

Oral History Interview



Cathy Schaughency
Wife of Lt. Col. Paul Schaughency
World War II
Aleutian Islands, Alaska

July 22, 2016

Cathy Schaughency
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Aleutian World War II
Oral History Project

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Contents

Transcript of July 22, 2016 interview.

Interview with Cathy Schaughency

**Aleutian World War II National Historic Area
Oral History Program**

**July 22, 2016
Pittsburgh, PA**

Interviewed by Joshua Bell, Park Ranger,
Aleutian World War II National Historic Area

This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. This interview was recorded with the interviewee's permission on a digital recorder. Copies of the audio file are preserved in wav format and are on file at the offices of the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska.

The transcript has been edited by the interviewee.

[Start of recorded material 00:00:00]

Joshua Bell: Today is Friday, July 22, 2016. I am Josh Bell, park ranger with Aleutian World War II National Historic Area. How are you today, Cathy?

Cathy Schaughency: I'm fine, thank you.

Joshua Bell: Excellent. This conversation's being recorded. Is that okay?

Cathy Schaughency: That's fine.

Joshua Bell: For the record, could I have you say your name, please?

Cathy Schaughency: Cathy Schaughency. The spelling is very unique if you need that.

Joshua Bell: Sure. We'll take it.

Cathy Schaughency: S-C-H-A-U-G-H-E-N-C-Y.

Joshua Bell: What name did you give up to get that one?

Cathy Schaughency: Black, B-L-A-C-K, easy to spell, easy to read.

Joshua Bell: When and where were you born?

Cathy Schaughency: Pittsburgh, PA, December 11, 1922.

Joshua Bell: What were your parent's names?

Cathy Schaughency: Homer and Elvira Black.

Joshua Bell: What was your father's name?

Cathy Schaughency: Homer, H-O-M-E-R.

Joshua Bell: Did you have any siblings?

Cathy Schaughency: Two sisters, one deceased, one, 100 years old.

Joshua Bell: Oh, wow. Good. What did your parents do?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:01:37] My father was an office manager for Moore, Leonard and Lynch Brokerage, a company here in Pittsburgh. My mother was a stay-at-home mom like all people were back in ... or like most women back in the 1920s.

Joshua Bell: What was it like growing up in the '20s and '30s?

Cathy Schaughency: I have very happy memories. I know we went through the Great Depression which was interesting. We learned to conserve a lot. We didn't have any problems with it. My father kept on working through it so we were one of the fortunate families. The '30s, we had a huge flood in Pittsburgh, 1936. Why I remember that is my sister had wanted to go to a dance in Princeton and had to stay home instead which was a disappointment. Those were simple, easy times to live through, no problems for us as children.

Joshua Bell: What did you like doing when you were a kid?

Cathy Schaughency: I was always a great reader, as far as that goes, and a great dreamer too, because I did a lot of writing too. I'm still doing that. We lived in Edgewood which is a nice borough and a very, very wonderful school. There were only 60 in our graduating class from high school. Everybody knew everybody else. It was just a real good time in life. Then, I went to Pitt. At Pitt, I met P.W.S., Paul and, I knew that the degree I really wanted was MRS [to him.]

Joshua Bell: What were you studying?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:04:09] I started out in journalism and really enjoyed that. After I met him, I decided that he was the one. We were married January 4, 1944. He was already in the Army. He was stationed at Fort Hancock, New Jersey. You wouldn't

believe it but he wanted me to come for Christmas, and I didn't want to leave my parents because both of my sisters were out of town. I said, "I can't come for Christmas, but I'll come for New Year's." I did. We decided to get married. We were married in Pittsburgh on January 4th. This was New Year's that I was up there seeing him. We even had a formal wedding. We couldn't do it today; too much planning is needed [now].

Joshua Bell: For sure. What did your parents think of all this?

Cathy Schaughency: Fortunately, my father, really, and my mother too, really liked Paul. I think they knew that if I did go see him, if he wanted me too, that I might come home with some news. Paul was very good. He called my father and got permission on the phone. Everything turned out well until one week later when his orders arrived: "destination unknown." He was on one of four troop trains, and they didn't know where they were going. If they did, we didn't. I was on my way home to Pittsburgh on the train. One of the trains did go through Pittsburgh because a friend of Paul's picked up a paper. It said, "The Schaughencys to reside at Fort Hancock, New Jersey." He took the paper up and gave it to him when he saw him.

Joshua Bell: It was a little short-lived there, wasn't it?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:06:48] Right. Then after VJ Day, I got a call from the American Red Cross wanting to know if I would be home on a Sunday evening and be willing to receive a phone call. That was the only communication we had by telephone from the Aleutians. The new orders after the war, if you had still a year to serve, you could take your dependents with you. He said, "Would you want to come?" I said, "Yes." I didn't bother to look it up and find out what was up there.

[00:07:29] He came home then for an R&R. That was wonderful, so we could travel back together. At that time, they were saying on the radio that they needed drivers for cars to get them out to California. All you had to have was a destination point there. One of my sisters lived in San Gabriel at that point. We called up to find out the rest of the details and decided to go ahead and do everybody a favor and take a car to California. It was a Plymouth. I don't know how old.

After the war, you could sell anything with wheels that ran. We went to my sisters, and then Schaun turned it in ... I called him 'Schaun'. I meant to keep it 'Paul' all the time

Joshua Bell: That's all right.

Cathy Schaughency: He turned the car in. Then, we flew up to Seattle. The *George Washington Carver* had been a hospital ship, but they had restored it. That was the first boatload of wives to go up to the chain.

Joshua Bell: What did you think of that?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:09:09] I thought it was really interesting because in my mind, I was thinking more of an ocean voyage and a cruise ship while they had the women in one place and the men in another. There were two other couples going and we became well acquainted. It was just wonderful on our way to Adak. We really became real good friends which was nice. Then when we got there, of course, we all had our Quonset huts. We were lucky that we got a single Quonset hut because with a single Quonset hut, you could have an electric stove. Otherwise, the larger huts, it would have been an oil stove. Since I didn't know how to cook, period, electricity seemed better than oil.

Joshua Bell: What was your first impressions of those islands?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:10:16] I don't know, like a big park, I guess [I was fascinated because it was so different: colorwise I'd say beige, the land, no trees or flowers, lots of hills,] and the strong winds, as you know. This one day, I was going to make something and I needed a cup of sugar. I thought I'd just walk across the street and borrow one from our good friend and neighbor. However, I was told that the winds were too strong. I'd never make it across the street, and I should forget all about that. You know when you're in the 20s, you're not only invincible, but you also think you can do anything. I went out of the door.

As soon as I got away from the overhang on the Quonset, I was down on my hands and knees. There's nothing I could do but crawl back and knock at the door and say, "You were right. I was wrong." Back in those days, the wedding vows were, "Love, honor and obey." I forgot the "obey" part, I guess. I think we had a wonderful time up there. I mean it was rugged. If you like camping, you're okay. I sent word to one person that here it is. We finally had a wedding anniversary *together*, and it *was* on an island just not the island in the south Pacific.

Joshua Bell: What was daily life up there like for you?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:12:19] It got into a routine in that I was working for the Civilian Personnel Office. There were very nice people there. That worked out fine. One of them we became really good friends with. I was talking to him about spaghetti one time. He said, "Let me come to your place, and I'll fix your dinner," and it was wonderful spaghetti. I did, in the future, see him a couple of times. He had gone overseas someplace to work. At that point, we were in Ohio. He stopped to see us. Then when we were out in Missouri, we saw him there too just once. He was from Wenatchee, Washington. I don't know whether he's still alive or not, but that would have been somebody to talk to.

Joshua Bell: What was his name?

Cathy Schaughency: Dick Gaspar. G-A-S-P-A-R. He was the chief clerk there, civilian personnel. His home in Wenatchee, Washington and that's the only home he ever talked about, if he's alive I think he's probably still there.

Joshua Bell: How long did you stay on the islands?

Cathy Schaughency: About a year.

Joshua Bell: Were you happy to leave the islands?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:14:39] Well, happy to think about going home and seeing my folks. We really had enjoyed our lives there on Adak. It was like a year-long honeymoon. The people were all very nice. When it rains, you're all saying, "Oh, how it rains." One of the things, though, that happened, I don't know whether Paul mentioned it or not. When the nurses got lost ...

Joshua Bell: Oh, yes. He sure did.

Cathy Schaughency: He told it. Okay. We went up there. We went up there without any furniture. Paul knew all of these outposts where the people had already gone. It was easy to get furniture for our huts.

Joshua Bell: His rank and his job title has its privileges, doesn't it?

Cathy Schaughency: Right. He knew where the only bathtub was on the whole island. The colonel's wife really preferred her bath to a shower. He happened to talk to the colonel. It happens, they got their bathtub. There was a chapel and a small choir we both sang in. We tried to make the activities as much as they would be at home. That worked out real well. I worked with one of the ... well, with the colonel's wife. We set up things for the ladies to do. It was fun.

Joshua Bell: Like what?

Cathy Schaughency: What did we do?

Joshua Bell: Yes.

Cathy Schaughency: We had tea for the other women, different social-type things like that. That, I think, made it more attractive to them, too, because it was something that was a little bit different than everyday activities. You can't go shopping. As they say, "The gravy's in the Navy." They had a really nice Ship Service. We could take advantage of that [as well as the commissary and px.]. I should have done what my mother suggested and that would have been to write all about it when we got home

You know how it is. You don't always do what you're told. You think about it later and think, "Well I should have." It was a wonderful experience. I'm so glad that we had the opportunity to do that. It's too bad that there was a war in the first place. Now you think

of, "Oh, my goodness. What's happening?" We just heard over TV that Germany has had a lot of shootings and oh, my [- how sad!]

Joshua Bell: That leads me to a question. When did you hear that the US was at war?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:19:00] Pearl Harbor day was the beginning of what we knew. When it was going to happen after Pearl Harbor day, we knew it was inevitable.

Joshua Bell: What were you doing when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Cathy Schaughency: I remember I was at home. My father had the radio on. I was coming down the steps. He said, "Be quiet and listen." That was a very sobering thought.

Joshua Bell: How do you remember feeling about all of that?

Cathy Schaughency: Shocked. At one time during the church service and Schaun was gone, of course, they were singing "Onward Christian Soldiers." I thought, "Maybe I should join the service." Then, I realized that [I knew I couldn't make it.] That didn't last very long.

Joshua Bell: What led to that determination?

Cathy Schaughency: That I couldn't make it, you mean?

Joshua Bell: Yes.

Cathy Schaughency: I began to realize that you'd have to learn how to follow orders, and you'd have to do all of this athletic stuff to get in. I thought, "Oh, no." Then to the alternative of just waiting for Paul to get home. I didn't want to be obliged to do anything else except go wherever he was going.

Joshua Bell: I wanted to ask about school. That was kind of a unique thing for a girl to go to school at that time, wasn't it?

Cathy Schaughency: Right.

Joshua Bell: Was that encouraged?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:21:12] [At our home, yes.] It's so different now. They really need to go so they're prepared to do their thing, whatever it may be. At that point, I know neither one of my sisters-in-law graduated from college. I didn't because we got married. Both of my sisters did. As I recall, my father wasn't too disappointed when I dropped out of school at Pitt. This was after we were married. I think he thought, "Well it's probably just a good cause." I'm not a student. I know that.

Joshua Bell: You met Paul at Pitt. How did that happen? How did you meet him?

Cathy Schaughency: Oh, that's a real story. I was a Kappa. He was a Sigma Chi. There was a Sadie Hawkins dance where the girls would ask the boys. I had asked one boy. I hadn't met Paul yet, of course. Actually, that night he was dating my best friend which was another thing that happened. Then when he called, he wanted to pick me up and take me home after our meeting. I said, "No." I said, "No," I think two or three times. The third time he said instead saying, "Shall I," he said, "I'm coming down to get you." I said, "Okay." Then the funny part about it all was that I was talking to some of the older girls. I said, "I hate to ... Wheezy likes him so much, and I know she does. I don't want to interfere." They said, "Don't worry about it. Go have a good time." On their good advice, that helped.

Joshua Bell: How did he court you?

Cathy Schaughency: Well the first problem was that he had to meet my folks. I was commuting by streetcar to Pitt. He went out with me after our meeting which would probably have been around 9:00 PM. It took me all the way home to learn to pronounce his name correctly and spell it. Then, he met my folks and didn't really stay that long because he had to get back. My father, of course, recognized the name because Paul's brother was a radio announcer. That helped, I'm sure.

Joshua Bell: You're in college during the war. How is the campus taking the news that war is happening?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:24:45] There were collections of coat hangers and all kinds of things. Everybody was busy doing all these things we could do from the home front. Social life did go on. There was a formal in downtown Pittsburgh, I remember. Here are all of the girls in their long dresses because we wore long dresses then. We went there on the street cars, because of the gas shortage and things, rationing. We all were in the same boat, so we all had a good time.

Joshua Bell: Would you say that the ratio started to change of boys to girls at school?

Cathy Schaughency: Oh, yes. At school, yes, very definitely at school. There was an active ROTC program which you probably heard about already. That meant some nice dances too, the *Scabbard and the Blade* [Military Ball] or whatever they called it. Schaun was lucky. He got to finish which was wonderful. Then after the war, he had decided that he really wanted to go back and get his master's. He probably told you all this maybe.

Joshua Bell: He sure did.

Cathy Schaughency: Okay, so you know what it was like from there on. I worked in the treasurer's office at Pitt while he went back to school for his masters on the GI bill.

He had his classes in the morning, studied in the afternoon. That meant we had the evenings free. It was great. We didn't have any place to live, of course, so we lived with my mom and dad. That worked out real well.

One of the big thrills [of undergraduate school] was the fact that he had asked me if I would like to have his fraternity pin. He made the arrangements. They came down to the Kappa House. The men all serenaded, "*We are the Sigma Chi.*" He pinned me there. That was a real, real touching thing to do. It was something I will always remember.

Joshua Bell: There's a whole ceremony that goes with this.

Cathy Schaughency: Right. I think there probably is. I don't remember anything else other than the pin. You ask how I actually met him, at the Sadie Hawkins Day dance. I had gone upstairs to take my coat up. When I came down, it was *Elmer's Tune* playing on the record player. I was kind of dancing as I got off the steps. He said, "Come on. Let's dance." We did. That's how we actually met, I guess, the first time.

Joshua Bell: Kind of a forward fellow there, isn't he? He didn't even know your name.

Cathy Schaughency: We introduced each other! Those were good days.

Joshua Bell: What courses were you taking?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:28:42] Journalism is what I was wanting to major in. The biology was the one that was getting me down.

Joshua Bell: Do you remember anything about -

Cathy Schaughency: I knew that I really wasn't a student by that time.

Joshua Bell: Do you remember anything about your professors that you had?

Cathy Schaughency: Yes. The English one was Mr. Crowe. My first theme that I thought was so wonderful, he only gave me a 'C'. Everybody got 'C's in the beginning, but he was a good teacher. Then after we were married and I did leave school, I went to work where I had worked from my senior year in high school up until I started at Pitt in the fall for United Engineering and Foundry Company. When they found out that I was no longer a student, they wanted me to come back and go back to work for them, which I did.

My job was with a man from the Soviet Purchasing Commission, because at that point, we were allies of Russia. They were over here to buy rolling mills and equipment. I did not know Russian, but they were pretty good with their English. I would type up the letters that they'd ask me to send. Then I would go upstairs to the offices of United and

have some of the men check us out to see if it made sense. They were our ace in the hole, and we got along fine. Everything worked out okay. There, again, here my father said to me," You really should be studying Russian while you have this opportunity." I was not wanting to commit myself to anything in case I got to go with Paul. That was my hope.

Joshua Bell: Naturally.

Cathy Schaughency: Things have gone well. We are now in a retirement community which is absolutely wonderful.

Joshua Bell: I just have a couple of more quick questions. How did you stay in touch with Paul when he was up on the island?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:31:41] Would you believe I think I wrote to him every day? If I didn't hear from him, I'd think, "He's going to be coming home soon," and I'd go shopping. Then when I told him that, he wrote more letters.

Joshua Bell: Was he sending home any pay at this time?

Cathy Schaughency: No. I don't remember getting any of that. I never thought about that.

Joshua Bell: You were part of the war effort in your own way. What are you most proud of about your experience during the war?

Cathy Schaughency: [00:32:39] I guess it's the fact that I was working with United and the Russians. It was very interesting. One day when there was only one of them in the room with me, he said, "I need to tell you that I'm a white Russian, and we're different than the red Russians." Then he liked music very much so. His favorite song was, "Someone like you, a friend good and true. I'd like to leave it all behind." Do you know that one?

Joshua Bell: No, I don't.

Cathy Schaughency: It was probably popular in the 1930's. Okay and, "Go and find a place that's known to God alone."

Paul Schaughency: "A place that is known to God alone. This spot -

Cathy Schaughency: ... "To call our own. We'll find a place where yours will never see, somewhere ...

Paul Schaughency: "Up there where the western sky. Just you and I will build a sweet, little nest somewhere out in the west and let the rest of the world go by."

Cathy Schaughency: "Just you and I will build a sweet, little nest somewhere out in the west and let the rest of the world go by."

Joshua Bell: That's great.

Cathy Schaughency: I was so surprised that he would know one of the songs that were popular over here. Music, I think, is the world's common language.

Paul Schaughency: It was kind of a sing-a-long then.

Cathy Schaughency: Yeah, it was great.

Joshua Bell: Music's powerful stuff.

Cathy Schaughency: Then, when the boss came, the boss, the Russian boss, things were entirely different, no nonsense. I could tell they knew he was boss!

Joshua Bell: What did the company sell to the Russians?

Cathy Schaughency: Rolling mills and equipment. It was a wonderful company to work for. It's not changed. It's just WEAN United now, W-E-A-N United.

Joshua Bell: Excellent. Thank you so very much for sharing your story with me today. I appreciate that.

Cathy Schaughency: You're welcome. I hope that I stayed on track like I was supposed to.

Joshua Bell: You did wonderfully. You did wonderfully.

[End of recorded material - 00:36:57]