

# *Jacqueline Gaither*

## **Hillsborough Remembers**

Jacqueline Gaither was the wife of the principal of Hillsborough High School during World War II. She tells a wonderfully detailed story of bond drives and shortages, of women working for the first time to take the places of the men who went off to war. She also tells of letters they received from a former student who missed his graduation because of the war, grateful that his mother was able to receive his diploma in his absence.

WWII

At Home & Abroad

(from a conversation begun earlier and not recorded)

**Jacqueline Gaither:** It was [pause], it was something else. I know that when the armistice was signed after the second World War, we attended a service in the sweetest little old historical chapel [pause] not that far, in North Carolina. So, I just didn't know how much to put in.

**Cheryl Sanclemente:** I have these pictures to show you. This is an area of Tampa Bay along upper Dale Mabry Highway. Um, this is Dale Mabry in the year of 1955, I believe. Does that look familiar to you?

**JG:** Yeah, that was pretty much Dale Mabry Highway in those days.

**CS:** There was nothing. This here was Al Lopez Park and this is Dale Mabry.

**JG:** See, I go way out past--I can go home Dale Mabry, but I go way on out.

**CS:** Yeah? I live by um Gunn Highway and--

**JG:** Oh, you live out by Gunn Highway?!

**CS:** Yes, I live out near you.

**JG:** Oh. See we lived close to the school and then when they put that, they call it 275 but they called it 75 at the time--

**CS:** Right.

**JG:** When they put it through, we sat out in the middle of a loop, 'cause we weren't too far from the high school (Hillsborough High School) where my husband (Ms. Gaither's late husband was Vivian Gaither, former principal of Hillsborough High school and had

Gaither High School named after him) could go back and forth. And so we had to move, we hated to move, because we had a big brick house with three lots and our famous, our gardener was a landscaper, and he said we had a showplace, which we did and we just hated to lose it. So we ended up out in Lutz in a little grove, on a lake and then the grove froze. (Laughs good heartily).

**CS:**(laughing) Oh, no!

**JG:** So now I live out there by myself with no neighbors since my husband died.

**CS:**This is "Children of the Roxy", this was during the 1940's,..this is what it says in the back. "Today many people recycle. This habit of salvage and reuse began in earnest during the 1940's when scrap METAL from unused pans, tinfoil, bottle caps and toothpaste tubes, chew gum wrappers and flashlight batteries were all saved and collected." And this is the picture of the Roxy downtown and all the children with the pots and pans.

**JG:** Yup, we saved everything, everything. So I know what they're talking about. I now wish I had the two iron beds and the brass bed back that my mother gave away. Cause it would be very valuable now too. But we gave everything to help the scrap drive, you see.

**CS:** I have another picture.

**JG:** Another picture.

**CS:** Okay. This is kind of blurry. This is a celebration at Tampa Shipbuilding and Engineering Company. This is July 7, 1944. "The Tampa Shipbuilding and Engineering Company built 77 vessels during World War II ranging from destroyer escorts to destroyer tenders, and repaired or refitted another 500

ships. At the height of the wartime effort, about 16,000 men and women were working round-the-clock shifts and earning high wages in the company's yards on Hooker's Point. Shipbuilding contracts accounted for two-thirds of the area's industrial gains, but were lost to other states after the war."

**JG:** Yep

**CS:** I have another one.

**JG:** Another? They gave you an awful lot of material, didn't they? How did you get into this anyway?

**CS:** How did I get into this? Well, the History head teacher, she picked four kids from the school. And I'm in A.P.US History right now, and I was one of the people picked.

**JG:** Oh, I see.

**CS:** This is the Woolworth's Department Store downtown and um "Businesses nationwide went out of their way to promote patriotism during World War II. Tampa area stores were no exception, as this image of Woolworth's Department Store in downtown Tampa testifies."

**JG:** (referring to an ad in the photo) EZ Itching Troubles. (laughs)

**CS:** Yeah.

**JG:** Pretty good.

**CS:** I really, really, really enjoyed the part about the cats where you mixed in the raw ,a raw fish, or you cooked the fish.

**JG:** I just didn't know whether to put that in.

**CS:** If it's too much to ask, could you please read it over again?

**JG:** Yeah.

**CS:** Okay.

**JG:** Let me know if you're not gonna tape it. Are you taping it now?

**CS:** Yes, I read the whole thing over and I am taping it now.

**JG:** (begins reading biographical essay)

The 40s were dominated with the Second World War. When Japan dropped bombs on Pearl Harbor in December of '41, our life in the United States changed radically. Draft boards opened up recruiting 18 years old and older. The creme of the crop of young boys and men would be going to war and killed. I was personally concerned about my two brothers, one still in the senior year at the University of Florida.

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**JG:** (continues reading biographical essay)

Since my husband was principal of Hillsborough High School, we were aware that the war brought many responsibilities and changes to the schools. Diplomas were issued to the draft age boys. There were adjustments to schedules to part time workers who were aiding in the war effort. The school supplied volunteer service for a multitude of war and civic needs to meet the war demand. Teachers tutored students who hoped to become members of the Army Intelligence Service. Not only did many students enter the war service, but faculty members as well. Two of Hillsborough High School- one was head of the English department and the other head of the DCT department.

Everyone was urged to buy U.S. defense bonds. Hillsborough High School was one of the few schools in the state to sell them. A sign on the door of the room where they were being sold read, "Buy U.S. defense bonds, keep ours flyin'; keep Japs dyin'."

MacDill Field was opened up as well as Drew Field or Drew Park with hundreds of portables, another small airfield was

built in the Temple Terrace area. MacDill Field still exists to this day and has played a major role in our air defense. The shipyard here became quite important.

Scrap METAL drives took place. My mother gave two pretty iron beds and one brass one. Paper drives were quite important and everyone was urged to save the fat from cooking. At the grocery stores, fat was trimmed from the meat. Everyone was urged to have a victory garden, and gardening became very popular.

USOs were organized to entertain the soldiers to keep their morale up since they were far away from home. Women who had never worked before went to work at the shipyard and other places to help with the war effort. As a safety measure, the German and the Japanese people who lived in this country were put in retention camps. This was a very difficult thing as many were loyal Americans.

One of the worst situations that the war brought on was the rationing of most everything. Food and gasoline, especially. No sugar, you used honey. No oil or butter. No cigarettes. Autos and small appliances were not produced. Rationing stamps were issued for food and gasoline. Even soap was hard to come by. Clothing was in short supply. I was able to carry two pairs of nylon hose through the war and only because Grant's store was able to mend runs for so much an inch.

Even the cats and dogs felt the pinch. Especially my cats who would only eat canned "Puss n Boots" cat food. It was full of fish. I ended up cooking fresh fish and putting it over dry food to get them to eat it. It kept the house smelling like fish for the duration. The gasoline rationing really kept you grounded. Some people purchased

bicycles. My two brothers left their cars at home with us. We could not get enough gasoline to keep three cars going so we decided to sell ours. Then when the war was over, we would buy a new one. It just didn't work that way. When the war was over, cars were not being produced very rapidly.

You were urged to write the soldiers and their correspondence was called v-mail. No stamps were required for them, but their letters were all photographed and reduced to a very small square. If you send a package to them, it had to be a care package and you were required to show a request for it at the post office. It had to meet certain dimensions. It took all of our sugar rationing to send cookies and candy to my two brothers. And I went to a place in Ruskin where they had a canning machine, and I canned both so they would stay fresh.

When my mother died in '42, the funeral service had to be postponed until my two brothers could be located. I remember a letter my husband received from one of our senior boys that was stationed in the Pacific, and that had been drafted. He thanked my husband for sending his mother his diploma, and he would love to see his beautiful Hillsborough High School with its tall tower and beautiful windows and even the old yellow street cars that rambled along Central Avenue. He missed the school paper, The Red and Black and would love to see The Annual. All these things we're fighting to keep going.

The Hillsborough class of '49 raised the money for a memorial clock that was installed in the school tower in memory of all the Hillsborough High School boys killed in the war. The same class raised over 6,000 dollars at their 50 year reunion on October of this year 1999 to have the clock repaired.

One of the horrible memories of the Second World War was the Jewish Holocaust also dividing Germany and Russia in the Berlin War.

Since my mother had died during the war, and neither of my brothers were married, I felt so responsible for them. My older brother was in the Navy and was in the Battle of Sorreno in Italy. It was at this time that his fiancée wrote him that she was marrying someone else.

**JG:** My younger brother was in the Gliders. They were made out of cardboard. He was in charge of the glider training that landed in France on D-Day. The girl that he married after the war was over was a nurse that had set up the first hospital or nursing station on the coast of France on D-Day. He was later caught in the Battle of the Bulge and has been portrayed in several war pictures that have been produced since the war.

So . . .

**CS:** That was great.

**JG:** Was that . . .

**CS:** Yeah, that was wonderful. You mentioned something about the streetcars. Did you ride on the streetcars?

**JG:** Everybody did, everybody did.

(Tape recorder turned off and then back on, picking up an ongoing conversation)

**JG:** . . . it was a short time before the Armistice was signed in 1918.

**CS:** He was a great deal older than you, like . . .

**JG:** Ten years.

**CS:** Ten years.

**JG:** He didn't have to . . . to sign up.

**CS:** He didn't have to sign up. Okay. After you got on the train, you didn't get to be a camp counselor, right?

**JG:** Oh, yes, uh huh. Yes. Yes. We had already gone up. On the train.

**CS:** Oh, okay.

**JG:** We, uh, we went back to that camp til camp was over. As long as the principals had a long vacation, we spent eight weeks up there in the camp. And he ran the camp (laughter) the man that owned it. And I ran the craft shop. We just loved North Carolina mountains, they were up in the mountains up there.

**CS:** How beautiful. It must have been beautiful. How, did you have any personal friends, any personal, any German friends, like you mentioned, that were put away even though they were loyal Americans? I mean, did you have any personal experience with . . .

**JG:** You mean with any Japanese or Germans?

**CS:** Yeah.

**JG:** No, no.

**CS:** So you wrote the story on fact?

**JG:** (Indicates affirmative)

**CS:** Okay. I don't really want to do this, but we have to do this. It's a Life History data sheet and . . .

**JG:** Do you think its necessary to fill out all of that?

**CS:** I don't. It won't get in unless I have it.

**JG:** And you've interviewed somebody else today?

**CS:** No, huh uh. No.

(Tape turned off and on again, recording a conversation in progress)

**JG:** . . . saved an awful lot of people. It also saved a whole lot of our boys and saved a whole lot of Japanese that would have gotten killed during the war.

**CS:** I feel that's been very controversial for me and my family but I know it was a horrible thing that happened and a lot of people were killed, but the Japanese had a different war strategy. They were willing to crash their hopes to the side. They would, literally, in order to win the war, crash, they would crash into our planes. I mean they would just start crashing into our planes, and I don't think we could have, I don't think we could have survived . . .

**JG:** I had a very dear friend, and I started to put that in . . . that was, he was a commander of one of the big war ships out there in Pearl Harbor.

**CS:** Oh, wow.

**JG:** And the ship was destroyed. He wasn't injured but we were very concerned about him, 'cause he such a good friend of ours. So, um . . . But those Japanese, no, they, suicide.

**CS:** And now, I mean, they were just, that's why I think the president signed the (piercing noise interfering with sound) too many American soldiers were gonna die and he just . . . It was gonna be too much. In a way, I'm glad.

**JG:** Well, I hope we will never have to live through another one, that's for sure. It was rough, rough, rough.

**CS:** I believe it, I believe it.

**JG:** Because you worry, worry, worry about the people that were in the war when you don't hear from them. Oh, my goodness. It's something else.

**CS:** I can't even begin to imagine the ( ). Or my brother leaving, such a baby, so unprepared.

**JG:** Because, you see, my brother, after the war was over, he graduated from college at the University of Florida and they were going to send him back to Germany in the force over there. And he was in training up in Idaho someplace, to get ready to go back over there, when he came down with rheumatoid arthritis. They didn't know what he had. His head was swelled up, all his whole body swelled up, and I didn't hear for two weeks, then this nurse called me ( ), because you see, he wasn't married and my mother died, and I just felt like I was responsible, you know. They decided he had rheumatoid arthritis and they put him on the plane to send him out to Albuquerque where they had a special hospital out there. Got him on the plane and his appendix burst and they had to take him ( )

**CS:** Oh, no.

**JG:** Then they got out there where he met the nurse that he married.

**CS:** How beautiful.

**JG:** So that's how he got in and out of the service and he could have, he didn't really have to be in the service because he was one of these big athletes at Hillsborough High School and he got a scholarship to play football at the University of Florida.

And, here in Tampa, he had a silver plate in his head, 'cause he bashed his head in. They had to make a special helmet for him to play football. And, uh, then he tore his knee all up and they wired it all together. So he really didn't need to be in the war but you couldn't have kept him out. He wanted to be there.

**CS:** A lot, a lot of guys wanted to be there.

**JG:** And my other brother that was on, in the Navy. He went on a PT boat out here in the Atlantic for the longest. He died two years ago, but he would not touch an English pea because they got caught out there for a week or two with nothing but English peas on their boat. (Laughter) And the other one, the first time he came to visit after the war. I've always gardened and I raised, uh, these artichokes, not artichokes but um, brussel sprouts. And so I saved them special for him when he came. And he said, "Don't dare show me another brussel sprout. In England, that's all I saw was brussel sprouts." He didn't really want to eat another brussel sprout.

**CS:** I don't really blame him. How horrible.

**JG:** do you want me to keep this or do you want to keep it?

**CS:** ( )

**JG:** Well, does that take care of everything?

**CS:** Oh, thank you so much for your time.