

**Transcription:** Grand Canyon Historical Society

**Interviewee:** Esther Litton (EL)

**Interviewer:** Tom Martin (TM)

**Subject:** Early married life in the war years.

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TM: Today is Saturday, May 23, 2020. This is part 2 of a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Esther Litton. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Esther. How are you?

EL: I'm very well, thank you.

TM: Thank you. May we have your permission to record this interview over the telephone?

EL: Yes, you do.

TM: Thank you so much. You know, last time we talked about a number of things in the late 1930s, and you just mentioned something about college in 1938. Can you tell me that again?

EL: Yes, I started UCLA in September of 1937, and the tuition was \$18 a semester. And textbooks were hardbound, and they never went over maybe \$3 a text. Or if it was \$5, that was really expensive. And at that time, there were no paperbacks, although European schools did have thick paperbacks. But we always had to pay for a hardbound book.

TM: Okay. And that \$18... was that for one unit or for as many units as you wanted?

EL: Well, that's a good question because I know there was \$18 in my mind, and I have this little card with all kinds of numbers on it. And I may be mistaken. That might have been the student body card, but in any case, if it was the school year, it couldn't have been over \$27 at most.

TM: Oh, my. Okay.

EL: But \$18 is the amount that sticks in my mind.

TM: And that would have been a considerable amount of money back in 1937?

EL: Yes, but it made it possible for a lot of students to come to college, because USC was much more expensive. It was a private school whereas all of the University of California campuses charged the same. And possibly in lab courses, which I never took... You know, the science courses, they might have charged more for the labs, but for me, my little card says \$18.

TM: Okay. And so you started in '37. Graduated in '40, is that right?

EL: '41.

TM: Okay.

EL: June of '41.

TM: Graduated in June of 1941. And then you mentioned, in the summer of 1939, you went to Mexico. What did you do in the other summers, like in the summer of '38?

EL: Well, I was very interested in art, and I had a chance to go to summer classes at an art school called Chouinard, which was in an area of Los Angeles called Westlake Park. And I used to take life drawing and landscape and graphic design. So the summer school there was like \$50. And I did that... It was two or three summers, starting when I was in high school.

TM: Were you working part-time as well?

EL: No. No, I never worked part-time.

TM: Okay... as you went through college. And then 19... Let's see. So '39 was Mexico City, '38 was at the Chouinard school. And so '40. The summer of 1940, what did you do?

EL: Well, I can't re-- That might have been the summer when I needed another science course, and that might have been the summer that I took botany.

TM: Okay.

EL: And then at noon time, there was recreational swimming in the pool.

TM: Alright, that sounds nice. Yeah. And then when did you meet Martin?

EL: Well, I met Martin in the summer of September of 1937, when I was a freshman. I had enrolled in French, French I. The first session of French. And the class had been in session for maybe a week when Martin walked in. He had registered late. He was supposed to have taken... He took the English comprehensive in June of that year, but he had flunked it. So he was going to have to take it again in 1938. And to pass the time—and possibly... I don't know what else he took. He might have taken something to remind him of the English classes. He enrolled in French I.

TM: Got it.

EL: We were seated alphabetically. My last name started with a C, but there was only an empty seat next to me. There were no seats up in the L section.

TM: Okay.

EL: So he was seated next to me.

TM: Nice. And then did you guys start going out together, then, in the fall of '37?

EL: Yes. Since we were in the French class, he invited me to a French movie, which was in a fine arts theater, a couple of times. And then he invited... Since he was in ROTC, he would show up sometimes in the uniform for the ROTC, which had a scabbard and blade, and the jodhpurs and the boots, and was very militarily impressive.

TM: Okay. What else did you do in that fall of '37 together?

EL: Well, I don't think we did much, except a couple of movies. I think in the spring [of '38], he enjoyed picnics, so I think we picnicked out at the wildflower fields... Actually, I think that he drove me out to Antelope Valley, where I live now, because of the poppy fields.

TM: Oh, wow.

EL: So our dates were primarily picnics, which I enjoyed, and he always... And that was what we did.

TM: Nice, nice. You mentioned he was working for the *LA Times*. When did he start working for the *Times*?

EL: He started working for the *Times*... Let's see. I'm thinking December '38 [or] January '39, he was working at the dude ranch [The Wigwam, near Litchfield Park, AZ]. And then when that ended around February, I think that was when he started working at the *Times*.

TM: So February of '39?

EL: Well, I don't know when it was, but I thought February. But it was within that year that he started working at the *Los Angeles Times*.

TM: And he started off cleaning the machines, is that right?

EL: Yes. He started out in the basement cleaning the glue off of the machines and getting the newspapers that were being printed. They were being bundled, and then he had to pick up the bundle, and it was pretty much heavy labor.[He sometimes had to clean up the rodents that stuck to the glue on the floor.]

TM: Yep, yep. And how long did he do that before he transitioned out into the classifieds area?

EL: Well, I don't know specifically what time, but possibly in the forties he moved up into the classified area because he was called into service in July '41. 1941.

TM: Okay, alright. So in the summer of 1939, you went to Mexico...

EL: Yes.

TM: And then in the summer of 1940, what did you do?

EL: Well that was the summer I think that I took botany.

TM: Ah, yes. Okay. All right. Was that enjoyable?

EL: Oh, yes! Yes, it was. It was very low-key. I think the professor didn't want to be too demanding, so it was not a difficult course to take.

TM: Nice. That can be really fun, those kind of classes.

EL: Yes, it was very fun. And then I did the swimming in the school pool at noon time.

TM: Okay, alright. And then remind me again: when did you and Martin get married?

EL: October 27, 1942.

TM: Okay, 1942. So I have a couple more summers to sort out. That would be the summer of 1941. Now you graduated in in June of '41, is that right?

EL: Correct.

TM: And then what did you do?

EL: Well, it turned out that in July '41, when Martin was called in, he invited us [my mother and my cousin, Richard] to come up to see him in San Francisco. He was stationed at the—I forgot the name of it, but it was in Marin County [Hamilton Field]. The airfield where he was stationed. And so my mother and my cousin and I drove up to see him there. And he took us over to the Russian River. He had rented—he had borrowed a home that belonged to one of the officers on the Russian River [in the town of Monte Rio].

TM: Wow.

EL: And we were able to stay in that little cabin on the Russian River. And my cousin, who was about 15, we had a canoe, and we canoed on the river, and Martin came to see us up there. But that essentially was the summer of '41. I don't remember any other particular thing. But I did go back to the university in the fall to do the practice teaching.

TM: What was that about, and tell me more?

EL: Well, I was supposed to do practice teaching in art, because art had been my major. And then I was supposed to do practice teaching in a language, which I did in Spanish. And in '41, you know, after Pearl Harbor, I do remember standing in the schoolroom sometime in January of '42 when everybody was all

excited about the possibility of being bombed by Japanese planes or submarines coming ashore and all that sort of thing. It was a very worrisome time.

TM: I bet, I bet. And I did want to ask you as well: after your mom and dad divorced, did you stay in touch with your father?

EL: Yes, I did. Actually, when he was still at home, he would get the Sunday paper—this was before he left, but he would get the Sunday paper and spread it out on the table. I was bilingual, but he didn't speak Spanish. But he would open up, and he would read for me the funny paper, which were The Katzenjammer Kids, Maggie and Jiggs, and Felix the Cat. I always remember he would read the captions. But anyway, when he left—sometime after he left—in the summertime, he did take me to the beach. And then later on, when Disney came out with the Three Little Pigs cartoon, which became very popular. It wasn't a full-length cartoon. He took me to see that. We had to stand in line to get in to see the Three Little Pigs. And then later on, as I went into high school all of the visits dropped. I think in retrospect, as I think back over the years, I think he was not well. He had remarried. And he had asthma. As a child, he'd always had a problem with asthma. When I did visit him years later, he was in a wheelchair.

TM: Okay. When did he pass away?

EL: Well, that's a good question, because I don't remember the date. But one of my cousins, who was a lawyer, called me to say that he had seen in the obituaries of my father's death. And he had left \$3,000. And did I want him to try to recover the \$3,000? And I said, "Absolutely not." I felt that his wife should have that, which was little enough at the time.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EL: So I don't know the year [November 19, 1961]. But it was after I graduated from college.

TM: Okay, so 1942, '43. Somewhere in there?

EL: Possibly, possibly later than that. I really don't know. I know that... Well, I know what. I had my first child in '46—June of '46, my son. And I do remember I called my father to say I wanted to come with my son to show him his grandson. And he said, "No, don't come." And I was very hurt. And in the years that have gone by, and thinking back, remembering that he was in a wheelchair, and he had asthma, he possibly was too sick to see me. And he didn't want to contaminate the baby. And that's the only reason that I can think of that he would say, "No, don't come."

TM: Oh, that would make sense. Yeah, yeah.

EL: Yes, yes. But it's something I've had to think about over the years. And thinking back, I realize that was the logical reason for his saying, "No, don't come."

TM: Okay. So let's go back then a little bit to the botany class, 1940. By this time, you'd known Martin for two or three years. Were you guys getting a little more serious then?

EL: Well, December 1, 1941, he gave me the engagement ring, and I accepted his proposal.

TM: Okay, nice. Nice. And then...

EL: In fact, I thought that being proposed to and accepting was cast in concrete. Because one of the girlfriends I had in college during that summer when I was taking botany—she said she had broken off her engagement because she and her fiancé had decided to wait until the war was over. And I was appalled. I couldn't believe it. If somebody was engaged, it was that you didn't break it off.

TM: Yeah, right. And so engaged in '41 in December. And then when did Martin get called up for service?

EL: Well, in July of '41.

TM: Okay. Alright, right.

EL: He was assigned to this field [Hamilton Field] in Marin County—an airfield that had fighter pilots. And he was assigned... He was second lieutenant. And he was infantry. And he was doing just bookwork. But he applied for the Air [Corps] because he wanted to fly—very, very much. But he was rejected because he was—

TM: Colorblind.

EL: Colorblind.

TM: Yeah, and you mentioned that he got into glider training.

EL: Well, after July... Between July and December, the whole group from that airfield was sent back east on what they called “war games.” And those took place in the swamps of Louisiana and Arkansas and went on into North Carolina. And they returned to Oakland—a small airport in Oakland—around the first of December.

TM: Did Martin send you letters during that fall? During those—that time when he was in the war games?

EL: He probably did, I don't remember. I know he sent me some pictures. Pictures of the train ride across the country and then some little shacks. He took pictures of some of the little shacks in Louisiana, and there were some pictures of the snow that [had] already begun to fall by November. And he sent me some pictures of the snow in North Carolina.

TM: Wow, nice. And then you were writing him back as well, I'm assuming? Back and forth?

EL: I think so.

TM: Okay, alright. So then he came back in the late fall.

EL: Oh, I know I couldn't very well write to him because the whole thing was they were moving. It was war games, and they were in one place one time and another place. So it wasn't really in a fixed position.

TM: Okay, got it. Yeah, alright. And so he comes back in the late fall of '41.

EL: Yes. And at that time, his mother [Elsie Martin Litton] and I went up on the train to see him. She had a brother who lived in Palo Alto [CA], and we stayed with her brother, and her brother drove me up to Oakland to see Martin. And that's when Martin gave me the ring, and I accepted his proposal. And he drove me back to Palo Alto.

TM: Fun. Okay. And then let's roll into '42. What do you remember about 1942?

EL: Let's see. '42... Well, we were engaged, and I think that he wanted me to find some property so we could eventually build a house. And I was—I think—I was in college at the time, was I?

TM: Well, let's see. You would have graduated and maybe...

EL: Oh, I was doing practice teaching.

TM: Okay, was that for a year? That practice teaching?

EL: Well, yes. You had to do your practice teaching to get your credential.

TM: Okay.

EL: Yeah. So I had done practice teaching in art, and then I did the practice teaching in Spanish. [The reason] it turned out I did it in Spanish was because during my visit to Mexico—summer of '39—I had met the professor who would assign the practice teaching sessions. She said I was so fluent in Spanish that I shouldn't do it in French. Even though I had not majored in Spanish, she thought [for] practical purposes since I knew Spanish, that I should do my practice teaching in Spanish, which I did.

TM: Good.

EL: So that was in the spring of 1942.

TM: Okay. And so after Pearl Harbor—clearly, you know, the U.S. then goes to war against Japan—

EL: Yes. And at that time, when they came back [from war games] and they didn't accept Martin into flying, there was a notice about... They wanted to train glider pilots. So he approached them, and he was accepted for glider pilot training. So obviously, he was in glider pilot training in '42.

TM: What did you think about that, and what did you know about gliders, and what did you know about planes and flying?

EL: Well, I didn't know anything about it, and I don't remember that he even told me that that was what he was going to do. Suddenly, there he was in Texas—either Dalhart or Waco or Lubbock or Little Rock, Arkansas. And so... No, I didn't think much. Actually, I had another boyfriend. So I wasn't... Well, I shouldn't say that because at that time, I had left the other boyfriend. I was engaged to Martin.

TM: I was going to say, "Wait a minute. I got to work out this timeline. You're engaged to this guy, and you're visiting with that guy. Wait a minute. Clear this up for me." Thank you.

EL: No, the other boyfriend—his father had taken him out of school [at USC] and taken him up to build Camp Roberts up north.

TM: Okay.

EL: In San Luis Obispo County. So he was out of the picture physically.

TM: Okay. Good, there might have been trouble. Okay, so Martin's in Texas for glider training in the spring of '42.

EL: Yes, and he went from one post to another. They would start the training in one place like Dalhart, and then they'd move him on to, say, Waco, or I'm just guessing. And then each time he had a change, they would ask him for his medical record. And he'd say, "Well, it'll catch up with me. It hasn't caught up to me yet." So when he got to the final place—which I don't remember where it was in Texas—they said, "Well, you know, you have to fish or cut bait here." And so he had to... No, [he] didn't say he was colorblind. He knew that the test was coming up. The Rorschach test—and with all the dots [probably the Ishihara test]. And one of his friends took the test out of the desk. And so Martin memorized all the dots. And so when he went to take the test, they opened up the book, and he started reeling off the numbers. And they said, "Are you sure you can see those numbers?" And he said, "Oh, yes, yes." He had them all memorized. Well, it turned out there were two sides to the book. And there was another side. So they said, "Well, let's try the yarn test." Well, he had gone with a friend, and the friend was sitting opposite him. And there was this tray of yarn before him. And they'd ask him for the colors, and if he picked the wrong color, he got kicked under the table. So he managed to muddle through the yarn test, and I think they probably realized that he wasn't... You know, that he was getting help. But they were desperate, I think, for the glider pilots. And they had spent all this money training him, so they passed him. And then they sent him to Bowman Field, Kentucky to wait—to be assigned.

TM: So I'm curious, because I know that in future years, Martin is going to take... Well, he's interested in photography. He's a camera guy.

EL: Yes.

TM: How did his color blindness impact his ability to understand colors, or did he stick specifically to black and white? Or...

EL: No, no. He did a lot of color photography. And there's something curious about that. He can distinguish between red and green. But it's a different... It's hard to understand. I don't know. It's a shade of gray. But the thing is, this is going ahead. Because after the war, when they offered him a job at the [LA] *Times*, they said, "Well, how would you like to work in the color lab and work with color photography?" So he had to tell them that no, he wouldn't be any use to them in the color lab because he was colorblind.

TM: Yeah, okay. Yeah, kind of wondered how that might work out, but... Okay, so going back. This is then in the spring into the summer of 1942...

EL: Correct.

TM: ... Like you say, they're desperate for pilots—for glider pilots—because didn't glider pilots have a reputation of, "It's a one-way flight." You don't get to take gliders up in the air again once you land them on the ground.

EL: Correct, no.

TM: So that may be why they were desperate.

EL: Yes. Well, it was... I think it was [General] Montgomery's idea of having glider pilots, I'm not sure. But it was a campaign that they were going to use gliders at a certain point. But they didn't need them until that particular time, so he was waiting around Bowman Field, Kentucky in the spring of '43... Yeah, '43.

TM: Okay, so hang on a second, because let's finish off 1942. So you complete your practice teaching in the spring of '42. And then what did you do that summer of '42?

EL: Well, let's see... The summer... I don't remember what I did the summer of '42, I'm sorry.

TM: No worries. It's only, you know, 80 years ago.

EL: The fall of '42, I was doing my practice teaching. And in October, Martin had finished the glider training, and he sent me a telegram about October the 20th saying, "I have two weeks off. I have to report to Bowman Field, Kentucky. I'm coming home so we can get married."

TM: Wow, and...

EL: So I had a week to get ready to get married, and I said, "Well, gee. This is awful fast. I don't have to do it right away." And she [my mother] said, "Well, you don't want to be cut short when he comes and you're not prepared." So there was a sale of bridal gowns at Bullocks [Department Store], and I got one for \$39—\$29. And the shoes, and so... And anyway, so I was prepared that way. And we decided that it would be [in] the church; his mother's church, which was Inglewood Methodist Church across the street from [his father's][Clyde Thomas Litton, DVM] dog and cat hospital.

TM: Where was that?

EL: And she knew the minister very well.

TM: Where was that?

EL: And he said, "I hope nobody smokes, because we just finished out hospitality room. And I don't want anybody in there smoking."

TM: Esther... Esther. Where was the Inglewood Methodist Church?

EL: It was on Redondo Blvd. in Inglewood. It was a main drag, and it was, as I say, across the street from the dog and cat hospital.

TM: So in Los Angeles?

EL: No, Inglewood.

TM: Okay. I'm sorry. My California geography is bad.

EL: Oh. Well, Inglewood is a suburb. It's not within the Los Angeles limits.

TM: Got it. Okay, got it. And Martin's mother was living in Los Angeles at the time? I was con—

EL: No, no, no. They were in Inglewood. The dog and cat hospital was in Inglewood. On Redondo Blvd [may have been on E. Florence Ave]

TM: Right. I was confused, 'cause I thought she was living in Oakland, way up in San Francisco.

EL: Oh, wait a minute. No, let's see. He had been—Martin had, at the end of the maneuvers, they had returned to Oakland, which is up in the Bay Area, San Francisco area. And his mother had been born and raised in San Francisco. She was very loyal to San Francisco. But when she got married, her husband got his [first] veterinary job was in Southern California—an area called Gardena. And he dealt with large animals at that time, and it wasn't paying well. He was getting chickens instead of money, and so he changed to the small animals. And he opened a dog and cat hospital on Redondo Blvd. in Inglewood.

TM: Got it.

EL: And their house [was] next door to the hospital so that Martin's mother could run over to the hospital if there was an emergency or if she needed to help her husband in some way. So it was just a driveway away.

TM: Nice, very nice.

EL: Which is where Martin grew up.

TM: Okay, alright. Thank you. That makes sense now.

EL: Okay.

TM: Alright. Okay, so that makes perfect sense as a place to get married. And what day did you tie the knot?

EL: October 27th.

TM: Okay. What do you remember about that?

EL: Well, I just remember that I had the gown, and the gasoline was very scarce. And we let my relatives know I was getting married. Some could come, some couldn't because of the gas situation. And

headlights were being blacked out. So I don't remember how many people, but it was immediate family. And some immediate family on Martin's part. His... Oh, I'll tell you something funny. His father did not come to the wedding.

TM: Why not?

EL: Well, because he had not gone to his oldest—his other—his daughter's wedding a couple years before that. He had not approved of the young man she was marrying, so he refused to go to her wedding. So when I was getting—when Martin was getting married, he said, "Well, I can't go to Martin's wedding when I didn't go to Marjorie's." So he didn't come to the wedding.

TM: Well, wait a minute. Didn't he approve of you?

EL: Not really, no.

TM: Oh?

EL: No, he didn't like the idea that Martin had a Mexican girlfriend.

TM: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

EL: Because in his early years in California, he had made his way to the Imperial Valley and then worked on a ranch. And the labor was all coming over from Mexico. So his experience with Mexican people was the Mexican laborers. And when Martin said he was dating this Mexican girl, I think he did it to provoke his father. But anyway, his father—well, later on—was a jewel. He was perfectly lovely, and we were great friends and he was very loving.

TM: Well, you won him over.

EL: Well, I couldn't say he was loving. He was very austere that way. He was austere. He didn't show affection very much. But he was very good to me, and I was very fond of him.

TM: What about your relationship with Martin's mother?

EL: Oh, excellent. Yeah, no. We got along just fine.

TM: Fun.

EL: She was such a lovely person, and no... She was just lovely.

TM: Nice. Okay, so October 27, 1942. Where did you go for your honeymoon?

EL: Well, we made our way to Riverside [CA], to the Mission Inn.

TM: Okay.

EL: And then the next day, we drove through the [Mojave] desert. I remember we went up to Amboy Crater, which was along the road, and we made our way to Needles. And it took all day and a good deal

of night to get to the Grand Canyon. So when we got to the El Tovar [Hotel], of course, the dining room was closed. But they very kindly brought us something to eat, and so we stayed at the El Tovar that night. And in the morning, we got up very early, and I think that we went to the Emery Kolb studio. Emery Kolb and his brother, in the years before—in the early 19[20's]... whatever it was—they had rowed down part of the Colorado River. And they had a movie about their experience. I think they're still showing it. But it was very interesting, and Martin said, "Oh, we've got to do that." And I thought that was crazy. I'd never do that. But anyway, I remember we saw that little film. And then we drove along the edge of the South Rim and then started on... And we went through Cameron, we went through Tuba City, to what's now the Navajo National Monument, and on up to Moenkopi. Oh, I have to stop because we got as far as Goulding's Trading Post in Monument Valley. And we spent the night in Goulding's Trading Post. We were the only guests there, obviously. Nobody else had gas. And they very kindly showed us a slideshow of other parts of Monument Valley.

TM: Oh, wow.

EL: And they said, "Do get up early before dawn." And they showed us where the different little roads of sand—sand roads and all that—were in the valley so that we could wander around in there before we took off. And we did. We got up at dawn and went down, and it was just driving through a sand wash, really. Very few roads, and we saw the totem poles on the W and the... We had a movie camera my mother had given us for the wedding present. So he took some movies of me running over the red sand...

TM: Oh, nice.

EL: And I don't think we met anybody at all on that day. And so from Monument Valley, we went on up to Tuba City—Cameron and Tuba City, Moenkopi. And all of those other... Tuba City was just this octagonal trading post. It was a fascinating building with just a few hogans in the road. The road to it was just a sand road, and anyway... There were just a few hogans around, and recently, I saw a picture of Tuba City, and it's a regular town.

TM: Oh, yeah.

EL: Anyway, Tuba City.

TM: Let's back up a minute, Esther. Do you have any thoughts on your first view of the Grand Canyon?

EL: Well, it's like a scene set, you know? It's like a backdrop. And it's not that... it's very impressive, but so far away.

TM: Yeah, okay.

EL: You know? You don't get the feel of it at all. I feel sorry for Japanese tourists who come in a bus, and they stand there, and somebody takes a picture with the Grand Canyon behind them, because it's just like a stage set.

TM: Right, right.

EL: But it was interesting when he drove along the road that goes along the rim, and we'd get out and look down, you know. And that was more impressive. That was very exciting. You know, so but... But the initial view... You know, if that's all you ever see of the Grand Canyon, it's too bad.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Okay, so then from there to Cameron, Cameron to Tuba City, Tuba City over to Kayenta, and then out to Goulding's. From Goulding's, did you continue on north to Mexican Hat and Blanding?

EL: Oh yes, yes we did. Yes, I'd forgotten. On the way, before we got to Monument Valley, we came across a Navajo who was standing by the road, so Martin stopped. And he wanted a ride, but we didn't know that behind him he had 6 bags of flour. By the time we got the bags of flour in the car there wasn't any room for him or me. But fortunately, cars at that time had running boards. So I stood on one running board, and he stood on the other until we reached a place where he wanted to get off. But there was nothing in view. We couldn't see where he was going to go because it was just the flat desert.

TM: Wow.

EL: But that was where he wanted to get off, and so we said goodbye.

TM: Oh, that's a wonderful story. And so heading north, you must have gone across let's see... 19—

EL: Oh, yes. Yes. We went into a park. Actually, we drove up to Pikes Peak...

TM: So hang on. Wait, wait, wait, wait. After Goulding's, going north, you would have crossed the San Juan on a little wooden bridge with cables and then drove right past Norm Nevills' house.

EL: Oh, really? *[laughs]*

TM: Yeah. And in '42, I just— Clearly, there was, you know, no connection there, but I'm just really curious to know if you, you know... Did you see any boats at that time or...?

EL: No, no. Well, we were on our way, and we'd never heard of Norm Nevills. We'd never heard of people doing in '42, and we had no idea anybody went down the river. The only thing we knew was the—the Kolb brothers.

TM: Okay, all right.

EL: With their little black and white film. No, I'm afraid we skipped Norman Nevills.

TM: How about that? Okay. Well then, heading north from Goulding's, you go through Blanding and Monticello and then up to Moab. And Moab in 1942. What was that like? Do you remember?

EL: Oh, I'm sorry. I don't remember Moab.

TM: Okay, that explains it right there.

EL: I do remember we went to Durango.

TM: Okay. Oh!

EL: We spent Halloween night in Durango.

TM: Okay, so maybe you didn't go up to Moab.

EL: No, I don't remember Moab at all. And Durango, it was at night when we got there, and it was early in the morning when we left, so I really don't know much about Durango.

TM: Where were you heading for?

EL: We were heading for— for me—for Colorado—Colorado City. Springs. Colorado Springs. Where I got on the train and came home, and Martin went on over to Denver.

TM: Okay. And let's see, so from Durango to get to Colorado Springs, you would have had to go through the Rocky Mountains there. How did you manage? Do you remember?

EL: We did—yes, I do. Now I do remember. I'd forgotten about that. 'Cause we were up in a really high elevation. Much higher elevation. I think we stopped along the way just to look at the scenery, but from going up to that elevation, we did go past the road to Pikes Peak, so we drove up to Pikes Peak.

TM: Nice, nice.

EL: And in Colorado Springs, I remember we saw the Broadmoor Hotel.

TM: Okay. Did you spend your last night there before Martin headed off to Denver and you got the train?

EL: Yes. Well, I don't remember specifically. We probably did because I had to get on a train to come back to California.

TM: Right. So Martin's going to keep doing his military service, you're heading back to California. Do you remember that train ride? That would have taken you up the Arkansas River and up over a high pass and down into Utah. I'm trying to think about that—how that train route went.

EL: Yeah. I don't remember the route. Probably I was asleep. *[laughs]*

TM: That would make sense. Oh my gosh. Fun. So the winter of '42. When did you see Martin again?

EL: Yes. Well, on December the 31st. He came over from Texas, and I took the train to Albuquerque. And we spent New Year's Eve in the hotel there at the station in Albuquerque. And I remember January 1st, with my student body card, I could have attended the Rose Bowl game because it was the first time in history that UCLA played in the Rose Bowl. January 1943 *[laughs]*. But Martin had a car, so we drove over to Acoma. And we hiked up the trail to the top of Acoma, and it was very exciting. There was nobody there. I mean, it was just absolutely free of people at Acoma, but we met a lady who came out. I remember her name. Her name was Clara Victorino. And she had, I think, a son in the service. There was one young man on the lands up there, dressed in a uniform, and he was visiting with another lady. We

never approached him. He was off in the distance. But Clara Victorino took us up into the church there at Acoma and showed us the ovens and took us around the town. But there was nobody in sight. We were all alone with her up there in Acoma.

TM: Nice.

EL: And we hiked down. And we visited—we drove past some town—Isleta, I think. There's a town of Isleta.

TM: Yes.

EL: And then there's the town of—we passed several towns. We got as far on the road as Jemez Springs. And then we turned it back. We were kind of headed for a town on the map called Cuba, but we never got there. We turned around and went back to Albuquerque because he had to make his way up to Bowman Field, and I had to get back to California.

TM: So, hang on a second, Esther. I want to ask to you—going back to the end of October—to the El Tovar and then onto Durango and Goulding's... Was that the first time you had been east, out of California?

EL: Yes, except for the time when I went to Mexico. Well, I take it back. No, I had been in El Paso. Because coming back from Mexico, the train went from Mexico City to El Paso. So I had been through El Paso, and then I think I had to change trains at El Paso and make my way west to California. That was in September '39.

TM: Okay. Yeah, that would've taken you through—

EL: That was the only time. And, of course, I slept on the train, so I don't remember the scenery particularly.

TM: What did you think about the American West as in that—you know, let's go into October, then, of '42 and now the new year of '42-'43.

EL: Yeah. Well, it was all such a revelation. The desert and the... It was just such a lot of open space. It was just wonderful. It was an eye-opener.

TM: This is...

EL: Actually, one of my art professors...[Ms Anita Delano]. I think she was Navajo [or Hopi]. I never did determine that. But she was very familiar with Monument Valley. And when I came back with photographs of some particular bushes, she said, "Oh, I know that bush." So she was very glad that I had been to Monument Valley because she was familiar with it.

TM: Nice. So I'm thinking oh, you know, what would one do with a day or two from Albuquerque? Well, one could go up to the Sandia Crest, one could go to Santa Fe, but...

EL: We couldn't go to Sandia Crest because there was no tramway then.

TM: No, you'd have to take the road around the back.

EL: Well, we did. We went out on the flat part, where you can see Sandia Peak. And Martin had brought a rifle, and he wanted to teach me to shoot a rifle. And so he... That was what we did out there in the middle of the desert. Now, of course, there's a tramway going up there. And it's all built up on the flat.

TM: Wow, I wanted to ask you whose idea was it to go to Acoma? I mean, that's a really scenic place. Really just a, you know... Spanish influence. Really, really beautiful. Was that your idea to go over there?

EL: No, I think it was just on the map.

TM: Okay.

EL: Yeah. And I was sorry we didn't get to Inscription Rock. I think I knew about Inscription Rock.

TM: Was that El Morro, or...?

EL: But we did go to Gallup. On our way back, we went through Gallup. But no, it was all... [At] one of the villages, whether it [was] Isleta or one of the other ones where Martin just stopped and took a picture of the church, I think there was a kiva in one of the towns. And I climbed up to the top of the kiva.

TM: Okay.

EL: Which I probably wasn't supposed to do.

TM: Oh, well. You know, you're probably right. I mean, you are right, but... You know, social faux pas happen.

EL: Yeah.

TM: Yeah. So that was the new year of '42-'43.

EL: '43. January '43.

TM: Back to Albuquerque. And then you get the train back, is that right?

EL: .[No. My aunt met me in Albuquerque and we drove Martin's car back to Los Angeles and he took the train to Kentucky]

TM: Okay. And then from Albuquerque, that train would've gone through Flagstaff and the Needles, off back to Barstow and then into LA. Is that something... Trying to figure out the train route like that. And Martin then went back to the service. What happened in the spring, then, of 1943?

EL: In the spring of 1943, he went back to Bowman Field, Kentucky. And while he was at Bowman Field, Kentucky, he was just sitting around fiddling his thumbs, and he found out that his old group, the fighter pilot group, had moved to St. Petersburg, Florida. So he called Washington, D.C.—by this time, he was a first lieutenant. And he said [brazenly], "You know? My old group..." of such and such, whatever it was, "have asked me to come and join them. So do I have permission to join them in St. Petersburg?" And

they gave [him] permission to join them in St. Petersburg. So in the spring, he showed up at Pinellas [Army Airfield] outside St. Petersburg, and I said, "What are you doing here?" They hadn't asked for him at all. They didn't know what they [were] going to do with him. But he wanted to get to St. Petersburg because he thought that I [could] come and join him.

TM: Okay. How did that work out?

EL: It worked out. Because in June, I had finished my practice teaching, and so I said okay. And so I packed a suitcase, and I got on the train, which had a lot of troops in it.

TM: I bet.

EL: There were two young women in the car where I was. They were very pregnant. They had been living in San Francisco with their husbands who were in medical school. And they were going back to Louisiana to—what's the name of the town in Louisiana? Anyway, they were going back to Louisiana—to their family homes. And so it was a train ride from—let's see, where was I? Los Angeles. They were on a train. And we made our way... It was an old train. I got off at New Orleans. I had to change trains at New Orleans. I spent the night—I think it was the St. Charles Hotel, something like that—and spent the night there.

TM: I'm assuming the train was standing room only?

EL: No. No, no. We were very comfortable on the car we were in, but the other trains were pretty full of troops.

TM: Okay, 'cause sometimes during the war, the trains were so full of troops that people were standing on the little platforms between the cars. It was just packed.

EL: Well, that wasn't our experience, thank goodness. No, we were fine. And I remember that the train that I got on in New Orleans had windows that opened. And of course, they were steam engines, and so you'd get a lot of the smoke if you opened the window. And going through the land between Louisiana and Florida, it went through a lot of wild country where magnolias grow wild, and they were blooming.

TM: Oh, my.

EL: And I remember the fragrance of the magnolias as we went by.

TM: I bet. Wow.

EL: And then I got off—I think it was Jacksonville or St. Augustine. I think it was St. Augustine. And I got on another train that went down to Tampa, where Martin met me. The thing I remember was the impact of the heat. The humidity was just... You know, you just stand still and you're perspiring.

TM: Yes, yeah.

EL: He had rented—at that time, for some reason, part of the group was not in Pinellas, [but] was in Sarasota. So he had rented an apartment—a second-floor apartment in Sarasota. And I remember in

June—the storms, the lightning, and the thunder, and the cloudbursts. It was, you know, June is their really heavy rain season.

TM: Sure, it's a hurricane season, isn't it?

EL: Well, I don't know. Possibly. But in general, it's just their rainy season. And so there was a lot of rain. From the window of my second-floor apartment, I looked down on a home down below, you know, where you go in the front door and you go straight through the whole house. It was just like an alley from the front to the back. The people in that house had a laundry business. The women would be washing the clothes and hanging them up to dry on a clothesline. I remember I took Martin's shirts down there for them to wash them, and it was ten cents for washing the shirts.

TM: Yeah. Alright. And what were you doing that summer, then, there?

EL: Well, I was just sort of sitting around, perspiring. But then after a few weeks, he was moved back to Pinellas, to St. Petersburg. And at that time, there was not the bridge that exists now between Sarasota and St. Petersburg. So you had to drive clear around through Tampa and around... But then he found an apartment for us for \$30 a month in St. Petersburg where he was stationed at Pinellas [Army Airfield]. And he rented a bicycle for me, so I could get around because he used the car to get to the airport.

TM: So tell me about the car. Your big, black Buick that your mom bought for you... I'm assuming that's still back in California somewhere.

EL: Yes, I think so... I've forgotten about what happened to the black car.

TM: And so did you guys buy a car then?

EL: No, Martin had this little Chevy. Little Chevrolet—a four-door Chevrolet. And actually—let's see, I guess he had it there in Florida because he had a car... And so he had a little bit of gas, and we were able to drive out to Clearwater on the beach. And we were able to drive to Tarpon Springs down the coast. And we were able to drive up to Lake Wales, and let's see... One time, we drove out to what was called Myakka State Park. And on the way to this state park, there was a sign that said "Zoo." We walked in there, and it was just a man who had a couple of monkeys in a cage. It was just a little home zoo, but he had this big alligator. And so he said, "Would somebody like to sit on the alligator and have their picture taken?" And Martin volunteered me[!]

TM: Great.

EL: So I did. I got in there, and I sit... It was about 20 feet long. It was a big alligator. But the man said, "He's very gentle. It's not like a crocodile that will snap at you. This alligator won't hurt you." So I sat on the bumpy back of the alligator, and Martin took a picture of me on the alligator.

TM: How about that? What was Martin's position there in St. Petersburg?

EL: Well, that was a good thing because they didn't know what to do with him. So there was a small plane—forgot what the name, what the title was—but it was just a two-place plane. And they would

send him down the coast to another airport with the mail. He would do the mail run, and I don't know what they did with him during the day on the, you know... But we were there until—let's see... It was really—oh, I know what... Somehow, the school district—maybe somebody I met, a woman... They found out that I could substitute. So in the high school, they asked me to come and substitute. First it was a Spanish class, then it was an arithmetic class.

TM: Uh, oh.

EL: But the thing that surprised me when I went there and started the class... They said, "No, we always start with something from the Bible." I said, "You do?" Where's the division of church and state?

TM: Wow.

EL: So I had to dig through the Bible and figure out something to say at the beginning of the class. And it was really kind of shocking. Since then, I've talked to one of the residents here [at my residence], who is from North Carolina. And I mentioned this—how surprised I was, because I had never heard this in California. And I said, "Where's the division of church and state?" And she says, "Well, all the schools in North Carolina start with a quotation from the Bible. All the schools on the East Coast start with a quotation from the Bible." And then I realized that the school system on the East Coast was started by the churches, you know.

TM: Interesting.

EL: In Rhode Island, Roger Williams, and then Yale and Princeton. And I think all of those were religiously started. And it spread to the school districts on the East Coast. I don't know how true that is now. I don't know how widespread it is. But just recently, this lady here said, "Oh yes, all the schools on the East Coast start with a quotation from the Bible."

TM: Wow. I've never heard of that.

EL: No, no. And that was very surprising to me.

TM: Yeah. How did you do—you know, substituting for Spanish—I mean, you could do that in your sleep. But mathematics... Were you—was that easy? Were you comfortable with that?

EL: Well, it was just arithmetic. And fortunately, I think it was freshman arithmetic. I muddled through that. But the thing was the students in the higher classes—senior class, the boys—were really hard to handle. Because they were dying to get into the war. And they didn't want to study, they didn't want to have anything [to do] with school anymore. They were just anxious to graduate and get off to war. So there was one day when I went to the principal and complained about the behavior of these particular boys, because they just were hard to handle.

TM: I bet, I bet.

EL: But in Tampa Bay, there were some ships from Russia. Because there were some sailors on shore who had the Russian uniforms on. I never came in contact with them, but I did see them. And during our

stay in St. Petersburg, we went up the Hillsborough River, which flows into the bay and goes past Tampa. And up the stream, there were some rowboats—anchored. Nobody was using them, so we got in them and we went rowing down the Hillsborough River. And, of course, we returned the rowboats. It was my first experience with the kind of forest of Florida: the liquid ambar [trees] and the longleaf pines... And very interesting palms. Very, very interesting vegetation. Oh, and the size of the sumac. I came in contact with that.

TM: Oops. Oh, dear. When Martin was making the little flights in the plane for the mail run, did you get a chance to go with him on those?

EL: No, no. And I —no. Oh, no, no, no. I couldn't have done that at all. But one time, when he was coming back and he had another soldier with him in the copilot's seat who [had] just gone along for the ride, they hit a cloudburst. They were over one of the islands offshore. The power of the rain was so strong and forced him down, and he crashed into a house on the island. He wasn't hurt, [but] it made a mess of the roof of the house that he crashed into. And when the people in the house came out, they said, "Well, thank goodness it wasn't yesterday because yesterday, we had my daughter's wedding right here where you crashed."

TM: Oh my gosh.

EL: So anyway, the army somehow got the plane out of their yard and got Martin back—and the other young man—back onshore. He did have a cut on his cheek. And we were between apartments at the time, and we were staying in a motel. And they called me at the motel to say that Martin had been injured. He wasn't badly hurt, but he would be late getting home. So that was his experience in the small plane.

TM: Wow, that's—

EL: It wasn't his fault, because it was just [a] heavy, heavy down[pour] that just pushed the plane right down.

TM: Yeah, that was a lucky, lucky landing, though.

EL: Yeah. Yes, it was. Yeah. And I think the armed forces paid for the repairs on the roof of the house.

TM: Okay. So this is the—now we're into the fall of 1943, is that right?

EL: No, no. In March of '43, the government rounded up all of the glider pilots and told them to report to Bowman Field by such and such a time. So we only had a suitcase for clothes. It all fit into the backseat of the car. That's all we...

TM: So, Esther, hang on a second. Would... I'm confused about the timeline. I got messed up. Because I thought we were in the summer of '43. You had moved out to Florida—

EL: Yes.

TM: And this is back in St. Petersburg. So when did the glider pilots get called up?

EL: Well, the following year.

TM: Okay, so March of '44.

EL: March of '44.

TM: Okay, so hang on a second. We've been at this now for about an hour. Happily yik-yakking away.

EL: Oh my gosh, and that's all we've gotten to? Oh, that's terrible. I've ruined your whole Memorial Day.

TM: I'm thrilled! I am thrilled. This has just been wonderful. I think maybe starting with the callout of the glider pilots in 1944—March of '44 might be...

EL: March of '44, yes.

TM: ...might be the place to pick up the next interview.

EL: Okay. To be continued?

TM: Yeah. Before I finish this off, though, is there anything you want to bring in about the fall of 1943 into the spring of 1944?

EL: Well, it was just our roaming around that part of Florida. As I said before, we had gas. We were able to go down to Tarpon Springs. We were able to go up to Lake Wales. We did the row boating on the Hillsborough River, which we did more than once. Nobody objected to our using the rowboat. And swimming at Clearwater. And I had the bicycle, and I would use—I used to bicycle out to St. Petersburg on the coast... Not the coast—it wasn't on the coast. It was inland, where the canals and the people had houses. And the pier where the pelicans came in, and... It was just a glorious time. And my shopping with my first cooking experience, and it was the beginning of frozen foods. I remember I bought a package of Birds Eye peas, and I wasn't quite sure whether—which way to cook them, you know. Whether to put them into boiling water or wait and put them in the cold water... Anyway, I was learning to cook.

TM: Oh my gosh, okay. How often were you student—substitute teaching?

EL: Just about three times. The reason was that the teachers who were teaching that class had husbands who were about to be shipped out. So they asked for permission to go to see their husbands. But after I did that teaching, they asked me if when my husband left, was shipped out, would I stay and teach there? And I... [They] wanted me to teach home economics. And I said, "No, I have no experience with home economics." Because so much of the cooking in the area was on a wooden stove.

TM: Oh, wow.

EL: Not in town, but in the suburbs. And, of course, you would have to teach the girls how to cook on a wooden stove, and I was just barely able to cook on a plain old gas stove.

TM: Oh, gosh.

EL: And sewing, too. So I said, “Thank you very much for asking me, but no, I’m going back to California.”

TM: Right, okay. Alright. With that, let’s—we’ll go ahead and wrap this part two up then...

EL: Oh, I do want to say something.

TM: Yes, please?

EL: You don’t have to put it on th[is] thing, but anyway... Some of the ladies I met through [a] college organization—when they had a lunch and I went to it. And so these ladies were from the South. And they said, when you go to visit somebody, you just had to be careful because the cooks come with a special petticoat under their dress. It has pockets, and they steal food, and they put it in those pockets and take it home. Also, if the hostess is going to have somebody take you home, the person who is going to take you home will say, “Well, it’s my turn to carry you home.” And what it meant was they were going to drive you home.

TM: Right.

EL: But the term was, “I[’m] going to carry you home.”

TM: And you were thinking about that alligator and going, “Wait a minute”...

EL: Yeah. But anyway, those were two little things that I... And there was the attitude about the colored people, you know? Yeah, they were very suspicious about the colored help.

TM: Wow, okay. Did that impact you? As I’m assuming, you know, people would have looked at you and wondered maybe you were a First Nation person or Hispanic.

EL: No, no. They wouldn’t have suspected anything like that.

TM: Okay, okay. Great. Alright. Well, thank you. This is a great place to wrap up—

EL: You’re very welcome. And I hope you have a lovely Memorial Day.

TM: Well, hang on a second. Don’t hang up just yet.

EL: No, okay.

TM: This is going to conclude part 2 oral history with Esther Litton. Today is Saturday, May 23, 2020. My name is Tom Martin. And Esther, thank you so very much.

EL: Well, you’re very welcome. This is really a pleasure. It’s been digging up lots of memories.

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