

Lawler, Jeanne

Coast Guard: 1944-1946

This interview was held on April 25, 2003. The questions were asked by Steve Decker.

Q: Well, if you will begin by stating and spelling your name:

A: My name is Jeanne Lawler and it is spelled J-e-a-n-n-e, Lawler L-a-w-l-e-r.

Q: And you reside in Cedar City?

A: Yes I do.

Q: Were you...did you enlist?

A: Yes, I enlisted in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Q: From Minneapolis, Minnesota?

A: Uh huh.

Q: In the Coast Guard?

A: In the Coast Guard, which was called "The Coast Guard SPARS."

Q: SPAR, what does SPAR stand for?

A: Simper Perados Always Ready.

Q: OK.

Q: Um...you served full time for how long?

A: Just for about... oh 19 months.

Q: 19 months?

A: Uh huh. From 1944-1946.

Q: And you were head-quartered...

A: Well, we had my training down and in West Palm Beach, Florida and went from there to New York, but I was assigned finally at San Francisco.

Q: In San Francisco?

A: Uh huh.

Q: What years did you say you served?

A: 1944-1946.

Q: And... rank, what rank were you?

A: Yeoman Second Class.

Q: Yeoman Second Class?

A: That was a secretarial position.

Q: OK, and is that basically what you helped with?

A: Yes, I was in what they call the Coast Guard Intelligence where I was a secretary to 13 different men with different languages from different countries, so it was kind of a special job.

Q: Do you speak different languages?

A: Well, I speak Swedish, but I can understand some others.

Q: Any decorations or special circumstances? (When you served.)

A: No, no, I don't think so.

Q: And... any prominent people that you were able to meet as part of that, or any names that we might recognize?

A: I really don't remember. No, I don't think so. I don't think so. They probably are,

but I wouldn't know who they are. That long ago.

Q: When you reflect back on your service, is there something that really sticks out in your mind? Something that may be vivid. Whether it's good or bad, whether it's humorous or frightening.

A: Yeah, I've written it down in that book. Some funny things. I was really quite a character back then. I still am now, (Laughs.) but I had fun and I had a hard time getting out and doing...um getting a leave because I was... I did something that wasn't quite right, you know? It wasn't anything serious, it was just that I was just kind of silly, you know? And then, one time I did go out and *finally* got out and we took a little ferry from West Palm Beach to Palm Beach and there was a man that was playing a guitar, you know? And playing... and then he came around and I was young, and I thought he was collecting the fare, but he wasn't. I tipped him and then I didn't have any money to get off. (Laughs.)

Q: So did you have to swim back?

A: Well, fortunately there was a gal there in the front that rescued me, but after, when we came back, he sure stood in front of me again, hoping to get more money, you know? And then, you know, I would just hide in the shower because I wasn't a very good marcher, you know? Left, right, left, right. So, one time they just found me, so I had to come out and march in front of the whole platoon with a garbage pan covering each hand, saying this is my left and this is my right and this is my left and...so, I don't know. I guess I wasn't too serious, but I had a good time. I was an adventurous girl.

Q: You remind me of our architect, he was here yesterday and when he goes on site, he has a pair of leather boots that he wears while he's on site, and his right toe has an "R" on it and his left toe has an "L" on it.

A: (Laughs.) Well, I'm a musician and you would think, you know? But when they said to the rear march, to the left blike, right blike, and hmm, hmm, hmm, I was the only one that was just going the wrong direction all time. But I just...

Q: Lets talk about that music for a minute. You've written a couple songs?

A: I've written many songs.

Q: Many songs? And you had some published?

A: Yes.

Q: Why don't you tell us about those?

A: Well, I wrote music a long time ago. I wrote my high school song. From "Many Haha Academy." And it was pretty wild. I won't sing it. (Laughs.) And... and then I wrote the theme song for "Welcome Wagon International." (Singing.) "Make A Welcome Wagon Call And Someone Everyday." You know, something like that. And then, in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, I've written... oh, 5 songs in the Children's Songbook.

Q: What are they?

A: Oh, I Often Go Walking. And, that was the music I did. And... I'm All Made of Hinges. Did that one. And... Family History, I am Doing It. And When Jesus Christ Was Baptized. And The Holy Ghost.

Q: Lyrics and music?

A: Yep.

Q: Lyrics and music. (Taking note.)

A: Except on I think, I'm All Made of Hinges, I just did the music on that one. And then I done a play on Isaiah. It's over there on the piano. It's a musical for children. And... it's a fun thing, twelve songs in it, and it's a play. Takes 40 minutes. They call up Isaiah in heaven and ask him to come down and help em' write it, so he does.

Q: So he does?

A: Uh huh. I mean, really, I shouldn't say all of it. (Laughs.) This isn't a good one to have in the first one. (Laughs again.) And, we've recently written a book for ukulele, Kathryn Ipson and I did that. A Hawaiian Music book.

Q: So you play the ukulele?

A: No, I just play the piano. I just accompany them.

Q: OK. Do you play any other instruments?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: I'm lucky to do that. (Laughs.) But I've done it since I was a kid. I'm not a kid anymore. (Laughs.) In my heart I am. But music, you know, has been a lot of fun for me. And then we... I've written a book for the Psalms 31 days. Of Psalm music. Pet Verbatim. Marion Ashdown wrote the words for me. I set the scripture to music, and then she interpreted it in four lines. She's great.

Q: Good.

A: Great writer. Uh huh.

Q: Have you written... all your life? Did you start...

A: Yeah, I... since I was... I didn't really know how to write, you know? But I would play. But I didn't take a composition in theory until I went to college. Yeah. I didn't get back to... well I graduated from Glendale College in Glendale, California after the service, you know? We had that... we had the GI bill. And I, you just took anything you could get at that time and I got into a Carson Paleontology and all this stuff. But anyway, I did graduate, and then I didn't get back to go to... school to finish my degree until I was 57. I was the oldest one at BYU to ever graduate. Isn't that fun? That was in humanities.

Q: That was in humanities?

A: So, I've had a fun life.

Q: Um, while you were in the service, did you have a family, were you married? Did you have any siblings?

A: No.

Q: No? So you were married later?

A: Yes.

Q: OK. Any particular moments of religious or spiritual experience while you were in the service maybe?

A: No. Uh. No, no.

Q: OK.

A: I just went to church I think.

Q: OK. Uh... what would you tell, if you had your grandchildren around you, what would you tell them about the service?

A: Oh, I was a... get my book and I'll tell you. That was a wonderful experience. I would tell them... if they had the opportunity to serve... their country, to do so. To do

so. So, it's a great honor to live in America. A great honor. I have lived in India, I've served 7, 6 missions I guess. Lived in India, Sweden, and served in this country. But, to come to America, it's wonderful. We have no idea. And so I... I think it's... I said in here: (Opening book.) "During the SPARS was a great experience for me and it has grown in significance over the years. I was young and in-experienced, but I hope I rendered good experience to my country by... willing, by being willing to do what I could to supportive of our government. I'm especially grateful for the education I've received and the subsequent benefits for having made that decision to join the SPARS in 1944. It taught me much about personal discipline, order, and obedience; all attributes which have had and impact on my life. After having lived in India, Sweden, and having visited Israel, I am thankful I live in America. I appreciate and support all who preserve our freedom by serving our country in the military services." That's what I said. How 'bout that?

Q: Perfect.

A: I'm glad to be still above ground. (Laughs.) I forget that that things on. (Pointing at camera.) (Laughs again.)

Q: That's what you're suppose to do. You're suppose to forget that that things on. (Laughing again.)

A: And I enjoy everyday. My favorite slogan is, "Whatever you vividly imagine, ardently desire, sincerely believe, and enthusiastically act upon must inevitably come to pass. And, enjoy here while you are here because there is no here there."

Q: Excellent. I need to take that to Hollywood. Sometimes I get wrapped up in the moment a little bit.

A: Laughing.

Q: Um...

A: I was a house mother at Brigham Young University too.

Q: You were? And what did that entail?

A: Oh man! 250 girls between the age of 18 and 22. Everything was either an emergency or a tragedy. (Laughing.) I had a great time with them. My name was Peterson when I was married. That was my maiden name. But then I married a Boozer. How about that? And so they called my building "Boozer Hall," which didn't go over too good, you know? (Laughs.) And then I married Brother uh... Frederick Lawler. He was from Maine.

Q: From Maine?

A: I never did understand what he said.

Q: (Laughs)

A: Pop the cock on the bob. You ought to bag this thing. (Laughs.) I just go through life laughing.

Q: That's the way you ought to go through life. Peterson with an "ON" or an "EN?"

A: "ON," Swedish.

Q: OK.

A: "EN" is Norwegian or... Danish. And I will say when they say the Norwegian, they can take pills for that! (Laughs.) Oh dear. I've ruined your whole day. (Laughs again.)

Q: This is wonderful! You were in at 44 and 45?

A: 44-46 was...

Q: 44-46. So you...were serving when Pearl was bombed?

A: ... No. That was in 42... 41.

Q: 41. That's right, I was thinking it was 45. But it was 41?

A: Uh huh. And I didn't go in until 44. But I was there when they... when the war was over.

Q: When the war was over. So it ended in 45, is that right?

A: Uh...46... 45... Yeah 45 or 46. Yeah.

Q: OK. Any regrets?

A: None whatsoever.

Q: None whatsoever?

A: Uh huh. I have no regrets on anything. I just... love life and I had a wonderful upbringing and a happy family.

Q: I get a feeling that the... the support from the country and from the politicians and from the media was much different than...

A: Much different.

Q: Than it is now. How...

A: Uh huh. Well, we live in a day of anti and rebellious people. I've never seen anything... you know? I've never seen anything... we were very patriotic at that time. Very patriotic. We didn't have the sort of... I don't remember any sort of... of saying we shouldn't go to war and all this stuff, you know? And packers were going around. We were willing to sacrifice and... we had rations, you know? There's a book in there, you can take a copy of that. The ration books we had were to get sugar or anything like that. But we were very much supportive of our country, you know? And never talked down our president like they do today. Course, that was the day before seatbelts and television and all that stuff. And Nintendo's, and... you know. We really worked hard. We really worked... but I think the feeling was different, you know? And there is pockets of this foolishness going on, but I'm thankful that there is many there that are very supportive of our people in the military service.

Q: Good. Did your service... how do you think that your service tended to color in a social, political, religious views that you might now have?

A: Well, my... I've always been of one party mind thinking. And I think the religious end of it was the most... probably the one I was searching the most to find as some answers at that time. I was raised in a very religious environment but it didn't seem to have the whole thing that I wanted. And so I, I found what I did want.

Q: Were you raised as a member of the LDS Church?

A: No, I was not. No.

Q: You were a convert?

A: Uh huh. But I... it didn't take long. I was only two weeks and I joined the church. Because I was well-prepared. I was a student of the scriptures. But I ... all my family are, are very fine and Presbyterians. And, my one nephew is the lawyer... top lawyer for Billy Graham.

Q: Oh really?

A: Uh huh. And... so we have a good relationship. I'm very ecumenical. I love people. And... but I think that that's been the greatest experience of my life; to have found this wonderful religion.

Q: OK.

A: Yeah.

Q: Is there something about your service that you would point to and say, "That is the most single... the single most powerful experience of my service?"

A: I would say the discipline. And the... order was very important to me. And the personal discipline of, of... having to be at a time at a certain time and, you know, follow directions and being very obedient. I think that that was probably the greatest experiences that I ever had in the service.

Q: OK. Anything we haven't covered?

A: No.

Q: Anything you want on that, while the cameras rolling and the tapes going?

A: (Laughs.) No, I've enjoyed visiting with you. And you may take that book and make a copy of it and if there's anything that would be significant. But I would certainly urge people to... if they have an opportunity and if they're young and if they can they would serve their country in any way they can because it's a great privilege to live here in America. And to be happy, and to fly the flag. I'm all for flying the flag, or, did I put it on there? Yes. Uh huh. And to be proud of your country. And... be the best that you can. And for one thing, be happy, because if you're not, life can be miserable.

Q: That's true.

A: Uh huh.

Q: That's true.

A: But, order is important to me and I think that that's what I learned; order and discipline, personal discipline. And self discipline I would say.

Q: Great.

A: Even though I was wild. I still am. (Laughs.) Thanks.