

**Oral History Interview of
Sue Riggs**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
May 01, 2013
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview highlights the life and career of Sue Riggs. Riggs describes growing up in Nazi-occupied Paris during World War II, her subsequent marriage to Elton Riggs, her move to the United States, and her career as a French teacher at All Saints Episcopal School in Lubbock.

Length of Interview: 01:23:37

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David Marshall (DM):

Today is May 1, 2013. This is David Marshall interviewing Sue Riggs at her home in Lubbock, Texas. And Mr. Elton Riggs is also here, you can ask questions if you like. Let me start by getting your full name, including your maiden name.

Sue Riggs (SR):

Okay. My full name is Susanne Riggs. You want what now?

DM:

Maiden name too.

SR:

Montandon.

DM:

Mon-mon—

SR:

Montandon is what it is, yeah.

DM:

Does it—does it have—does it mean “mountain” in French?

SR:

No.

DM:

Okay. Because it sounds like Spanish....

SR:

No. Let's see. I was born in Paris on nine eleven twenty-nine [September 11, 1929]. My mother's French, and my dad was Swiss. At that time, I had an older brother, four years old. And we lived in the front of the Cade Jamas [spelling unknown; She lived on Toulouse Street.] that's on the canal, side of the canal.

DM:

That's a canal that flows into the Seine? Or—

SR:

No. No, it doesn't flow into the Seine. It comes from the Seine. And it has locks. You can see the ships going in locks and everything. And after I was ten years old, and we moved from there to a larger apartment. I attended school and—the beginning of World War II is what it was. The Germans had already invaded most of Europe, Poland. First, they talked about the Jewish being transported to camps, so we knew his goal was to collect all Jewish people and to put them in the edge of Paris in a skyscraper, shave their heads, and then put them in freight cars.

DM:

They—they put them in a skyscraper in—did you say—

SR:

Yeah, the skyscraper. That's a building in Paris that—taller than any others. Most buildings were six floors.

DM:

They made compartments for them there, or—

SR:

No, I don't remember what it was. I don't really know, but it doesn't matter. Shaved their heads, and then they bussed them through there and put them in freight cars. That was almost pretty much halfway, because we didn't know that was going on until we went like we did and saw that happen. Then we knew that something was not right. You don't put people—so. Let's see—the children were separated from their parents, and they were crying, you could hear them crying. So we went real quick and left there, we didn't want to get caught in that, the concentration camp. The Gestapo came in classroom to take anyone of Jewish descent, then to camp. After that, the Jewish were never seen again. Those people that they collected, they're gone. Now, in my building, they had a couple on the fifth floor, and they had two girls and a boy, and a grandmother was living there with them, and then this one day the Gestapo came and got them out of bed, left the grandmother there, came to school and got the two girls, and they were never seen again. The neighbors in the building, we cannot take care of the grandmother, so she passed away. And the son was gone, he was in south of France, but they would never reveal where he was. So that was—after the war, he came back. So my day consisted of wait in line for food, the supply was no longer available. The Germans took all the food and what we had—what was left was for the population. I went to school from eight thirty to four thirty, and came home after—very difficult air raid during that time where we would take cover in a shelter, and the shelter was a long, cold special shelter. They were just like a long hallway, but they had several exits so if one exit was blocked, then you know we could go. The walls were concrete, and they had concrete seats attached to the wall.

DM:

This was at the school, or near the school?

SR:

At the school, yeah. The back, there was a lot behind it, and that's where the shelter was. Now it's a big boulevard, it's no longer there, but that's what it was at the time. So you know as soon as we started one of the classes, here comes that siren, so we'd line up real quick and we knew what to do and just took our books and everything. So it was really—educate us a good three years in an air raid shelter. I've never heard—the teachers, I never heard them complain. I thought that was remarkable. They never said anything, they'd just get us up, we knew what to do and off we went. And when the sirens sound off again for us to get out of there, by that time, the Americans, the bombers were coming back from Germany, and we looked up, and there weren't thirteen. There's thirteen in a squadron, but there never were thirteen so that meant that one of them was shot down. The Germans didn't try to chase them, you know, after they come back, I thought that was interesting too, they never did. They couldn't have gotten them anyway. And then at night, then they had this big old long cord, and it was like a football. That was attached to the ground in Paris, around Paris, and then they had like a football that was full of helium. So at night, if any American bomber come, you know, they get into it, because they use lower altitude when they throw the bombs down. They come down and drop and then they go, so you know. And then after that, we heard on the radio, the BBC, we used to listen to the BBC, because sometimes they'd give a message for pilots who had been shot down or somewhere so that they could be picked up and then returned. So like one night, there was a hospital close to my house, and it was a children's hospital. And one morning there's a parachute dropped—draped over the wall, so they knew that there was a body somewhere, so they came and inspected the apartments, looked for him or anything, and it was—that's the way it was. We accepted it. That's the way it was. It was scary—

DM:

Did you remember hearing people talk about whether they were opposed to the Nazis being there or some maybe in favor of the Nazis—I mean, did you hear that back and forth at all, or did people just kind of keep quiet about the whole thing?

SR:

Well, I think you'd just listen; you don't make any remarks. You may think it, but you're not going to say it.

DM:

It's too dangerous.

SR:

Because see, the ladies, the women that collaborated with the Germans, when the Americans came in, they'd take those ladies and shave their heads and parade them all through the city, that collaborated with them. You could—you know that actions speak louder than words. You didn't have to say anything to see that they weren't for the Germans or wasn't against it.

DM:

Did they have any terms for those ladies, by the way? And if they did, can you repeat it? I mean, did they have a derogatory term for those ladies—

SR:

You mean just the—

DM:

The lady—the collaborators.

SR:

No. People knew in the neighborhood who it was, they knew who it was. They all picked them up. Men, too. But the girls, they dragged them through the streets. That was the FFS, Forces Francaises de l'Interieur, that's French Forces of the Interior. They'd call them the Maquis. Maquis, that was the underground people, the Maquis. Yeah. And you had French people in there. So you had to be careful.

DM:

As a child, did you hear anything about the French resistance, underground? Or did you hear about that later?

SR:

No. That way you didn't know that was going on. See, the Germans were afraid of the sewer. So that was in the sewer, and there was a family that stayed in the catacombs for four years, they had a room down in the catacombs. If you go there, they'll be listed. Four years they were in there. The Germans were afraid of the sewer, anything underground; they just didn't mess with that.

DM:

Can you tell me about the subway, how, I think you mentioned, the subway became a bomb shelter.

SR:

Yeah.

DM:

But you had to get off the subway? Can you tell me about that?

SR:

Well, yes, when the siren sounded when you were at the stations, then the doors were locked, but they kept it thirty minutes, and then unlocked the doors and we just jumped on the track and you walked to the next station. You had to be careful with that because the [electrical] current was there in those tracks, so could've been anything happen. But that was a safe place to be, it was so far down in the ground. And also, you know if you couldn't get up at the station, you could walk to the next station, go back up on the street and do that. And of course, it seemed like it always was when people were going to work, going home, when it was just loaded. So when those doors opened, you'd just kind of jump. There were some old people too that couldn't, they just couldn't do it. Some people kind of—but there was a lot of German soldiers in there, too.

DM:

Oh, you mentioned that this was troop transport, also, I think.

SR:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

Would it be mostly German troops on a Subway, or mostly French people?

SR:

The Germans had control of the subway, too. They had control of everything. So I said myself, it was a lot of them that had to wait until the next train. Because it came every thirty minutes--so the only thing about that, if anybody tried anything, there you were, so you got no telling what. And they used the transportation, the trains and—of course the air, I don't know about the air. They were everywhere. That's why I said you needed to know who was in front of you, behind you, and just keep your mouth shut, so to speak. Just move on. The sewer line, it was built for three million people. Back then—at the time, it was at the time eleven million people in Paris so they had to take it out further. It's kind of interesting to see the function of the sewer line.

DM:

How you handle that kind of population—that is incredible. Well, the transportation, as we were talking about is incredible. But sewage for that many people?

SR:

Yeah. Used to, these Germans always had a backpack on them. So they'd just bump you, they didn't care. The people—you could see their attitude was bad; you could tell. You know, you

went to school, you came home. But Hitler never bothered the churches. I thought that was very interesting. He never did bother the churches. So that was interesting.

DM:

Were there any times that you were really scared, either scared of German soldiers around or scared of having an air raid?

SR:

Well yeah, because those air raids always came at the wrong time. For instance, at night. So, well, we had some breaks. My mother had a cook stove, a wood cook stove. She'd put coal in it. And we'd put bricks in the oven, and at night we just wrapped the brick into a towel or sheet or something and put it in the bed, so when you'd get in the bed, it was kind of warm because it was cold everywhere else. But then here comes that siren, you know, so you had to get up—

DM:

You'd leave your brick.

SR:

That's right. We also learned how the gas meter, the electricity meter and the water meter—we were rationed for that. And the coal—we counted a piece of coal, but we'd put it in the wood stove, so that we had enough to go through the whole month. And also the water, we rationed that.

DM:

How much water might you have for a day, for example?

SR:

Well, the people over there didn't have hot water heaters like we have here, it's just a little heater over the sink. So that went on, we had to be careful because our gas, too, so we had to make sure that you use [little]—it's just a lot of things that—

DM:

And what would you eat? I know that food was scarce, but what was a typical meal for breakfast, lunch and supper, for example?

SR:

Well, sometimes we'd get a piece of bread that we had waited at the baker's for the day before. But we never did eat much, just bread and maybe a little dessert or something. We just had to figure out that we wanted, something every day, otherwise you'd come up short. The lady in the building, she made us soaps, so we bought that from her. [inaudible] It was a lot of—you could

buy a lot of stuff like that, but you needed to know where it was. Black market, the black market was really strong. But still, if it's nothing that can go black market, there's no nothing. But everything was rationed. Of course, gasoline, we never did mess with that, so we didn't know about gasoline. But the coal was the one that was—anthracite was the name of the coal.

DM:

Anthracite coal.

SR:

And that would burn nice in the stove, it would regulate a lot of heat.

DM:

Well I think that's interesting about the brick, the bricks absorbing heat and then wrapping them up and carrying them to bed.

SR:

You learn a lot when you don't have any—you don't have it.

DM:

Amazing what you can do when you have to, I guess.

SR:

Oh yeah. We just went to school, we walked to school. So really, when we left in the morning, we never knew whether we'd see our parents or not. We just walked; we came straight home. We didn't mess with it. So that's pretty much—

DM:

Now you were—you were born in '29, is that right? So you were eleven or so when the Germans came in.

SR:

Yeah, I was. You know, everybody was scared, of course. They called it the *exode*. *L'exode* is when people that left the city were so afraid to come in—

DM:

There was a mass exodus from the city?

SR:

From the city, yeah.

DM:

Where did they go? Just anywhere in the country?

SR:

Just went. In one place, they went to the train station and of course all the schedule and everything was just a mess. People would crawl in the cars through the window to get in there, and then three hours later, they had a big head-on collision that killed a lot of people.

DM:

Oh no. Do you think they were going to the countryside to live with relatives or something like that? Or just anywhere?

SR:

Well, some of them did, but see the Italians—the Italians were involved in that, too. They would come down on people who were walking on the highways to leave the city. The Italian planes would come down and shoot the people that were—people would run in a ditch and would dig leaves or something to get under there. But some were killed that way. We stayed in the apartment. We didn't get out. We just—you know, we just stayed there. But you can hear the sound of their boots, something else.

DM:

I can imagine. Marching in unison.

SR:

Mussolini had a big hand in that, too. He sure did. Sure did. They used French buses to haul the Jewish people. And they stole the buses—you know that end is open—have you ever seen—

DM:

Where the end of opens?

SR:

The platform in the back? Yeah. That's the one. Those Jewish people sang the French national anthem as they were going. They didn't really know what was waiting for them.

DM:

Yeah..

SR:

If you went up in the north, they had Switzerland and it was—part of Switzerland was in Germany territory. So the station, the train that would take people, take them through Germany

then Switzerland again, but when they went to Germany, they had to put all the window shades down and everything so there would be nobody seeing them.

DM:

I see.

SR:

That's how they'd come through. They had all the railroad train, all the stuff.

DM:

They had all the transportation tied up.

SR:

I'm going to have to look at those states, because they've got—I know I've got one—the Eisenhower one in that seller, thirty-some miles, full of gold bricks and all kinds of stuff. Art and everything. And they were taking that, too. It was really something else. Went to the Louvre and just helped himself.

DM:

As far as your—you continued of course to go to school and things like that during the German occupation. Did your family attend church before or during the occupation?

SR:

We went to church. My mother did. Yeah. My mother was Catholic.

DM:

But there were no restrictions on her?

SR:

Oh no. Nothing. I think most people had their own restriction to stay out the way. That was the best thing, really. Out of sight, out of mind.

DM:

Before the war, did you ever get out of the city, or were you in Paris all the time?

SR:

No, we went to my French grandmother. We spent usually two weeks with her.

DM:

And where was she?

SR:

In central France.

DM:

Central France. Do you remember what town?

SR:

Yeah. Nouillac. It's close to where these caves are, the Lascaux caves? Down in there. And my dad—because my dad was Swiss—so we'd spend another two weeks in Switzerland.

DM:

How nice.

SR:

Yeah.

DM:

But all this shut down during the war. I guess there was no mobility?

SR:

No, not really. We'd just stay out of sight, like I said. We'd go to parks, something like that.

DM:

Tell me again where your family—where they were in Switzerland?

SR:

Shaffhausen is one of them. And Mache, close to the Neuchatel. Shaffhausen is right above Zurich, it's on the Rhine.

DM:

And your grandmother down in central France, the town again?

SR:

Nouillac.

DM:

Can you spell that?

SR:

Nouillac. N-O-U-I-L-L-A-C. Nouillac. It's down there where the caves are. Lascaux caves. Down in that area. Right up above Toulouse. He [Sue's husband, Elton] went to Bordeaux and Toulouse, I think. Well, Toulouse is where they have—what is that cave? Not in Toulouse, is it?

DM:

Toulouse, there's some south of there in the Pyrenees and then north of there in the Dordognes, I don't know about right in Toulouse. Niaux is down there south of Toulouse, a-ways. It's near Tarascon.

SR:

Tarascon, yeah. That's a beautiful area.

DM:

What about—we were sitting here talking before the recording, it being May first and May Day, that's one celebration you said that you remember as a child?

SR:

Yes. That's the Labor Day there.

DM:

That's what?

SR:

Labor Day.

DM:

Oh, is it?

SR:

And the Muge—that's a little flower, a little white flower. I can't think of what you call them here. Anyway, you'd buy that for good luck or whatever.

DM:

And that was pretty much it or did you have some kind of celebration on May Day?

SR:

Oh, no. Some people might have, but we didn't. Labor Day, it's what it was.

DM:

Not a May pole or anything like that?

SR:

No. I'm sure somewhere in the country it would be appropriate. We didn't.

DM:

What about other festivals or holidays? Are there any that you remember from your childhood?

SR:

Well, let's see. July the fourteenth. That particular time, those big parks, you couldn't get on the grass. That was a no-no. But on July fourteenth, you could get on that and have fireworks and everything. But see, over there, you learn in school in nine years what you learn here in twelve years. Yep. The schools don't have any sports in them. Sports are outside.

DM:

They're about learning. They're about academics.

SR:

That's right. That's what it is. You can belong to a club if you want to play, but you have to do that on Thursday, because Thursday was a day off, and then we went Saturday morning. Now it's Wednesday, their day off, now.

DM:

They break up the week that way. So Wednesday and Sunday, I guess, and then the other days.

SR:

It's a good schedule. But there was no sport at all, it was strictly academics. That's why they do in nine years what they do here in twelve years. (laughs)

DM:

Well we always talk about—being in education—we always talk about how much more efficient our system should be. (laughs)

SR:

Yeah, there's a little emphasis on the sports here. But theirs is done by the city. It's all done by the city. So anybody can go play tennis or do what you want to do.

DM:

When you think back to school, did you have any special subjects that you enjoyed? Was there anything that you really liked beyond the others?

SR:

Oh, I don't know. Not really. We just kind of went to the park or visit the museum. We'd always go to the museum. It's amazing what you discover in a museum.

DM:

Now that would be a nice place to grow up, getting to go to museums in Paris.

SR:

Yeah, we did, because we went a lot with the school, too. They would take us. We'd go on the subway, they'd take us on the subway. There's a lot of things you can do there. The subway was—in those years, they had ladies who punched your ticket in the subway. Then they had the automatic door on the track, and you would really run because a train was coming in and those doors would close. You'd just run and go through it.

DM:

When did they go from having a lady stamp the ticket to having an automated ticket?

SR:

Oh, let's see—I don't really remember that. I know it was after 1952, because when I went back, they still had the ladies. And see, those French kids now, they jump the tourniquet, they just jump and run. I had a student, he's a doctor now, but he and his buddy, I told him, we went to the Duchamp museum, I told him, I said, you don't want to try anything funny because inspectors are in the subway. Because these kids, they're from all over the world. So those two boys they decided that they went to the tourniquet with one ticket. I didn't know that because they were—I always put myself at front and then sandwiched the kids in with a colleague. I looked over there, and I saw him, and he was talking to a big—heavy-set lady. I knew what it was, and I told him—

DM:

Gotcha. She caught him, huh?

SR:

She said, "Oh, Madame," they had their crests in their uniforms, I thought they were British, that's what I thought they were. "Madame, Madame!" I thought, oh, what did they do? So I walked over there. So the lady thought they were British, she said what happened. They had the tickets, I don't know why they did it, they just did it.

DM:

Because they're boys. (laughs)

SR:

So anyway, she told me, she said, "You tell them that's two hundred American dollars. I take them to the police station in that area; they'll take them to the American embassy, and you come and get them." And I said, "Yeah, and they're going home. They're going home after that. That's it." He's a doctor here in town.

DM:

I bet he wouldn't try it now.

SR:

I've told them, I said, "You just don't do that. Don't try anything funny." That's how the French kids do it, but they couldn't run off.

DM:

Well, it takes a very brave person to take a group of kids over there. We're going to talk about that a little bit.

SR:

It takes a lot of organization. You have to be organized.

DM:

Before we get to that, can you tell me anything about maybe other holiday celebrations in France? For example, Christmas. What is Christmas like for a child, say in the 1930s, in France?

SR:

Oh well, it's an old-fashioned Christmas. The tree has candles on it. And the candles are not lit until Christmas night. And it's not really that commercialized. If we had a scarf or something like that—and the people went to the midnight mass; that was real popular. We went to bed, but growing up, went to the mass. The next day, that was a big reverllon. But the French people give gifts on January first over there.

DM:

Is there gift-giving instead of a Santa Claus or something like that?

SR:

Well, yeah, there's a lot of organizations that had things for children, Christmas trees and things like that. But as far as the private homes, it wasn't really that commercialized. January first was

really the most important for that. Usually, that's when they get the bonuses, on January first, if there was any.

DM:

That when they'd get what?

SR:

Bonuses.

DM:

A bonus. Oh, the bonuses.

SR:

From the company they work for, yeah. And just a good meal, that was about it. It's just not commercialized like it is now. Now, the store windows are just beautiful, oh yeah. They decorate with all the toys and everything, it's really—we used to go and look at the windows in those big stores, really pretty. But—of course, the midnight mass now, Catholic people got Notre Dame and all these places for midnight mass.

DM:

Did you attend any of those kinds of midnight masses?

SR:

Well, we did it one time I remember—the parish in the neighborhood that I lived in. I lived in the nineteenth district. There's twenty districts in Paris. So every district has a church, a priest usually. Usually in those areas, it's usually old priests that are retired out of Rome, they put them in those—in a district—usually in an abbey, with a priest with a hat and a long black robe. And he always walks around with his German shepherd dog.

DM:

Why with a German shepherd dog?

SR:

I don't know. Maybe he just took him out for a walk. Now, my brother was an altar boy. He—the altar boys helped in the baptism service, they'd stay in the middle of the church where the holy water is. And it's usually done in the afternoon or whatever. But in that parish, the priest and then the altar boys usually would hold the candles so that the priest could reach the baby and everything. And the boys, my brother was one of them, he moved this candle and it caught the priest's cassock on fire.

DM:

Oops. (Laughs)

SR:

And come to find out they had been in the sacristy behind the altar in the wine.

DM:

They what?

SR:

They were—they went behind the sacristy where they kept the wine and those kids drank that wine. So the next day, I saw the priest coming with his dog, sometimes he came to visit with my mother, but I could tell when he came, it wasn't a nice visit. Sure enough, he told her what they did, so that was his last time as an altar boy.

DM:

That's worse than going through the tourniquet.

SR:

Oh, yeah.

Elton Riggs (ER):

Some of them jump the turnstile and some of them steal the wine.

DM:

Oh, my.

ER:

We call it turnstiles, not tourniquet.

DM:

Tourniquet, yeah. Okay. During the war years, did you receive any news about what was going on? Did people talk about what was going on out there? Because things were happening around the world, but that information—I don't know if that was trickling down to the people of Paris or not. Because Germany started facing reverses, especially by 1944, and they probably wouldn't want people to know that. Did you hear things about the war, this battle or that?

SR:

The BBC. They were a good source of information.

DM:

There you go.

SR:

But you had to be very careful when you turn the radio on.

DM:

What would they do if they caught you listening—

SR:

Well they would do what they did to the Jewish people. So we usually wrapped it in a blanket or in the closet and just listened to it. Yeah, the BBC, they had some good information. And *Francois*, that was a newspaper—and sometimes you could eke out—my parents talked about it. But you could tell—you could feel it, I think. Particularly when they announced the Americans had landed, when they got real—

DM:

There on Normandy beach?

SR:

Yeah.

DM:

So you knew that pretty quick?

SR:

Yeah, we knew that pretty quick. So we knew that it would be a matter of time, if they come. Just the newspaper, because we didn't really have to do anything, and I didn't work for the Germans. I was going to say my dad was a machinist in the factory—a day worker—that they just took over. But I don't think they signified—we didn't—in the book I had, *Is Paris Burning?*, that's what happened, the books tell everything. They were hiding in city hall, the architecture up on the roof. They would hide up there and shoot down at the people. They didn't leave very easy. Some of them ripped off the plumbing in the bathroom and really did a lot of damage. And some of them would take prisoners. They had a bunch up there, over there where the PDB was, there used to be a bunch of Germans in there. I think they were tired.

ER:

PDB—Paris Detention Barracks.

DM:

I see, okay. Were you saying that the Germans were taking some prisoners, or people were taking Germans—

SR:

People would take—

DM:

Germans as prisoners, as the American army was approaching?

SR:

Yeah. And they were tired. They just kind of—you know, they didn't have much left, I don't think. But they were everywhere. Particularly in a cave where they stole all the paintings and everything. Unbelievable.

DM:

Do you remember the day that Paris was liberated? That the Americans actually arrived?

SR:

Yeah, we went to the Butte Chaumon park. We were just walking there and my brother, he climbed up on the light poles. And there was some troops coming in that parked their car there, hollered and everything. But they didn't—the Germans would hang on. They didn't decide to keep going or anything.

DM:

You always see in movies and some documentary films, you see people, like in French towns, waving little American flags. Did you ever see anything like that?

SR:

No, I didn't. French flags.

DM:

French flags.

SR:

And again, it took them a while to take all the districts, like I said, I was in the nineteenth district. So when they came in, I think they came in from north of the city. I think that's where they come in.

DM:

Yours was farther south, wasn't it? Farther south?

ER:

No, she was in the north.

DM:

Oh, in the north?

ER:

Northeast part—

DM:

Oh, northeast part. Okay.

SR:

That was the gates of Paris. Now its Periferique. That's the loop now. Of course, they have a lot of Algerian people.

DM:

Right. It's all changed.

SR:

They've been building buildings full of them, and there's a lot of trouble. It's just not what it used to be.

DM:

Do you remember victory in Europe day? We call it V-E and V-J day, y'all probably called it something else when you heard that Germany surrendered. Do you remember that day?

SR:

Victoire, yeah. Victory day. Yeah. People could talk again. But still. There was still some German hidden places. Yeah.

DM:

So you had to wonder.

SR:

Yeah. And you know these people that were on the beach, there were their homes. They had to be going somewhere. They had nothing left. That's quite a traffic there.

DM:

I think it's interesting, something you said last time I was over here. You said—we were talking about the two of you meeting, and you went to the United States, and I said, "Well, would that be a big—that sounds like an awfully big thing for a seventeen-year-old girl from Paris to do," and you said, "Well, things were different then, and we felt like we could do things like that." That's interesting. It kind of—post-war confidence, maybe, I don't know what you would call that, but maybe we can talk about that a little bit. Can you tell me the story of how you met Elton Riggs?

SR:

Well, my best girlfriend, her mother was British, and so she started working for the American office, and that's when she met the little Bill. She met the little Bill. My girlfriend's boyfriend, the other one.

DM:

Met your friend?

ER:

Little Bill. His name was Barney Reed. They called him Little Bill.

SR:

You know, she said, "Oh, come on, let's go." I remember her telling me, "Come on, let's go, he's going to bring somebody." I don't know how she knew that he was going to bring somebody because—unless her mother said that, because I didn't know him. So we went—Metro Station, down at the entrance of it, and that's when they showed up. Then we went from there. I think we went to a movie, didn't we?

ER:

I think so.

SR:

I think so. We went to a movie. And that was it, you know. After that, it was here.

DM:

You thought you might like this guy. I got your story, your side of it, so I had to get the other side, too.

SR:

Well, I remember going to the train station when you left for Bordeaux. Didn't you take a train with the WACs [Women's Army Corps] to Bordeaux? Didn't you take the last? You had to.

ER:

We took a train, a special train for the troops, it was a tour train. It had five groups on the train, and got the military police in it. So they picked me up in my outfit, and then they picked three other guys out of other outfits. And we left on that train, I don't remember from where, what station it was. We started out south for Toulouse, Bordeaux or whatever, on down to the Pyrenees. In fact we went up on the Pyrenees. Took a trip, bunch of buses, took a bunch of buses, hauling a whole train of people.

DM:

This was a sightseeing thing, huh? Good for you.

ER:

Each police was assigned to a certain group. My group was the WACs and nurses.

DM:

The what?

ER:

WACs and nurses. The car on the train. And we visited the—they called it the wine cellars—a place in, I think, Bordeaux.

DM:

Bordeaux, yeah.

ER:

Where they make a lot of wine. So we went in to the wine cellars, as they called it, it had a big, long table set up by it, tablecloths and wine set all the way around it and all kinds of stuff—molasses. People would drink, which I didn't. They helped themselves. One of the chaplains was Catholic, and he took a fifth of something, put it under his blouse and took it with him. (laughs) He couldn't get on the bus when he got back to the bus. Couldn't make the train. He couldn't get on the bus.

DM:

Oh no, because he had drunk it?

ER:

And then one of our MPs was, he was a Catholic boy, and he said, "Here Father, I'll help you on." I said, "I don't care whether father gets on or not. I'm not helping."

DM:

He deserves to get his cassock set on fire.

ER:

That wasn't an altar boy.

DM:

Yeah that was a priest. Oh, my. And you went down to the Pyrenees?

ER:

Yeah, we—what's the place where we stayed down in the valley? I—where the movie filmed, I think, *The Song of Bernadette*?

DM:

Hm, I don't know.

SR:

Lourdes, yeah.

ER:

Lourdes, France. There's a church on the hill. The church on the hill, the south hill, you go down around it, and there's a springs down there. And this girl is supposed to, many years ago, have seen the Virgin Mary standing on the side of the hill. Remember that? Ever see that movie?

DM:

I've never seen the movie.

ER:

Anyway, the girl was ill from something, this young girl. Mary talked to her, and she told her to go down and wash her face in the water in a certain place there. So she went down there, and there was just sand. She went to where the Virgin Mary told her to go. So she—she didn't—there wasn't any water. So she started digging in the sand, and water started bubbling up. So she grabbed that muddy water and washed her face with it. As a result she was healed. They still have that grotto on the side of the hill there.

DM:

Wow, how interesting.

ER:

And then hundreds, probably thousands of canes and crutches, and the beaches where you can go and have a service or pray or whatever.

DM:

It became a pilgrimage site, I guess.

ER:

A relief place. From there we went up on the mountain.

DM:

Did you happen to go up to Ronceveaux? Ronceveaux, it's a pass over from France into Spain, it's where Charlemagne— how would you say it—

SR:

Charlemagne.

DM:

Charlemagne—was returning from Spain and his—and his army was attacked and his nephew Roland was killed. Song of Roland is what we call—

SR:

Chanson de Roland, yeah. I've heard of that.

DM:

Chanson—

SR:

Chanson de Roland.

DM:

De Roland, yeah. That sounds like it might be in that area.

ER:

It was probably in that area, but we didn't go to that place.

DM:

It's on that route, the—I don't know what they call it. It's a pilgrimage route that goes over into Spain into—down to Pamplona and then all the way over to Santiago de Compostela. A lot of French people take that—that pilgrimage around there.

ER:

We took a tour up on the mountain. We could see over into Spain, but where we were, it was no roads or passages that went into Spain.

DM:

Okay. How nice to get to take that—that tour down there. And I'm so glad that you got to go down there as a child down into central—into central France to see family.

SR:

It was just a little village in that little—we took the bread. My grandmother made the bread, and I took it down to the village, to put them in the oven. They had an oven. That's how—

DM:

She made the loaves and you took it down to—

SR:

Yeah, we took it down there—the quick, yeah. Big old round bread. Big old hog chased me one time. Those hogs are mean, they really are. (laughs) All the farmers, you know, everything down in that village, there was chickens all over the place.

DM:

Made them mean. Kind of like our wild hogs all over Texas now. Now, I mentioned Charlemagne. Were there certain heroic figures that you were taught about as a child? Did you hear about Charlemagne as a child?

SR:

Oh, not very much.

DM:

Joan of Arc?

SR:

Yeah, Joan of Arc. And—let's see—no—not really. We studied history, and Henry IV was popular. He was quite something else.

ER:

Henri?

DM:

Henri?

ER:

Henri.

SR:

Yeah, Henri.

DM:

Well, let's go back to—you were talking about you meeting and then y'all decided to get married somewhere along the way, but you already came back to the U.S., is that right?

ER:

Came back before her, yeah.

DM:

How did you—how did you propose to her? By correspondence or in person, or how did—?

ER:

I believe it was correspondence.

SR:

Yeah. My girlfriend's mother, she would translate the letters for us.

DM:

Did you speak much French? I mean—much English?

SR:

No, not really.

DM:

Not much English? Okay. This was a big decision for you. Seventeen years old and then leaving this country and going over to the United States.

SR:

I think—we traveled a lot before. We went to the grandparents on the train by ourselves. So what I did when I got to New York, I just went to the train station. Now, I was supposed to fly from New York to Big Spring, but somehow I got off the ship at seven o'clock at night. I remember that. First American citizens get off the ship. And then the visitors get off the ship, then alien people stayed till the last. And it was seven o'clock, waiting to get out.

DM:

How long was that trip across the Atlantic?

SR:

Nine and a half day. I left the nineteenth, I think, I got there the twenty-ninth.

DM:

Before that, had you ever been anywhere besides France or Switzerland?

SR:

Brussels—Belgium, yeah.

DM:

But still, suddenly, this is a long way.

SR:

Well, yeah, but like I said, in those years, it was different. People—they'd do things like that.

ER:

She was too young to—

DM:

What's that?

ER:

She was too young to know. (DM laughs)

SR:

No, we—you know, we just traveled and—

DM:

That very bold, though. It's very bold to leave your country and to go across the ocean and show up in New York and find your—knowing that you were going to find your way down to Midland, Texas. (Phone rings) You need to pause this a minute? Do you need—

SR:

Yeah. Okay.

DM:

Well, that's just kind of a bold thing to do. So you showed up in New York—

SR:

Yes, and got a cab and went to the Grand Central Station, because I was familiar with the stations and everything. Bought me a ticket, and then I looked on the track, I realized how the system worked. So mine was going to—what was it—that chief—that train? It come to Midland, seven o'clock in the morning?

ER:

You mean which way you went? You went up north through Chicago.

SR:

Yeah, I went through Chicago.

ER:

Down through—

SR:

Dallas. And Dallas to Midland.

ER:

Dallas to Midland.

SR:

Yeah. Chicago I had a transfer station; I didn't know that until I got there. That was the dirtiest place. I thought, My goodness.

DM:

Welcome to America. Well, what I'm wondering is—so you took a train all the way to Midland?

SR:

Yeah.

DM:

By the time you got to Midland, the U.S. wasn't looking very much like northern France.

SR:

No.

ER:

Not at all.

SR:

Oh, I had people tell me, "But you don't know what you're getting into," you know. Of course, on that train, there were a lot of soldiers going home. So that took me about two days to do that. And when we got to Midland, another man—when I got off on the track, you know, the last car, and I thought, there's no train station here. But this man with a briefcase, he got off and he kind of helped me. And I got to the station, and I remember that he worked for a cab company. And the fellow—of course he [Elton Riggs] knew about it, he was in Big Springs waiting for me, because I was going to fly there, but I had no way of knowing. He took me, that man, into an elite part of Midland, and then he took me to your folks' at six-thirty in the morning.

ER:

A friend of mine was driving the cab.

DM:

Ah, I see.

ER:

And he knew my folks, of course, we went to church together. He got her in a cab, nice girl, she wanted to go, you know. She didn't have the address. All she had was a post office box number. Box 215. She seemed to—what's his name—showed him the box, it said Elton Riggs—he said, "I know who that is."

DM:

Oh, good. That worked out well.

ER:

He took her to the house. He went to the door and told my dad, he said, "Brother Riggs, I think I've got something out here for you."

DM:

Aren't you glad that worked out well? You got the right cab driver.

SR:

Like the windmill, you know, what's the windmill for? To keep the cows cool.

DM:

(laughs) What? What is that about?

SR:

No, that's what somebody—

ER:

Somebody told you that?

DM:

Somebody told you that—well, what did you think? Before you came over, did you think you would see cowboys? Cattle?

SR:

You know, there was some movies—and there still is—and the movie, they show those hard western movies, so people really think that that's what it is, that's a false statement, but that's really what they think it is.

DM:

Well, even students—we have a lot of students from around the world who come to work where I work, and they think the same thing. They think, "Well, I thought there would be cowboys and horses. Everybody wears cowboy hats."

ER:

They're out there.

DM:

You see them, but they're out there. So that was kind of your expectation?

SR:

Yeah. And I wasn't disappointed. He had to put up a five-hundred dollar bond so if I wasn't married, it sent him back. It sent me back with the money.

ER:

Yeah, a cash bond.

DM:

Send you back with the money. Oh, okay. What about the place itself? I know you had never seen anything like this, this kind of country. What did you think about it? Wind blowing and—

SR:

Well that never bothered me. I don't guess. Sometimes you don't know what you don't know, that works.

ER:

It didn't bother her. She knew she had me.

DM:

And then there's the situation with—Midland was not a large town. I mean, it wasn't a large city. It's not like Paris.

SR:

Oh, no.

DM:

Suddenly, you were living kind of in the country.

SR:

Well, yeah, I guess I did.

DM:

Was that difficult for you?

SR:

No.

ER:

A little over five thousand population.

DM:

What?

ER:

Midland had a little over five thousand population.

DM:

A little over. It wasn't too small, but it wasn't Paris. There were no museums like Paris. Well, this is a very drastic lifestyle change, but you didn't—

SR:

Like I say, we went to different—after the war and everything, we had so much—you know, I don't know, it was just—

ER:

Quite a move.

DM:

That's adaptability. That is some real adaptability.

SR:

We had two exchange students, too, one from Denmark and one from Tokyo. And they thought it was different, too, but we kept them a whole year and they were real nice kids.

ER:

Yeah, the first was a Japanese girl, Koshia. She had her seventeenth birthday here. So she brought her up to the building where my shop was. She went to the window and she said, "It is so flat."

SR:

She did real well, though, I think. She was really—

ER:

She was a good girl.

SR:

She left for fifteen years and then she came back after fifteen years and visited with us. She was a nice student.

ER:

She had been a flight attendant for Tokyo Air for ten years. Then she quit that, came over here for—what was it—a month, two months?

DM:

Well, at least you kind of knew what it was like to go from your country to a foreign country, so you could probably relate to them pretty well.

SR:

Yeah. The boy was from Denmark. He was from a divorced family, and he was from a church family, he couldn't figure out why the kids didn't do their homework. He had a coach for English, he couldn't believe that the kids just wouldn't do their homework. He said they just didn't care. He was about the only one that turned his homework in. The teacher was his coach, was one of the coaches, and that don't look very good, really, if you think about it.

DM:

Well yeah, I've seen that myself. I used to teach in the history department at Texas Tech and a lot of foreign students did better on American history than the American students a lot of times,

only because they studied real hard. How long did it take you to become comfortable with English?

SR:

Oh, I don't know. Probably three, four years.

ER:

She picked it up pretty fast.

SR:

Yeah. You know, I've always said that if you want to learn a language, you need to go in a country that the language is spoken, because that's the only way to do it. Book is okay, but—

DM:

Well, you sure did that with English.

SR:

I did. Because with German, it was kind of my second language. Yeah. Because overseas, they require a foreign language before they graduate, so—That's right.

DM:

Now, you came—you got over here in '46 or so? Forty-six or '47.

SR:

Forty-seven.

DM:

Forty-seven. And you lived in Midland for a while. When did you all move up to Lubbock?

ER:

We moved to Wichita Falls.

DM:

Wichita Falls first.

ER:

Went to school in Midwestern up there.

DM:

That's right. Okay.

ER:

That was in 1948. Five months after our first one was born.

DM:

And then you came to Lubbock when?

ER:

1950.

DM:

Fifty. Okay.

ER:

Five months after my daughter was born.

DM:

Oh, okay.

ER:

Came here and got a job here right out of school.

DM:

Did you—I know that eventually, you taught at All Saints [Episcopal School in Lubbock].

SR:

It was Saint Christopher's.

DM:

Saint Christopher's.

SR:

Yeah, when I went in.

DM:

What year did you start at Saint Christopher's?

SR:

Oh, my goodness. Let's see—one of my girls, she was—how old is Yvette?

ER:

She's forty-seven, forty-eight. She was born in '64.

SR:

Yeah. That's about when I started, because I had to get a babysitter. I remember that. Dr. Cannon hired me. I think he was—I think he was in Amarillo. Somewhere up there. I guess he was Episcopalian. No he wasn't a priest—but he was a doctor of history too, I think he is.

DM:

Well the name sounds familiar, I think I've come across it somewhere.

ER:

What was the name?

SR:

Cannon. Dr. Cannon. Yeah. Tom Cannon. A girl from the base, her husband was at the base, she was a Swiss girl, and she was teaching there and she was fixing to move, because he was transferred. She told me, she said, "You need to go and" I went on half-day for quite a while and then went on full-day. But it was just from first to sixth grade. Kindergarten, first and sixth grade.

DM:

And teaching French.

SR:

Yeah. Metric system and all.

DM:

Did you teach it—what's that?

SR:

The metric system.

DM:

The metric system. Oh, the whole thing.

SR:

Yeah. History, I taught everything.

DM:

French history as well? Well, I'm not surprised because that kind of idea of immersing them in the culture, well that, it follows that you would want to take them on these tours over to France.

SR:

And some of them went back.

DM:

Some of them have gone back since you took them over there?

SR:

Yeah. One of the young ladies, she told me, she said she'd be back—her daddy's a doctor, and she went back and modeled for French and Italian—and then Turner Field, he went back for a year. Every Christmas he sends me a letter; I think that's nice.

DM:

That is nice to know that you have some impact. You know, you take someone over there, they want to go back; they send you letters.

SR:

Because some of them went back to visit, but those two that I know of, studied.

DM:

And how many years did you teach at All Saints?

SR:

Thirty-one years.

DM:

Thirty-one years.

SR:

Went through five administrations there. And I didn't think I could go through another one.

DM:

Thirty-one years is enough. How many tours did you take over to—

SR:

Oh, about sixteen I think. And then the last tour, I took them to an American school in Switzerland for three weeks. I just took them there, and I stayed there with them, but they took

over. I enjoyed that because I helped them and I didn't have to but I did. It was kind of fun for them to do.

DM:

About sixteen tours. That is a lot.

SR:

And one year, I took one tour and then come back and went back to see my mother. That was really rough, two trips like that.

DM:

Right, back-to-back.

SR:

I never had any problems with them; I never lost any of them. They knew what the rules were and that's just the way it was.

DM:

But it was organized.

SR:

Oh yeah. Took me a whole year to organize it.

DM:

How many students would you take at a time?

SR:

About twenty.

DM:

Twenty? Who else would go with you to help with them?

SR:

Three staff members.

DM:

Three staff members, okay.

SR:

Their expectation was just like mine, so—we were five to one. We kept their passports and everything, because they'd lose them if—you know.

DM:

I imagine getting their papers—making sure they have their papers together, their passports and everything would be quite a chore.

SR:

Well see, I had to take all the divorce papers if parents were divorced. I had to take that to prove that I was not stealing the kids. In those years, that's when kids were stolen. So—what I did, I made a big envelope apiece, and I got traveler's checks. And on an envelope, I wrote the numbers of the traveler's checks and the amount, the date that they exchanged it if they did. So I had all the—the bank—one of the bankers was on the school board, so he gave us the—no charge there. They had a little cash, but I didn't want them to get anything, they didn't need anything. Every day, we looked at the current exchange of the day, so they learned to see if it was a good price, they could get a little more money. Otherwise, they don't take as much. They were twenty dollar checks, so that kind of—

DM:

Well, so they learned how to travel. They were learning French, they were learning French culture, but they were also learning how to travel. I just think that's a treasure.

SR:

I wouldn't let them have the money until they figured out how much they were going to get. We'd go to American exchange down in the basement, we'd set them up in a corner and they weren't to get the money until they figured out what they were supposed to have. And they also learned that when we left the country, like we did Switzerland or Belgium, the amount of exchange the French money for those tickets, because they've already paid taxes for those, they needed to change from English to Belgium or from English to Switzerland, otherwise they'd lose a lot of money.

DM:

How about packing for this trip? Were there limits on what they could carry?

SR:

One luggage each. One suitcase, that's it, and a backpack. Oh, yeah, you don't want to get stuck with all the.... One time, we went to a park in Paris and they had one place open where we could slide them, and when they'd come back out, their clothes were green. Their levis [denim jeans] were green, and I thought, oh. So that night, they said, "We're going to wash them." I said,

“Well, be careful because we’re fixing to go in a few days.” They took shampoo, and brushed it and it went off. They cleaned it up with shampoo. It worked. Oh, they were something else. I tell you. We went to the supermarket, and they had a little refrigerator in the room, so I asked them to take everything out of the refrigerator, put all their stuff in there. They learned a whole lot.

DM:

They learned—they put—oh, the market things in the—

SR:

Refrigerator.

DM:

In the refrigerator.

SR:

Yeah, we went to the market—you see, the cokes were three-fifty, and I told them—they weren’t—if they buy them at the supermarket, they get it—but at the restaurant. And they had to have three meals a day: a big breakfast at the hotel, a big lunch, some fine restaurants. I took them to some fine restaurants, and then the same thing at night.

DM:

They got to taste the cuisine, also.

SR:

Yeah, and the manners, too. Their manners. I told them, I said, “You’ve got manners; use them.” They couldn’t get over that they had to pay for extra napkins, they couldn’t get over that.

DM:

Manners is something I don’t see much among American kids traveling now, when I see them over there.

SR:

I didn’t put up with that. I told them we’re guests in this country, and if we can’t abide by their laws and their requests, then don’t go.

DM:

Right.

SR:

Simple as that.

DM:

Exactly.

SR:

And at night, see, I took them out at eight o'clock in the morning, brought them back at ten o'clock at night. They were just—they wouldn't play at night.

DM:

There's no mischief left in them. (laughs)

SR:

I taped the room with masking tape, I collected all the keys. So if the tape is broken, they got out. But the clerk downstairs, they closed the door at ten o'clock in the hotels. And I told them, I said, "You know, if you see one of them come down, don't unlock the door." But they didn't—they were too tired to do anything. Of course, I had to tip the clerk, but that's okay. It works.

DM:

Well, they probably knew right up-front that there was not going to be any room for them to try to get by with things.

SR:

No, because we had some of those kinds since kindergarten. I had them since kindergarten. So they did pretty well. But they enjoyed it. They were really—

DM:

What an opportunity. What a wonderful opportunity.

SR:

They said it was the most fun trip they'd ever gone to. And I didn't take parents. I did not want parents with me. That just doesn't work, even if they're doctors or nurses. They never got sick. One little boy, a doctor's little boy, he'd sleep all the time. And I thought, something's wrong here. So that very night that I was going to talk to him about it, why was he going to sleep all the time, and his roommate come up and told me, he said, "He's got a patch behind his ear." And I said, "What patch?" He said, "He's got something behind his ears." So I called him up, and he had a patch for airline, you know, he got sick, he had it about a week, no wonder he was going to sleep. And I didn't know that.

DM:

Oh, he had left it on.

SR:

He left it on.

DM:

Oh, my.

SR:

And I come to find out about it—his buddy wanted one, he said, “I thought I’d get one,” I said—so I took him—I took it away from him. I said, “No. That’s not going to work.” So he stayed awake after that. Oh, I’ll tell you. Some of those kids were something else.

DM:

Well, they all made it back, though.

SR:

They sure did.

DM:

Oh, that just sounds like a wonderful program.

ER:

They got pretty used to Madame Riggs.

SR:

Well, you know, some of the parents wanted numbers of that Lalique crystal company. The parents wanted a certain number, so I took them to the crystal company, and I said, “Anybody who wants to buy something, we’ll go in. The rest of you stay out there.” And Fred, the chaplain of the church was on that trip with me, and he was something else. So anyway, some kids said—because when you go in those places, they assign one clerk to one person. So I took the ones inside that was interested. I looked out there, and they were flipping on the sidewalk and Fred was just beside himself and they were doing cartwheels on the sidewalk in the most elegant avenue in Paris.

ER:

Entertaining.

DM:

Never a dull moment there. Well, did the kids pick up French pretty well, were you pleased with their progress?

SR:

Yeah, oh yeah.

DM:

You started teaching them in the first grade, you said?

SR:

Kindergarten.

DM:

Kindergarten, good. Because earlier is better, I understand.

SR:

Sure it is, yeah. But anyway, they were something else. But of course, some them were not.... The most popular ones were like that. I told them, I said, "If there's any problem at night, you'll have to enjoy my company for the night. You'll sleep on my floor in my room." It's a big responsibility. The airlines sure did enjoy them, they were really good airlines. The last trip I took, they told me that they were no longer taking groups out of Houston, and I told why, and they said high school kids that are going, they're rude, they drink and all that, and there's no supervisor. So I told the kids, I said, "The people on there, they spend all their money, retired money to go on the trip or whatever, they don't want a bunch of kids hollering or stepping over them or whatever." So they, they'd give them cards and things, they were—

DM:

What airlines would you usually use to go over there?

SR:

At first I used from here to Dallas, Pan Am.

DM:

Pan Am.

SR:

After that, I used Air France from here to Houston. They were good to us, they would give us good prices. And we were the only trip of kids that they'd take. They wouldn't take any others because of the behavior. That's kind of sad.

DM:

It is sad. It is sad, but what I'm hearing from the way you handled the trip is very different from what I see among groups over there. It looks like there aren't enough sponsors, and the children are just doing whatever—they're running everywhere.

SR:

Yeah. The ratio has to be one-five.

DM:

Oh yes. Yes.

SR:

Coming back, they wanted a little old bottle of champagne, and I said, "No, you can't get that." They sell champagne on Air France for lunch. I told them they can get water or coke, whatever they wanted, but they weren't getting no champagne. The representative from the travel company, the group out of Houston, and he went to see—he'd come at night and see us, you know, visit with us and everything. That was nice, I thought.

DM:

Did you ever fly on a Concord [supersonic airliner operated by Air France]?

SR:

No, you know we had option to do that one time, fly from here to Washington, I believe, and then Washington to Paris, and then come back with the Queen Elizabeth, the new liner, come back to Houston—where was it—New York, I think. Anyway, it was just too much, because the ship wouldn't come from South Hampton, it was just unfeasible. They'd be hard to keep up with on there, too.

DM:

Well, besides the teaching, you also did private tutoring, I believe.

SR:

Yes, I did. I tutored some children from an airbase. Their daddy was here training, so they needed to make their schooling and everything and I did that. And I was—I'm translating—a young fellow here in Lubbock, he bought books at some—it's history. But anyway, he got the book in New York, three thousand dollars a book, and I've been translating that, and it's a lot of history. Louis XIV, Louis XVI, blah, blah. Lots of formulas and that sort of thing.

DM:

You're doing that now?

SR:

Yeah, I'm doing it. It's interesting, you know. You know, history repeats itself, because I could see what was going on here now was a little bit in the sixteen, seventeen hundreds, same thing.

DM:

Do you remember when you were a student, a schoolgirl in France, learning anything about all the French activity in North America? There were lots of French explorers over here. We learn about it from here, but I wonder if they teach it in France, about La Salle and people like that who came over.

SR:

La Salle, yeah.

DM:

Who explored all of North America.

SR:

Yeah, he was well-known, La Salle was.

DM:

Do you remember hearing about him as a child?

SR:

No. And Henry IV; he was a biggie. He was the most awful character to learn about.

DM:

Well, we all have those. (Chuckles)

ER:

Never had the opportunity to shake hands with him.

SR:

You know, in Versailles, they threw the trash out the gate.

DM:

They threw the trash out the gate?

SR:

They did. There was no sanitation in that place.

DM:

Just like they say they used to do out of the upper story windows in American streets in the colonial period, throw your trash out.

SR:

Yeah, Louis XIV was quite a character.

DM:

Louis XIV.

SR:

Sixteenth. Yeah.

DM:

We have—over at the Southwest Collection, where I work, we have a globe about this big around [51” in diameter] that was made in 1688, dates back to 1688, and an Italian globe maker built this globe, but he made it for Louis XIV. And some of La Salle’s information that he got from North America is on this globe. In that period, France had such an impact on our history over here, so we study that a lot. Anyway—so France is a big thing to us, I don’t know if the United States was a big thing to France until maybe the twentieth century.

SR:

Well, I’m sure that the—see, we had geography. Social Studies was not taking the place of geography. So you’ve got kids that—if you don’t—they get in a car in a garage, they’re going somewhere, they don’t know how they get there if they’re in the car. They’ve no sense of direction.

DM:

I know. They don’t learn.

SR:

They don’t know where it is.

DM:

It’s a problem. It’s a problem, and you can’t study history without geography, and so it’s a difficulty for us trying to teach history, because people just don’t know where things are.

SR:

We always thought that geography was kind of fun.

DM:

I love it. Well, yes, I can tell by you maps that you—there's a stack of maps here, so I can tell that you're interested in geography. Did your children grow up bilingual? Did you teach them French?

SR:

No, not really. I had the girls in school, but they didn't understand my English, and they sure wouldn't understand my French.

DM:

When you go—when's the last time you went to France?

SR:

Oh, let's see, when my brother passed away.

ER:

Two thousand four?

SR:

Do what?

ER:

Two thousand four?

SR:

In 2004.

DM:

When you went back—and before that, whenever you would go back, did people over there comment on your accent? I wonder if you picked up some change in accent, living here in Texas.

SR:

No, I don't think so.

ER:

Didn't say, *qu'est que c'est*, y'all.

DM:

Well, I guess when you go back to speaking French, you're in the same accent, the Parisian accent.

SR:

You know, one time—I don't know what—it was a doctor of philosophy, I think. Anyway, he came to the school. And his interest was if I dream, did I dream in English, or did I dream in French? I never thought about it, you know. So I don't know. It's kinda hard to tell.

DM:

Well, you're able to think in both languages. You think in French; you think in English. I can't imagine that.

SR:

But you don't go from English—I mean it has to be automatic—automatically straight on to what I'm thinking. But only a native can do that, too.

DM:

So you can't really say whether you dream in English or French because you think in both. That's interesting. In London, they say that there are about fourteen distinct dialects, so that someone who grew up in London can say, "That person is from such-and-such section, and that person is from so-and-so section." Growing up in Paris, could you tell kind of where people were from by their accents?

SR:

You mean the French? Yeah. Like the south.

DM:

I mean from within Paris, or—

SR:

Well, if they're in Paris, yeah, but if they're not originally from Paris.

DM:

I see. So if they're from Provence, you could say that they're from Provence.

SR:

Yeah, they have—some of them have some dialects, too.

DM:

What about within Paris? Could you tell if someone was from a different part of Paris, could you tell it from their dialect, or did most Parisians speak about the same?

SR:

About the same, yeah. See, I taught the kids some things that they would never see in a book or anything. The translation was *echouette*. That means “you’re neat.” Well, one of the students in a department store, I could see he went to look for a watch and I was watching him, and I saw the clerk just laugh. I thought, oh my goodness, what did he say to her? So I just went and approached there, and the lady said, oh, she said—I knew his teacher must have been a French lady, but he was telling her, “you’re neat, you’re neat.” But that was *echouette*, so she knew that had come from a native. It’s idiomatic expressions.

DM:

Well, that’s about all the questions I had, did you have anything else you wanted to add?

SR:

No, I don’t think so.

DM:

Okay. I’ll go ahead and turn this—did you want to add anything else?

ER:

No.

DM:

Okay.

End of interview.

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