

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, NEWPORT, RI

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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SIMONNE DUPUIS POTVIN

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INTERVIEWEE: Simonne Dupuis Potvin
INTERVIEWER: Evelyn M. Cherpak
SUBJECT: THE HISTORY OF THE WAVES
DATE: May 4, 1998

EMC: This is the first oral history interview with Simonne Potvin, who's a resident of Woonsocket, Rhode Island. She is a member of the Ocean State WAVES 118 and was a yeoman in World War II. The interview is taking place at the Naval War College in Mahan Hall, in N-22. Simonne, I'm so pleased that you were able to make the trip down from Woonsocket today to be interviewed on your career in the WAVES in World War II. I'd like to begin the interview by asking you where you were born and when you were born?

SP: I was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, July 20th, 1922.

EMC: What did your father do for a living there?

SP: My father worked in the mills. He was a card tender or something. He worked in the mills.

EMC: Did your mother work?

SP: No, my mother didn't work. She had thirteen children.

EMC: So, she was busy at home.

SP: She was busy at home.

EMC: What number were you of the thirteen?

SP: I'm number ten, I think.

EMC: Oh, so you had three brothers and sisters older than you?

SP: Three after me.

EMC: Did you spend your growing up years in Woonsocket?

SP: Yes, I did.

EMC: When did you graduate from high school?

SP: I did not graduate. I had a year-and-a-half to go and my oldest sister talked my mother into taking me out to help with the family, because she had to go to work when she was young.

EMC: Oh, I see.

SP: And I really missed it. I would have loved to continue my schooling. The teachers sent letters to my mother and all. But my oldest sister was married to a twenty-year man, and when she came home she was the big boss. See, my mother and father separated years back, so my mother needed help from all the children to go to work.

EMC: Sure. You had to leave high school when you were about a junior and go to work? Where did you go to work?

SP: I worked in the hospital as a nurse's aide. They wanted to make a nurse out of me. I could not take it.

EMC: You didn't like it?

SP: So I went to work in the mill. I was working in the third shift at the mill.

EMC: What was the name of the mill?

SP: The Bell Company on Mason Street.

EMC: Is it still operating?

SP: No. The mill is there, but it is not...

EMC: The company's gone.

SP: Yes, it's different. They do different things in there now.

EMC: Did your family have any Navy connections?

SP: My brother was in the Navy.

EMC: Was this before the war?

SP: No, during the war, but my brother-in-law was a twenty-year man. My oldest sister's husband was a twenty-year man, and he went in when he was 17. He worked himself up to chief warrant officer, which was the highest he could go without a college education.

EMC: Did he influence you to join the Navy?

SP: He certainly did.

EMC: What did he say about it?

SP: When he came home on leave, like I say, I was working with his wife on the third shift because she came home when he was sent out. I mentioned that maybe I would like to go and he told me, "Why

don't you go? It would be wonderful for you. You don't want to work in the mill all your life?" And I said, "No, I don't appreciate it." So, he said, "You make your bed and you lay in it." And so I said, "Well, I would like to go to travel to see the country, and get out of Woonsocket a little bit." And that's why I did.

EMC: Great. Did you hear about the WAVES through your brother-in-law or was there some other way you heard about them?

SP: My brother-in-law.

EMC: He was the one who told you?

SP: He told me, "If you're going to join the service, definitely join the Navy."

EMC: Well, that's good. Well, the WAVES were established on July 30, 1942. But before that Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941 and can you tell me what your reaction to that was - to the bombing of Pear Harbor?

SP: I was pretty upset. I didn't trust the Japanese anymore. It really influenced me to help the country.

EMC: Oh, that's good. So, would you say patriotism was a motive, too?

SP: Yes, yes. That was the main thing.

EMC: Patriotism and travel then. When did you decide to enlist in the Navy? What year?

SP: I decided to enlist in the Navy about-- It was either late '43 or early '44. A friend of mine was going to join with me and I kept waiting, and waiting. And she'd say, "Well, we'll join, we'll join, we'll join." So, finally, in late '44, she said, "Alright Simonne, I'll join with you." So we went and we signed papers, and they sent us to Boston. When we got to Boston, I turned in my papers. They gave me a sheet and I went in the cubicle, and then I heard her say, "I changed my mind. I'm turning my papers in." So she said, "You go ahead and you take your physical. Don't worry. I'll be at the beauty parlor. I'll come back." So, I took my physical, but they would not swear me in.

EMC: Why?

SP: Because, I looked too young. They would not believe I was twenty-two years old. They did not believe I was old enough.

EMC: Didn't you have a birth certificate with you or some proof of birth?

SP: I guess not. They didn't. They said, "We have to send the Navy to your mother and she has to sign," which they did. They came to my house and my mother signed. Then I received papers to go to Providence to be sworn in, but I had never been out of Woonsocket hardly. I had nobody around to come with me, so I didn't go.

EMC: Oh, no.

SP: Then a month or so went by, I received another paper to report to Providence on this date to be sworn in.

EMC: Couldn't you have taken a bus, do you think?

SP: I guess I could have. I was afraid. I was chicken. So, I didn't go. Then my brother came home on leave from the Navy. He said, "Simonne, I thought you joined the WAVES?" I said, "Yes, I did." "Well, what are you doing home." "I'm supposed to go to Providence to be sworn in." Well, he said, "Why aren't you going?" "I'm afraid to go alone. I don't know what to do?" So he took me. We went to Providence. I got sworn in.

EMC: Was there any question about why you didn't go for the previous two appointments?

SP: I guess so. I told them that I was just afraid, but they let it go. They said it was alright.

EMC: Oh, that's good. That's good because, you know, there may be a problem with the military.

SP: Yes, but no--

EMC: If you miss an appointment, but that was okay?

SP: It was alright.

EMC: That must have been in late 1944 then?

SP: Yes, it was in late 1944, and then I got my papers. And then (I don't remember how) I guess I went by train. I don't remember how I went in.

EMC: To New York?

SP: To New York. Then when we arrived in New York. I know they brought us to Hunter College and there I met Harriet Croft. She was from Worcester, and we became very good friends. In my cubicle there were three girls that were a little nasty. And like I say, I was timid. I was green. One day when it was my turn to be the head of the room when you had to muster out and then the officer goes in and checks.

EMC: Oh, the white-glove inspection?

SP: Yes. This girl--one of them said to the one in charge of us, said, "I have to go in a minute." And she came back out. When the officer went in, there was a pen on one of the beds. So I was getting demerits.

EMC: Oh, I see how it works.

SP: And I told the girl, she must have done this when she was in because I did not leave anything. So, I was supposed to go downstairs and wash the walls, and I started to cry. And the officer said, "What's wrong?" And I explained to her. She called the one that was in charge. She said, "Did this girl go in?" "Yes, she did." I did not have to wash the walls.

EMC: Oh, that's good.

SP: But, it taught me a lesson. I said, "From now on, no one is going to step on me while I'm in the service," and no one ever did. Because later on I had an experience at Quarters-K when we were working at the Bureau of Personnel. I had my room and there was another, we were doing filings. These three girls would talk. They came from the other alphabet. They would sit there and they would talk about what they did the night before, who they went out with, they went drinking and all. And I used to do my work, and I was

happy to get my work done. But then, because they didn't finish their work, (it was a civilian lady) she would come and distribute the rest of the work for us to do. And I said, "That's not fair, because they sit there while we're working. They sit there and talk." There was a way upstairs, there was a room where if you couldn't find a name and you could go up there and look. I told the woman in charge, "I have to go up there." So I stopped doing the work for this girl. One day, I was going to do my work. She's right in front of the files and I said, "Excuse me." And she just kept talking and talking. And I said, "Excuse me, I have to get my work done." She kept talking and talking. I guess I got mean. Nobody's going to step on me, because she was on a chair with rolling--

EMC: Rollers?

SP: Rollers. I just grabbed the chair and I pushed her into the desk and she got up crying. And they were all over her. Never again. When I got up to go do my work, they moved. They got out of my way.

EMC: Well, that's good. Quite a lesson. Before we continue you with your experiences at Hunter, I just wanted to ask you how your mother felt about you joining the WAVES. Was she in favor of it?

SP: She was in favor of it because she knew that my brother-in-law, a twenty-year man, had said it was a good thing, and she took

his word for it. And I did, too. He was a very reliable man.

EMC: You mentioned that your mother got some money from the Navy because of your joining. Can you comment on that?

SP: I had twin sisters that were eight years younger than me and my mother, so the government put the three as my dependents. My brother would not take a dependent, so when I went in I said, "Yes, I would take them." And they gave her half of my pay plus the government gave her the other half and I received one-half of my pay.

EMC: I see. Did you feel you could live on that?

SP: I can stretch a dollar. My friends got their full pays and they were always borrowing from me.

EMC: Oh, boy. You were careful then?

SP: Yes. In fact, I made a bond a week - \$25 bond. A bond a week. I would mail them home to my mother because her name was on with me. When I came home on leave, I said, "Mom, what did you do with my bonds?" She said, "I needed the money, so I cashed them." So after that, I would mail them to my sister, my other sister. And she saved them for me and they came in handy; because when I got married with my husband, my bonds helped to buy the house with his.

EMC: Great, fantastic. Well, you're very frugal and very good. You got to Hunter College. You had never been to New York City before. Did you feel overwhelmed by the atmosphere at Hunter?

SP: Yes, it was big. In fact, I got there December 28, so New Year's Eve everyone was going by the windows and I was supposed to be in bed. I'm at the window and I'm crying because it was New Year's Eve.

EMC: Were you homesick?

SP: I was homesick, first time away from home.

EMC: Did you write your mother and sisters when you were at Hunter?

SP: Oh, yes.

EMC: Did you call them.

SP: Oh, yes, I wrote them all the time. I wrote my second sister and my mother. I wrote to them all the time. They wrote to me, and I wrote to them.

EMC: Do you have any of these letters?

SP: When I got discharged, I had saved all my letters and I packed them to ship them home. And when I got home, the mailman - there was a note for me to go the post office. It seemed that my package had slit open and I had letters from Army boys and some Navy, all my friends that were in the service and all - the mailman wanted me to pay for each letter. I said, "But I've already paid." He said, "I'm sorry, but they're being shipped." So I told him, "Well, then throw them away."

EMC: Oh, dear. That's too bad.

SP: All that I have are a few that my husband wrote to me before we were married. I kept his on the side.

EMC: Separately, yes?

SP: Yes.

EMC: Did you know your husband when you were in the WAVES?

SP: I knew him from younger days - dancing. We used to go dancing. I used to teach them how to dance, and we used to go to the swimming hole and all our friends. I had only gone out with him once or twice.

EMC: Oh, so he was from Woonsocket?

SP: He was from Woonsocket. He went in the Army. He was four years in Iraq/Iran.

EMC: Iraq?

SP: Iraq and Iran, yes.

EMC: That's quite a story too, I'm sure. Well, let's get back to Hunter College. You were there for anywhere from six to eight weeks of training, do you remember the kinds of classes you took and how you felt about these classes?

SP: I thought they were a little hard, but I copied everything and all. And naturally, I would have liked to be something else than working in an office, but I wanted to be where the airplanes came in.

EMC: Oh, an air traffic controller?

SP: An air traffic controller. They said I couldn't be because I had an accent. Because we speak a lot of French at home.

EMC: At home?

SP: At home.

EMC: Oh, that was your language at home then?

SP: My language at home is French. And because of my accent (which I didn't realize I had, I still have it back now), they could not give me the job. Because they said I would have been good for it, but they couldn't give it to me because of my accent. And I would have liked to have been a mailman, but at the time I could not drive.

EMC: Oh, I see, you didn't have a license.

SP: But that's what I asked for and I don't remember, I must have asked for something else, but I was sent to --

EMC: Yeoman's school.

SP: Yeoman.

EMC: Well, did you like the marching and the drilling at Hunter?

SP: I loved it. I loved the marching. It was very nice. I was in the very last row because I was the shortest -- one of the shortest. But I loved the marching. It was great. I really enjoyed it.

EMC: Did you have to march on Saturdays for the regimental reviews?

SP: I believe we did.

EMC: How did you feel about the discipline of military life? Did you adjust easily to it? To the rules? The regulations?

SP: I adjusted to it. There was only one thing that disturbed me. When we mustered out in the morning, we had to stand at attention. One girl next to me fainted, and there was nothing that I could do about it. I didn't understand at the time, but it disturbed me. I almost fainted myself. I started to go backwards, but that was the only thing that I didn't understand about it. But then after a while that they were right. But no, I thought they were great. I really enjoyed it.

EMC: Do you remember chow hall, and the mess hall, and the food at all?

SP: At Hunter, I don't remember.

EMC: Did you have an opportunity at Hunter to participate in any extra-curricular activities?

SP: I played basketball. I was in sports. I was sports-minded.

EMC: Oh, that's good. You had a little free time then for that, because you're day was very busy there.

SP: It was busy, but whenever I had a chance I was in the gym doing sports.

EMC: Oh, really. Oh, that's good. Had you done sports before when you were working, been involved at all in sports?

SP: In school I was involved in sports. I loved swimming. I loved dancing. I loved bicycle riding. I was very active in those things.

EMC: Great, that's fantastic. How did you react to the uniform? Did you like the Navy uniform?

SP: I loved the Navy uniform, except the shoes.

EMC: Why the shoes?

SP: I never had a corn in my life, and when I started marching with my shoes it was starting to almost form one. So I was a bad girl. I found myself a low-heeled little navy blue "wedgie" shoe. After I got to Quarters-K in Arlington, Virginia; whenever I went to Washington D.C., there were so many in uniform that the officers

- they didn't care one bit what kind of shoes you had on. So I wore my little shoes all the time. But when there was an inspection day, I kept a set in my desk and I would put them on.

EMC: They were the old clodhoppers.

SP: They were heavy, clodhoppers. And I never had a corn in my life. No bunion. No corn, but it was starting to give me one. And I said, "No, I'm not going to wear these shoes."

EMC: They were very serviceable, but nothing practical about them.

SP: They weren't really comfortable, but the rest of the uniform - I loved my rain hat and my raincoat. I loved that. When it would rain, I'd put it on. I loved it. And one of my girlfriends, Rita from Connecticut, was the same height. We were about the same build. I don't know how many times, people came up to us, especially when we had on our rain hats, to see if we were twins.

EMC: Oh, for heavens' sake.

SP: Because we were the same height, same build - they thought we were twins.

EMC: Oh, isn't that interesting. Did you have any limited time off in New York at Hunter? Usually they said they got from about one

o'clock on Saturday to sometimes late Saturday evening and then Sunday afternoon off. Did you ever have a chance to go into New York City and do anything?

SP: I don't remember it, but I know we did because there's this young man that was working with me. Took a fancy to me. He surprised me and came in to visit me in New York, and I have some pictures that we took. So, I had to have had that time off. And I believe I went to a dance in New York, but I don't remember that much.

EMC: Yes, because that was a very busy time getting adjusted to the Navy and doing your class work and your training. Did anything amusing or interesting, or noteworthy happen during you're training period at Hunter? Anything outstanding that you remember other than the girl putting the pen on the bunk?

SP: No, I don't remember anything else at Hunter.

EMC: That was the most outstanding thing.

SP: That's the thing that I remember the most.

EMC: Well, you told me what you expressed a preference for as far as the billet went - being an air traffic controller or being a drive, but you ended up as a yeoman or seaman to begin with and

doing office work as you said. Did you get an advanced training as a yeoman?

SP: No.

EMC: You weren't sent to Oklahoma A&M, Yeoman's School?

SP: No, just straight to the Bureau of Personnel.

EMC: In Washington.

SP: And I worked from eight to four. If I stayed out after two, I could not be in slacks, but I could stay out till two in slacks; which I never stayed out that late. But I know some would stay out the whole night. They came in the morning.

EMC: You say you worked for the Bureau of Naval Personnel and that was in Washington?

SP: No, Arlington, Virginia.

EMC: Arlington, Virginia.

SP: Right across from the cemetery.

EMC: Arlington Cemetery. And what exactly did you do for them?

What kind of work?

SP: It was mainly filing page nine's.

EMC: What are page nine's?

SP: Page nine's are all your record of what's going on in the service, of you and the service, day-to-day, what's going on. They even had me in the hospital once. My mother didn't get her check, and I got a phone call. I was wondering, I didn't get my pay. They made an error and they put me as being in the hospital, but I wasn't. It was someone else similar, a name similar to me. No, we filed mainly the page nine's in the jackets and that was the main thing we did. I don't remember. We had a desk and a chair, and we did other things, but it was all paperwork.

EMC: Was it a large office?

SP: Yes. I had the end of the alphabet and they were pretty complicated names, but I got to know the names pretty well and you get to know. I had the end of the alphabet.

EMC: Oh, so that's what you had to file. Did you have any friends that worked with you, or were your co-workers your friends?

SP: My friends were in other parts of the alphabet; and it was

very handy because when we meet some sailors, they'd try to date us. We'd say, "Well, we'll see you tomorrow." We'd get their names, where they live and we'd go into their jackets and we'd find out all about them. And then the next day, we'd say, "Well, how's your wife and how's your little daughter?"

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sake. Yes, you could find out the dope on them.

SP: Anyhow, if it was Army or Marine, we had different parts of the Bureau personnel: one was Army, one was Marine, Coast Guard. We'd ask one of the girls to check on this name for us. It was very, very interesting.

EMC: Oh, yes. You had all the information right at your fingertips.

SP: Yes, we had all the information. In fact, what's his name - "Singing in the Rain"?

EMC: Gene Kelly?

SP: Gene Kelly was stationed there. He walked down the aisle past me one day.

EMC: Oh, for heaven's sake.

SP: Yes. Gene Kelly.

EMC: That's fantastic. Interesting. Did you like this work?

SP: I enjoyed it. I got used to it. I would have preferred to do something else, but like I said, I had to do it. So, I enjoyed it.

EMC: Good. Was it an eight hour day?

SP: Yes, but we had breaks. We had our lunch. It was eight to four.

EMC: Eight to four. Did you work on Saturdays?

SP: No, we had weekends off and, like I say, it was just like working in an office - eight to four. We were free. But, like I say, you could go till two in the morning with slacks. But after two you had to be in uniform.

EMC: Where did you live when you working at the Bureau of Personnel?

SP: I lived at Quarters K, which was a brand new barracks, just two minutes down from the Bureau. It was built right around, next to it, right near and it was all brand new barracks. We had maids

that did our cleaning. We did our own washing and ironing, kept our cubicles in order, but they did everything. We were very fortunate, we had no men on the base, but we had (I think it was around eight) sailors that would just come and they would do the mess hall.

EMC: Oh, I see, so you did have a mess hall?

SP: Yes, we had a mess hall. We never had to peel a potato. We worked in an office - eight to four.

EMC: And that was it, you were taken care of?

SP: That was it.

EMC: How many people did you share your room with?

SP: We were four in a cubicle. When we were at the train station, they told us to (we were in a big auditorium) get yourself four together. And so Harriet and I were already friendly. We were together already. Then this young girl said, "Oh, I'd love to be with you." So we said alright. She was Millie from Pennsylvania. She was married. Her husband was in the service. And then this other one, Anne Dunne, said, "I'd like to be with you. I'm all alone." So we took her.

EMC: Oh, that's good. How did it work out?

SP: It worked out very good. Millie, Harriet and I we the best of friends. Anne Dunne was a sweetheart, but she was an all-night person. She loved to go out and drink, but she was a sweetheart, never gave us any problems. And then in the cubicle next to me was Rita from Connecticut. She was French, didn't speak it, but understood it. When I would go to brush my teeth, she'd borrow toothpaste. Another day, she would borrow my comb. Another day, she borrowed my steam iron and I said, "Do you have anything? Don't you?" She said, "I've got everything, I want to meet you because you and your friends have so much fun. I hear you talking." She was miserable in her cubicle.

EMC: Oh, I see.

SP: So, she wanted to be friendly with us. Well, she became one of my best friends.

EMC: Oh, that's good.

SP: And I enjoyed it because I would tease the girls and talk French to her and she knew what I was saying, and they'd say, "What are you saying?" We were sometimes, around ten to twelve girls. We would go out together. I never went out with any of the men. I didn't trust them. I'd read their jackets. I didn't go out with them.

EMC: So, you went out with the girls.

SP: I went with the girls.

EMC: And where did you go?

SP: We would go-- I'd never found out who did this to me, but one of the officers-of-the-day, knew that I was kind of the leader. I had gotten a map of Washington and they'd say, "We'll follow Simonne because she knows where she's going." And she would put tickets in my box. I had tickets to ball games, tickets to the shows, tickets to different things. And I would say, "Who put them there?" And the officer would say, "Enjoy it. What do you care who put them there, enjoy it." So, we would go bowling. We'd go to ball games. We'd go roller skating. We travelled. We walked. We'd take the bus through the Pentagon, once we passed the Pentagon - now we're in Washington. We'd get off the bus and if you wanted to walk and never get tired - march. We would march and sing. We had a wonderful time. We walked all over Washington, D.C., and we could go into the Smithsonian Institute, the art gallery - free. We went to everything that we could see.

EMC: Isn't that amazing, great.

SP: I enjoyed it very much.

EMC: On your weekends, I guess?

SP: On the weekends, yes. I never got to the Archives, which I just did in February, because those were closed on weekends. We couldn't go. When it was cherry blossom time, we've got pictures in the trees and under the trees. We even got in the White House once.

EMC: Oh, you did?

SP: Yes, we got in the White House once. We were there for Franklin Delano Roosevelt's funeral.

EMC: Oh, yes. You would have been.

SP: We were there.

EMC: Can you remember anything about that?

SP: They didn't let us march. We were not asked to march, but we were there and I saw it. And it was sad. We were there when Admiral Nimitz came back home. I have pictures of when he was there. There was a big parade. We were there when they dedicated the Iwo Jima Statue and we got pictures of that. We saw Washington D.C.

EMC: Yes, you certainly did. It must have been a very busy place during the war?

SP: It was very, very busy. Like I say, when you meet an officer, you're supposed to salute. Well, the officers would either look down or across the street because they didn't want to keep saluting.

EMC: Oh, I see.

SP: It was too much. They were at every corner.

EMC: Too many military.

SP: Too many military, but there was a-- I love to dance and on Saturday night on G Street, it was the G Street Dance. It was on the second floor, it was a big hall, and we had bands from different servicemen playing for us - only for service people. And I enjoyed it, I couldn't wait for Saturday to come to go to my dance.

EMC: And did your friends go with you?

SP: Oh, definitely, they came.

EMC: Was it a USO, that you went to? Was that a USO?

SP: It was G Street Dance. I did go to this special USO where they had a dance once in a while on Sunday afternoon, sometime. I'd go there and play cards. The servicemen would show us how to play different card games and we had a dance. And they always gave us a very good meal, because we didn't want to go all the way back to the barracks. But they'd say, "You don't have to pay, you come here." And they gave us very good meals.

EMC: That's great. So, you got a lot of benefits being in the service?

SP: I got a lot of benefits and I really could save a lot of money because I didn't drink, I didn't smoke, so I saved money. But when I'd go home, I'd bring my mother and sisters nylons and cigarettes.

EMC: Oh, yes. That's what was in short supply.

SP: Yes. They wanted nylons and cigarettes.

EMC: Well, did you go home once or twice a year on leave?

SP: I had quite a bit of leave. In fact, many long weekends, especially I went down to Pennsylvania - Brownsville, Pennsylvania. We went the three of us to Millie's house for a long weekend. We went to Delaware. I went to a friend of mine over there. I went to

Kentucky to Evelyn's. I would love to try to find Evelyn Massey. She was a very good friend. She wasn't in my barracks. I went to Kentucky with her and they came to my home. I went to Connecticut to Rita's. I went to Harriet's, long weekends.

EMC: You really travelled around then.

SP: I went to travel.

EMC: You kind of fulfilled your ambition to travel in the Navy.

SP: I filled my ambitions, and I really, really enjoyed it. I wish I could have joined earlier and had been sooner.

EMC: Yes, a little longer because you joined when you were twenty-two and you could have joined at twenty.

SP: I could have joined earlier.

EMC: Well, that's okay. At least you had some experiences and you did join eventually. Did you ever have any contact with any civilians during this time and, if you did, how did they react to the WAVES?

SP: In Bureau of Personnel, our bosses were a lady civilian and a man civilian, they were. When I came home (I see what you mean)

they looked at me funny. She's in the service because a lot had bad-- They thought bad of the women in the service, but you went to do what you wanted, like my brother-in-law said, "Make your bed and lay in it." And that's what my friends and I did.

EMC: Most of the women that you met in the service, I assume, were very nice?

SP: I would say ninety-nine percent were very nice. There were just a few because a lot in our quarters, they got a kick out of us. There were very nice. They didn't come out with us, but we were always ten or twelve of us - one big group. No, there were very, very nice.

EMC: Would you say that you were well treated by your civilian bosses?

SP: Yes, yes, they treated you as doing a nine to four job, except when she tried to make me do the other girl's work.

EMC: Right, right. You stood up for yourself. Was there anything that you didn't like about your assignment in the Bureau of Personnel?

SP: No, I enjoyed it. My friends were in the other wings. At break-time we'd meet each other. No, it was very good.

EMC: Did you have the opportunity to participate in any sports during you two years in Washington. You said you were sports-minded.

SP: I went bowling downtown, but right across (almost across the street from us) was an Army base. They had men and women. They had a dance hall. I was able to go to the dance twice. They did not want us.

EMC: Oh, because you were Navy?

SP: Because we were Navy, but I won a jitterbug contest with one of the Army men once anyway. And on top of the hill was a Marine base. They had men and women. They had a bowling alley. I went once and I never returned, because they only had a few alleys and I can understand. It was their base, so we didn't go. I went to the baseball games and, like I say, went bowling and dancing and roller skating.

EMC: Those were your main activities.

SP: Yes.

EMC: You mentioned that you really didn't date any Navy men during this time frame or any men?

SP: I didn't date at all.

EMC: Okay, you didn't date at all during the service?

SP: I never cared to date earlier either.

EMC: Were you writing to your future husband during this time period?

SP: I was writing to him as a friend. I was writing to many from Woonsocket, but as friends.

EMC: Absolutely, nothing special though.

SP: No.

EMC: Did you keep up with news about the war during this time period. Did you read the newspapers, debriefings?

SP: I don't believe I did.

EMC: But you knew what was going on. Did you ever meet Mildred McAfee who was the Director of the WAVES?

SP: No.

EMC: What was the highest rate you achieved during the Navy?

SP: I was going in for yeoman, third.

EMC: Were you a seaman to begin with?

SP: I was seaman, seaman first, seaman second, and I was due for my yeoman. Rita and Harriet signed over for the six months. They got their yeoman, but they moved them to Arlington Farms. And when they moved us to Arlington Farms - I had come home on a sixteen day leave, and I had one day left when my husband today found out I was home. He had been visiting his mother in New York. And he called me up, and I went out with him that night and I was taking the bus the next day to go to the train. So I came back. That was in November and I came back for Christmas. Then I came back for New Years. And I was starting to go with him. So when they moved us to Arlington Farms and I wanted to join the next six months like my friends, he was against it.

EMC: You were saying, Simonne, that you began to date your husband toward the end of 1945, is that it?

SP: Yes.

EMC: Were you thinking of joining up for six more months?

SP: I was. I was seriously thinking of signing over because of pre-dependents - they offered me to go out. Like Mildred, earlier because she was married. Her husband was out of the service. But, they moved us to Arlington Farms. And Arlington Farms was not Quarters-K. I was spoiled at Quarters-K. I saw my name up on the board, about five or six down and I said, "Captain of the head?" Yes, when your name comes up there, you have to clean every single toilet. So my husband-to-be was after me - don't join. We were just going out. It wasn't serious yet. He had just gotten out of the Army, and it was dark and dreary over there. My friends were in other cubicles. We were no where's near each other, so I decided, "Well, alright then." I came out.

EMC: Oh, so you decided to--

SP: That's the reason I came out that early, because I would really-- If Rita stayed in Quarters-K, but they were taking us out of there and giving it to the new sailors coming in and now at the end there were men and women on the base. And we had a big hall. We never used it, but they started having dances and it wasn't the same. When you have the men and women on the base, there's a little more trouble.

EMC: Yes, there is in war. Well, anyway I want to just double-back a little to August 1945 and that was V-J Day, August 15. How

did you celebrate the end of the war and how did you feel about the end of the war?

SP: I was swimming in the swimming pool in Washington, D.C. with Rita. The bells started ringing. The people were screaming and we said, "What in the world?" They said the end of the war, so we dressed up, went down to the streets - everybody was taking the buttons and the insignias off the officers. They were all ripping. One officer gave me his buttons, I don't know why. I have them today. They were taking everything off their uniforms, the buttons, the insignias and giving them out. The people were going crazy.

EMC: Oh, really?

SP: Everybody was yelling and screaming. So it was quite an exciting day. I was all wet from swimming. We were swimming in the swimming pool. I remember that day very clearly.

EMC: Now, did you personally celebrate with your friends in any way?

SP:- I don't think so. I think we just--

EMC: Enjoyed the mob.

SP: Enjoyed the mob. And I mean, it went on and on. Everybody was

making snake dances all over Washington. We happened to be in Washington at the time, so it was very, very interesting to see. It was a fun, fun day.

EMC: It must have been?

SP: It was.

EMC: So, were you thrilled about the end of the war? Were you happy?

SP: Oh, I was very happy, yes.

EMC: Well, after that then you stayed in through, I believe it was, February, 1946?

SP: Yes.

EMC: February 2, 1946. So you were in for almost four or five months after the war ended?

SP: Yes.

EMC: Even before we get to that question, I should have doubled-back and asked you this - Did you know of anybody in the WAVES who was disciplined or discharged for any particular reason?

SP: No.

EMC: Okay, because I always ask about discipline problems in the WAVES.

SP: No.

EMC: And if there was any that you ever encountered?

SP: No, not where I was or none that I knew of.

EMC: Okay, good. Where and when were you discharged from the Navy?

SP: I was discharged in New York on February 2, 1946. I remember it was a Saturday because when I got home, I got off the bus (the bus from Providence to Woonsocket), there was a dance going on. So, I went up, I had my suitcase, and I said to the young man at the door of the dance hall, where I used to go to before I went in the service, I said, "Today, I have to pay because I can't go in free. I'm not in the service, I'm discharged." He said, "You put your things there and get in there and dance." And there was my boyfriend dancing away with the girls.

EMC: Oh, really.

SP: Naturally we were just friends, you know. He was dancing. He was surprised because it was a spur-of-the-moment thing. When they told me I had to decide right then, I didn't have time to think anymore. They said, "You have to decide now." So I said, "Alright then, and I signed out." And I had no chance to think about it because I had just moved to Arlington. I didn't get to know the base really.

EMC: Right. You were just kind of out. How did you feel about leaving the Navy?

SP: Oh, I hated to leave it.

EMC: You did?

SP: I hated to leave it. I really loved it. Had they kept me in Quarters-K, I would have stayed on.

EMC: Oh, you would have despite even your--

SP: Oh, definitely.

EMC: Your boyfriend and such?

SP: Oh, I would have stayed on. That captain of the head that they had kind of threw me off.

EMC: Why, you didn't want to do that work. You were spoiled by having maids before.

SP: Yes.

EMC: Did you feel that the WAVES had a strong sense of esprit de corps and working together for the same objective? Do you think they blended in as a group?

SP: I would think so.

EMC: Togetherness?

SP: Yes, I would think so.

EMC: Did you feel that the WAVES were a smoothly run organization?

SP: As far as I'm concerned, it was. I would advise, even today, I would advise anyone - If you're going to join the service, join the WAVES. My niece's daughter almost decided, but she started having a boyfriend and she changed her mind. And I had told her, "Remember what you go in for." But she changed her mind.

EMC: Well, you're experience almost influenced somebody to join.

SP: Yes.

EMC: Do you feel that being in the WAVES changed your life or re-directed your life in any way?

SP: Positively.

EMC: How?

SP: How? I would have been a timid little girl in Woonsocket. Probably working in the mills, getting married and maybe working in the mills still. And that was not the future I had in mind.

EMC: Oh, that's good. That's good. So did you feel that the war and your experience as a WAVE made you more independent and self-reliant?

SP: Positively. It changed me, like I say, after that nobody steps on me. I'm very good to anyone. I will help them all they want, but let them not turn around and stab me once. They don't get a second chance.

EMC: Yes, that's good. So, it taught you to stand up for yourself.

SP: It taught me to stand up and it woke me up and it showed me

what the world is all about. And it's the second best thing that I ever did. My first best thing, was marrying my husband.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Well, that's a great compliment to the Navy and to the WAVES. And you really feel very, very strongly about that and their influence.

SP: Very strong about the WAVES.

EMC: Did you maintain any friendships with these WAVES that you were so close to in Quarters-K, after the war was over?

SP: Yes, Harriet Croft married Ned Bancroft. She added "Ban" to her name, and from Massachusetts. She's living in Connecticut, and Rita is living in Connecticut. Oh, Harriet has joined a WAVE unit from Massachusetts, so we meet at Cathedral in the Pines, in New Hampshire. We meet. Oh, yes, we keep in contact and I write to Anne from Delaware. She has moved to Texas, and I keep in touch, but I lost Evelyn Massey. I've lost her from Kentucky.

EMC: Isn't that something. That's great.

SP: Oh, they're my best friends.

EMC: So, these friendships of fifty years plus are still going strong. That's wonderful.

SP: They came to my wedding. Quite a few came to my wedding, and I went to a couple of their weddings. I even stood up for Rita, and she stood up for me.

EMC: When were you married, may I ask?

SP: I was married May 31, 1947. It will be fifty-one years I'm married.

EMC: Right, yes this month. Absolutely. When you came back, after you were discharged from the WAVES, did you work at all?

SP: No, I collected Social Security, and I was going to go back to work, but the job I was doing was a man's job, and they wanted me to do a woman's job, and I did not want that. I could do it, but I didn't want to do it. So, they said they were taking back the boys that were coming back. I did go and work a little bit in the hospital again and all, but my mother wanted me to be a nurse so bad. But, they tried. They wanted me to be. They said they could make a good nurse, but I couldn't take it.

EMC: You didn't like that kind of work?

SP: Well, when I took care of these elderly ladies, the next morning I'd go in the room and they were gone. And I got to the

point, I couldn't eat.

EMC: That was not for you?

SP: No.

EMC: Yes. Did you stay at home and help your mother during that time frame?

SP: I stayed at home and helped my mother with my twin sisters.

EMC: And were you dating your future husband?

SP: I was dating him then, yes.

EMC: What was he doing?

SP: He was working. He started back in the mill where he had worked, but then he got a job at an electrical place. He had a better job. He was there thirty-eight years.

EMC: Wow, that's a long time.

SP: Until he retired.

EMC: That's fantastic. Did you stay in Woonsocket after the war?

Is that where you settled?

SP: We stayed in Woonsocket.

EMC: Did you work at any time frame after you were married - in any paid employment?

SP: Yes, ten months after I got married, I had my son and then four years later I had my daughter. And my husband did not believe in me leaving to go to work. He wanted me home to take care of the children. But when my son was around twelve years old, we needed a new car, a new Frigidaire, so I said to my boy, "You know, they're asking for work just down the road. I think I'll go see what it's all about." So, I went (not telling my husband), I went. The man interviewed me. He said, "Can you start tomorrow?" And I said, "Huh?" So I told him, I would talk to my husband and that I went to work the whole winter. Then I took off the summers because I have-- Air conditioning is bad for me. It opens my bones. I had asthma when I was younger. And so I asked for the summer off and they gave it to me. But, then when I went back to work, they wanted me to start from scratch. So, I said, "No, I had already had quite a few raises." And I said, "No." So, I stayed out. Then a few years later, another, I was doing dials for transistors and diodes. And this man that I knew, he found out that I had worked at the other place. That was a few years later. He hired me over there. I worked there three winters, but I took the summer off. I wanted to be with

my children. My mother was living, and I had a duplex. She was living next door with my aunt. They were there to watch my children while I was working.

EMC: In the winter, yes.

SP: But in the summer, I was with my children.

EMC: Oh, that's good. Did you ever talk about your WAVE days to your children?

SP: Positively. My son almost decided to go into submarine, and I told him as long as it's Navy. But he was the last of the Potvin line. And so, when he went to college and all, he didn't get in. I don't know why.

EMC: He didn't get into the Navy?

SP: He didn't get into the Navy, never, nope. And I wished that my children would have. I tried to talk them into it, but they didn't. And then my son didn't have to. It was at the time when he missed.

EMC: He missed it.

SP: He missed it.

EMC: Vietnam and all the rest.

SP: Yes.

EMC: Immediately after the war, there were WAVE conventions in New York and Boston. Had you heard of any of those and--?

SP: I never heard of them.

EMC: Okay, because some people did go to some of those early conventions.

SP: I would have loved to go, but I never heard of them.

EMC: Now, you are a member of WAVES National and also the Ocean State WAVES 118?

SP: Unit 118.

EMC: You mentioned that you are very active in the Unit I believe?

SP: Yes.

EMC: And you also mentioned that you had recently been to the WIMSA Memorial?

SP: Yes.

EMC: In Washington, D.C.

SP: Yes, I had to go and visit the WIMSA. I have been to a convention in New Hampshire. I've been to the Bourne Cemetery dedications. They had two dedications. We chipped in--

EMC: Where was that?

SP: At Bourne Cemetery in Bourne, Massachusetts.

EMC: Oh, Bourne, yes. Okay, right.

SP: All the WAVE units, all the units chipped in, and we had a big rock with a big plaque put on.

EMC: Oh, how nice. Why did you pick that area?

SP: They contacted us. They're doing a park and they're doing it for all service and so the Massachusetts Unit asked all the units to chip in. They want to do something else. They want \$125. I don't know what it is. My unit said, "No, because it's only for Massachusetts." But this was for everybody. I went to the New Hampshire convention. I enjoyed that very much.

EMC: There was one here in Newport too, last year.

SP: Last year, it was ours.

EMC: Yes.

SP: We had four days and I crocheted and knitted for so many prizes. And we had a wonderful, wonderful convention.

EMC: Yes, it was very nice.

SP: It was nice. We had a great convention. I was very active in that. Now, they're talking of Hawaii, but--

EMC: That's a National.

SP: The National. But, next year is Cape Cod.

EMC: That'll be nice.

SP: I'm looking forward to that one.

EMC: That'll be great. Well, Simonne, do you have anything else that you want to add? Any event that was outstanding that we missed or any experience that we missed during your two years in the

service? Anything that you can possibly think of that we haven't gone over?

SP: I'm trying to think. There was so many things. Right now, I don't know. I think I've told you.

EMC: Yes, you've been very good and very accurate. If you had to sum up the significance of your Naval career for you and your life, what would you say?

SP: What would I say? I would say that, like I said before, it's the second best thing that I ever did in my life. And if there was a war now, and they said they needed me, I would be the first to sign.

EMC: Oh, great. That's fantastic. That's a wonderful comment.

SP: I had told my husband that even after we got married. If they ever needed me, I'm going back.

EMC: Oh that's great, that's great. A lot of the gals were in the Inactive Reserves after the war. That's what they called them and some of them received final discharges in the early '50's. But that's a very great comment and a very, very positive comment. So, it was all a very positive, good experience for you.

SP: It was a positive, good experience and I would advise anyone -positively go in. Because, you can make a good life out of it. Like I say, you learn, they're educating you. To me it was a college education because I could have gone to college and learned not even one little bit as much as I learned in the service. I was educated in the service. I made the best friends that I could ever find and they are all still my friends today and I really, really loved the service.

It also helped to teach me to travel, and it comes in handy because our son lives in California, and our daughter used to live in California; but she has built a new home in Nevada. My husband and I have driven cross country many, many times -- I hate to fly -- and being in the WAVES has taught me to be a map reader with no problem at all. We're both strong drivers, and I'm the road map. He hardly looks at the map. We have AAA, and I wouldn't travel without it. We also have gone by plane, but we'd rather drive and see the country. And we've seen just about all of the U.S.A. And thank God for the good old U.S.A.

I now belong to many clubs:

1. Silver-haired State Representatives about ten years.
2. Greater Woonsocket Senior Council.
3. Vice President of Wives and Girls Club.
4. President of Potpourri Club of Woonsocket.
5. St. Joseph's Senior Citizens' Club.
6. WAVES Unit 118.
7. Wednesday Girls' Card Club.

EMC: That's great. Well, thank you very, very much for sharing your memories of that special time in your life with me. Thank you.

SP: You're welcome.