um. And actually, that was the interesting thing. V.J. day was the day that we were married. Actually, V.J. day -- the announcement was made late in the day on the fourteenth, and the fifteenth was the day that it was celebrated. *(phone rings)* No, that was a time of rationing, during the war. And we had saved all our gas coupons for our honeymoon. And here were people that night, throwing their coupons away out the windows. It was a very joyous day. And certainly the fifteenth was a very joyous day for us. Um, one of the priests who was going to participate in the wedding, had come over to the house early in the morning and said, "Well because of the V.J. day celebration today, I'm not able to come to your luncheon until later in the day." And offered his apologies.

And -- but it was certainly a day that went down in history for the whole world, not just the United States. But went down in history for my husband and I.

And you asked about family. Yes, we had five children. Yes, I used -- I raised the first baby with Dr. Spock in one hand and the baby in the other; later throwing away the book. I did meet Dr. Spock again at my, um, son's graduation from medical school. He had been invited to speak by the graduating class. But the administration would not allow him to speak, ah, because he had view on the Vietnam war, and so on, that weren't in agreement with administration. But he, ah, recalled when I talked to him. He said, "Ah, yes. Those were wards 132, 133, 34." *(laugh)* He remembered it.

TB Oh, wow.

RZ It was interesting. I had five children. Um, my goal -- one of my dreams -- you referred to that in one of your questions that you submitted. One of my dreams when I was in college, of course like most girls, well some day I hoped to be married. But I wanted a family of six. To me that was the ideal family. And so we were well on our way; five children in six and a half years. Um, and now I have eleven grand children. And so my dream was realized in many ways.

Um, as far as your question about the Atom bombs, my feelings about it. Um, having seen so many of our young people injured for life, to say nothing at all about those who died in our war effort, um, to say nothing of many, who to this day find it difficult to describe their war experiences. I was just so

relieved that it was all over with; there would be no more of our young men injured, and that they could all come home. And I still have a problem dealing with that. When I -- well, the Smithsonian Institute, for instance right now, is subject to a great deal of scrutiny and questioning about the display of World War II and how it seems to be slanted toward the Japanese. I feel in almost an apologetic way. And I can't say that I feel that way. And I question very much the feelings that are apparently prevailing at the Smithsonian Institute.

TB Ah, what was your reaction when you first heard about the concentration camps that had been in Germany?

RZ You know, that that was not something that I was really aware of during the war. Um, I guess -- I don't know how college students are today, but having just graduated from college, and being so involved with my own families situation, um, and going into the war situation right away, I was really not that aware. I'm sorry to say that. I certainly have become since. But it was more, I think, a matter of maturing and learning, um, first hand, for instance, from people in this community, what they went through. Which was inexcusable. You just wonder, how could it happen? And how could other countries allow it to happen. That's something that will always be a major question.

TB Um, Well actually, um, what did you do, you know, after the war. Well you got married.

RZ Yes.

TB At the end of the war.

RZ My interest. Well I was still working at, ah, Halloran General Hospital for some time. And, um, but I must say that I happy I could see the end of that kind of need. And I was ready to exchange that life, and ready to focus on cook books and baby books. And, um, and my husband's work in pursuing his doctorate. Just completely focused on family. A complete change of pace. The only thing of the past, that when Katherine Cornell came to Detroit, um, made contact with her. I wasn't able to go and see her performance. But I talked to her on the telephone. And so it was a whole different way of life.

TB And what are your children's names?

RZ Peter. You just want their names? Peter, Kathy, Merla, Rico and Chris. Um, two live here. Two live in Colorado. One is here at home right now. But getting married next summer.

TB Um, do you feel that the war years changed you life in some way? Or -- as if, um, did you sort of think you were gonna go in one direction before the war happened, and that changed it? Or did it sort of, kind of lead you into what you wanted anyway?

RZ Well, I think it lead me into a way of life, in terms of work that I never even dreamed of. It was an exciting experience. And when I look back I'm real happy that, ah, you kind of got me digging out many of these *(laugh)* papers and, ah. And yes, of course it changed my life. Because I met the gentleman that I married, and we had 42 years and a beautiful life together. And it opened up the doors for a family that I dreamed about. And I realized that dream.

One of the things that, uh, I see in one of these pictures, that the patients had access to a beach club. It was a very usive beach club, the Atlantic Beach Club, was totally turned for the use of the patients. Which was very exciting, use every day we would have a bus take them to the beach. sometimes we'd have the duty to go with them. But there they'd receive their rehab in a pleasant atmosphere. Many of them still on crutches, as you see in the picture. *(tape ended)*
t on?

Yeah. Wait. Yeah it is.

My husband is a graduate of Northern Michigan University. 1932 he completed his doctorate at the University of Michigan. 1957, he taught at Wayne State University for nineteen years. in 1966 Dr. Hardin invited him to become the athletic doctor at Northern. Um, his primary reason for inviting him to on the staff, and the responsibility he gave him, was to develop the plans for the building of the Physical Education Instructional Facility at Northern. And, um, that was completed he retired in 1975. And, um.

Could you read the quote again? What you had?

Um, sure, yeah. Well, um, at St. Albans they had what we'd call the Inquiring Reporter column in their little weekly news paper. And the question that was posed, "What particular war gave you your greatest thrill?" There were four of us who responded, three Navy personnel and I. And my comment was to the effect of "The only war news which can give me a genuine thrill

can't be written until the word PEACE ceases to be an object of wishful thinking, and becomes a true reality."

TB Well thank you very much for speaking with me today.

RZ Well, hope it fills the need.

TB It was fantastic.