

#193 BLANCHE MORGAN: CIVILIAN RESIDENT OF HONOLULU

Steven Haller (SH): My name is Steven Haller and we're here at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel in Honolulu on December 3, 1991. It's four o'clock PM and I'm talking to Blanche Fernandez Morgan, who was a civilian resident of Honolulu at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. And we're doing this tape for the National Park Service, Arizona Memorial, National Historic Site, in conjunction with KHET-TV in Honolulu. And Mrs. Morgan, I want to thank you for coming here and talking with us and sharing your memories of that day.

Let me see, let me ask you what was your background? Did you live --- you told me that you lived, were a native of the islands and you grew up here. Is that right?

Blanche Morgan (BM): That's right. I grew up here, went to school here. I'm not Hawaiian. I'm Portuguese, but I am from Hawaii. And the --- at this time, I was working. I had just graduated high school and had, the year before the Pearl Harbor attack, had started working with the U.S. Army Engineers. And I had worked some other jobs, but this was a better job.

SH: What did you do for the Corps of Engineers?

BM: I was working in the personnel office. We did a lot of the records, typing and things. Worked there --- it -- I took the --- I was called a clerk-typist at that time, and as time goes by, you know, you could work your way up.

But I was doing that at the time, and of course, nobody's thinking of war at that time. And never dreamed of war, never gave any consideration. And my -- I had, through some friends, met my husband-to-be, though I didn't know he was going to be my husband. But these friends invited me to a party they were having and wanted me to go and there was a bunch of us that went. And I met my husband-to-be there, although I didn't know it at the time, but we met and we liked each other. But he was a sailor, and not -- the family, not too encouraging about getting involved with sailors. And so (chuckles) I, the next morning, going to work, I'm passing through Kress store and cutting through to go to Young Hotel.

SH: Which is where the Corps of Engineers . . .

BM: Yes, where the Corps of Engineers were, and I had gone on Fort Street, at that time, was a street, not a mall. And I had gone to Fort Street and cut through the store, and who do I see? I see Joe and this friend of his looking at things in the store. And I say, "Oh." And so I go around them, and get to work and he didn't see me. I told him about it later.

And then, oh, I thought, well, that's it, you know, he didn't find me and he won't know where I am, 'cause I only gave him my first name. That's all he got. And so, oh, what, about a week or two later, he's checking around, calling. And he finds out where I work and he calls. And he got the wrong Blanche. He got another Blanche and she said, "Oh, I think you want the Blanche down in the other department."

So she transferred his call. And so he called and I was shocked and wowie, here he is, you know. And so I said, "Hmm."

Of course, now, this is after the war. I should go back, I think.

SH: Oh, okay, yeah.

BM: Yeah. Let me go back.

SH: Skipping around a little.

BM: Yeah.

SH: So let's, let's . . .

BM: Okay. Like he had explained, you know, we had, were going, we started together after that. No, wait a minute.

SH: Yeah, let's go back. You were working.

BM: Okay, I was working.

SH: You were working for the Corps of Engineers.

BM: And . . .

SH: And how'd you meet?

BM: Okay. At the party, that's okay. I met at the party. And that is the morning I went around him. And then we started dating. That is correct. And we, you know, went to lunches and went to the beach, and he didn't get a lot of liberty, so we did as much as we could, until like we realized that in talking with each other, that we're engaged to somebody else. And so we decided this isn't correct, we better stop seeing each other and go ahead and be with who we're supposed to be. So we stopped seeing each other and this was about a week or two before the war broke out, the first week of December. And we --- of course, I'm going to work and I'm going on about my business, and I'm still thinking of him and wondering where he is and not feeling great about it, 'cause I thought to myself, "Well, if I don't marry him, I'll never marry nobody."

And so it was a bad case. And so I, when the war broke out, of course, here I am at home, now here he is, on an island in the middle of nowhere, getting shot, and here I am, getting awaked out of bed. And he's being shot at and trying to shoot at the planes, and I'm being shaken out of bed and wondering what's going on. First thing was an earthquake, then we thought, no, it's keeping up too much. It can't be an earthquake. So then, I went in the living room, my sister and brother-in-law were there, and they said, "Something's gone wrong with the radio. The radio's gone out."

And we said, "Well, that's strange," and said, "oh, it must be a, you know, it's a practice. The military is practicing. They always practice."

And so we figured that's what's happening. And so we go on and have breakfast, but this booming is still going on. And I went outside and I see this black flicks in the sky, but we couldn't see the planes or anything, because we're way in the valley, Manoa valley is on, it's deep into the valley, has mountains on each side, and you don't see beyond that. So we thought, "Something is going on, but the radio's off, so we can't find out."

We tried to call, the lines are busy. So my brother-in-law kept trying, but he couldn't get through. And finally the radio comes on again and the speaker is saying, "You're rad--- there's no trouble with your radio, leave it

on. We're going to get back to you. There's something --- we're being attacked. Leave your radio on," and they, you know, just got off the air, quickly.

And then, at that time, he said also, "Don't call us because we're --- the lines are bogged down, nobody call."

So after a while, we wait and we wait, and then it goes what seemed eternity, they come back on again and says, "Pearl Harbor is being attacked. No one is to leave their homes. Everyone stay where you are. Do not leave your homes." That was emphasized.

And so of course, by that time, we're getting very excited. We don't know what to do. And we figure, well, we have to stay put until they tell us what to do, and later on, they come on again and say, "Do not leave your homes. Do not get out on the streets, and we'll get back with instructions." So they get off the air again.

And finally, I guess when things sort of settled down and the Japanese planes had left, and of course, everything's a mess at Pearl Harbor, and just before that, right at that time rather, they got on the air and they said, "Pearl Harbor has been attacked. All workers, civilian workers are called back to work."

And all of them, of course, that were called in and military men just automatically went back in, but the civilians, of course, wouldn't have unless they were ordered to.

SH: You mean all civilian government workers?

BM: All government workers, civilian government workers were called in, which was all kinds of nationalities. And many were Japanese. That was all right. And so, that day, they said also, came on the air later on, and they said, "Do not turn on any lights on at night. Leave all the lights off. Get everything you have to do in while you have the daylight." And no one smoking. No lit cigarette. No lighting of cigarette on the outside.

And the purpose, we found out later, was that even a cigarette could be seen from the ocean, and that area could be bombed. So not knowing what was going to happen, whether there was a return going to come, or whether there was some more bombing going to be done, they were playing it safe and having people to cut out any lights. So some of the people on the block would watch, make sure nobody had a light shining or smoking a cigarette. And every once in a while, somebody would holler out, "Turn that cigarette off!" You know. So they really were watching.

The next day, I went to work, Monday. And everybody was really helter skelter for a while there. And then they announced that we were, for the next couple weeks, they were going to take, give us all the kind of shots that we needed and we're going to have to carry gas masks. And so the next weeks we had all the different shots, like DPT, typhoid, in case the water became contaminated. And we went and tested ourselves in the room, they give us the gas mask, and they go in the room and you'd feel what it'd feel like to have gas hit you in the eyes like tear gas. Then we'd come out. And so we'd know what to look for.

So we carried the gas mask home, back and forth, every day. And finally, after about the second week, they began to issue the car paper. Some people painted their windows, I understand.

SH: When you say, "They began to issue," is this issued . . .

BM: I mean city.

SH: . . . out of, at work, or the city . . .

BM: No, this was, I'm sorry . . .

SH: . . . defense, civilian defense workers?

BM: . . . this is the government, some of the government, if I remember right, some of the government offices that had this stuff, gave it out. And people bought, some bought their own and they were told to really black out everything, so they could have their lights on. So then the lights were able to be used after that. Some people painted their windows black, some bought the paper, and some of it was issued by the government. And of course, right away, martial law was declared, the very day. And so the military took over. Military said no cars out on the road, and nobody can travel without a permit. So that they know they're supposed to be out. So it was kind of, you know, you're wondering, oh my.

And then, here in the midst of all of this, you know, I was wondering about him. And I'm thinking, "What's happened to him?"

Here I am, but he's out in the middle of it. Of course, there's no way to find out. I can't call and he can't call in. So we have this restriction, and their liberty is cut off for several weeks.

And so, finally, when he did call me, but, you know, we were able to start having lunch together, and we got to talking, and the more we saw of each other, the more we realized that we really cared. So we got to talking and he proposed. And we got engaged and then were married, March the seventh. And then, of course, like he said, he got transferred to Maui, right. Oh my. And I'm thinking, not Midway, not Palmyra, please, you know, 'cause that's where some were going. And so he comes home, and then he says he's going to Maui. Oh, that was a relief. And they had put a base, a Navy air base on Maui.

The islands, no island had anything except Oahu. No military protection except Oahu. And the other islands were vulnerable to any attack. So they spaced out this one on the big island of Maui, which is a pretty good size, and that way they had the Naval air station there. That's where he was going and lot of others were transferred to Maui.

So we moved to Maui.

SH: You lived together. You were able to move . . .

BM: I, well, I transferred.

SH: . . . on your own?

BM: I transferred from, with the U.S. Army Engineers, and I had, I went on my own, but they gave me a transfer, a job on Maui. And so I went on April the

first, April Fools' Day and he was standing there, waiting at the airport, waiting for me. And he thought I wasn't going to come.

But we had --- we went and found a house and lived there throughout the war. And we had two boys while we were on Maui, at two different hospitals. And we found out that children always want to be born in the middle of the night or two or three o'clock in the morning. And you can't have your car lights on. You have to have these dark, all the bulb is the light of the car is covered, except for a little -- I call it the size of a green pea, and you drive with that.

So both boys were born with us having to go to the hospital, two, three o'clock in the morning, with that kind of light. And it was really fun. At the time, it wasn't. And you think back, you wonder how, how you managed. But you know, I think about the feelings and I think, you know, it's like, oh yes, I got scared. We all did. But yet, you know, it's kind of like, you do what you have to. And what you have to do is deal with this is it, and you fall in with the program. You go to work and you try to do the best you can on the job and everything, even though you don't know what's coming next.

And so we married and we're having children. We don't know what's coming next. But what was interesting was I had, to me, I had always prayed that the lord would send me a man to marry that liked to go to church. I liked to go to church. I loved the lord. And when we, he had already gone ahead of me, to Maui, so I started packing some things he'd left. And that's when I found his bible and I looked through it and I said, "He's not so strange."

My sister has asked what church did he go to, and I said, "I don't know. He said he's a Baptist, but I don't know what that is." And I'm a Catholic, was a Catholic.

And so I get on Maui, and I'm writing and asking him about the bible and things, and he says to wait until I come and we can talk about it. So when I got over there, we did. We read the bible together, we talked about it. And I found why --- see, all my life, I had wondered why Jesus had suffered so much, and why he died like he did. So when I found that out, in John 3:16, why. I told him, "Joe, this is what I've been looking for all my life, and this is the answer I've been looking for. Now I know." And I said, "As far as I'm concerned, that's what I want."

And so he and I found that mission in Kahului. We started going down there. I was baptized, I became a Baptist. And then I got tickled because he surrendered to the ministry. And I thought that was very interesting. I said, "Joe, you're going to be a minister." I said, "You knew you were going to be a minister." I said, "How can you be a minister with a Catholic wife?" 'Cause at the time, you see, he married a Catholic girl. He's going to be called into the ministry.

And he says, "Well, god knew what was in you and what was in me, and what I needed and he put us together."

And so I felt that was a big change in my life, and he became a minister. And he became, later, he was in the, as an enlisted man first, and then we went to college seminary, and we come back and he's missionary, we're together as missionaries. Then he is, takes the call to go in and be a chaplain when they needed them. So we have a chaplain's life. And then after that, we come back and have a church life as being a minister. I think I had a very interesting

life, and it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for the war. I feel like god gave us something real good.

SH: Well, that's good to hear, that you also feel something, you know, something good came out of that war, in spite of it. What you referred to, John 3:16, can you quote that? What is that?

BM: Yes. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son."

SH: Thank you. You also referred to, I guess, working with the Japanese, Hawaiians, and that sort of thing. What were you --- let me ask you two questions, I guess, and I've led a little bit. You sort of tipped my hand, I guess, a little bit. What were your feelings about the Japanese nation, the Japanese of Japan because of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

BM: Well, of course, upsetting and angry. I mean, this was really weird why they did such a thing when we had so many Japanese people living on Oahu. And many of them were working at Pearl Harbor, and I'm sure some of 'em might have been working that Sunday. And we never could figure out why this, why they'd do such a thing. And many, well, I talked to several, and I had friends, I have good friends who are Japanese. I went to school, where a majority were Japanese. I had many friends in school. I had Hawaiian friends, Filipino, Japanese friends. And you know, they were upset. I had a girl come to work that morning and say, "You know, Blanche, I almost didn't come to work."

I said, "What's the matter?"

She said, "I was so embarrassed." She said, "I didn't know how I would be treated when I came to work this morning," being she was Japanese. She was embarrassed.

And they were not happy about it. And many of the American Japanese that lived here felt this was not good, what happened. They were shamed, really ashamed of the whole thing that happened. And I know several expressed it. So we had no trouble. We had neighbors as Japanese people. You know, we live here like we are and you look at them, sometimes you have differences. We all have different cultures, and we share 'em. We have, oh my, we have a chop suey mixture here in Hawaii. And we don't think. You get to where you don't think nationality. You think person, when you talk to someone. You don't think in the way of, "Oh, this is a Japanese and this is another."

And it's, to me, I feel, I think it's great that we can be together and share different kind of cultures and eat the different kinds of foods, and know what different cultures like, and they know what ours is like. You know, it is a great thing.

SH: Well, Mrs. Morgan, I want to thank you very much for sharing your story and your feelings with us today. It was a pleasure talking with you.

BM: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW