

## **Transcription: Frances Relyea**

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*Today is Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Ms. Frances Relyea. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program, and today we're at the Courtney Home in Temple, Texas. So ma'am, thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview today. It's an honor for us, and for our program.*

**Frances Relyea:** You're very welcome.

*Ma'am, the first question I always start off with in any of these interviews is please tell us a little bit about your background and your childhood and your life before you entered the service.*

**Frances Relyea:** Well I was born on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1921. And I've been in this place I guess over two years. The 15<sup>th</sup> of December will be, I think it's gonna be three years the 15<sup>th</sup> of December. My memory is not all that good, so if I made a mistake I just make one.

*Now where were you born?*

**Frances Relyea:** I was born out in the country. My dad delivered me.

*Really, here in Texas?*

**Frances Relyea:** Yes, the doctor didn't get there in time. My dad delivered me.

*Wow. Did you grow up on a farm?*

**Frances Relyea:** Well, for the most part I guess. No, I didn't grow up on a farm altogether. One odd thing though, my two boys, I have two boys and a lovely daughter, and my two boys and I both all started to school at the same school which was Bel Meade near Waco, and we all three graduated from Waco High.

*OK.*

**Frances Relyea:** And I graduated in 1940.

*So before the war had started then. So what were you doing when World War II began? Do you remember where you were working?*

**Frances Relyea:** I was laying on a bed at my mother's place and I heard the news on the radio and I got up and I shook my mother who's hard of hearing, got her attention, and I said they just bombed Pearl Harbor. And she said what? And I told her and she didn't know where Pearl Harbor was or anything about it, so it didn't mean a whole lot to her, but it did me because I was afraid I was going to have to go to the war.

*Really, even though you were a woman you thought you were going to have to go?*

**Frances Relyea:** Well, nurses went, and I'm not a nurse but I was afraid I might have to go.

*Sure.*

**Frances Relyea:** And I did go in the Navy. My sister talked me into it. I never would've done that because I was so shy, but I guess it's one of the best things that ever happened to me because they really took that shyness out, believe me. It didn't take long either.

*So when did you go in the Navy then?*

**Frances Relyea:** I went in to relieve a service man for oversea duty, and I swear I can't remember the date.

*Sure, did they send you to some sort of basic training? Did you have to get sent away somewhere?*

**Frances Relyea:** Yes, I took it at the Bronx.

*In the Bronx, New York. So I guess they put you on a train and sent you up there. Was that your first time away from home?*

**Frances Relyea:** Well the first time, it wasn't my first time away from home. The first time I went to Kelly Field -

*Down in San Antonio.*

**Frances Relyea:** Uh-huh, they called me to work and I had just lost my job in Waco, and they had blackballed me so I couldn't get another job in Waco.

*Why was that?*

**Frances Relyea:** Because I told the store lady I wasn't going to train anymore people. She was making me train people coming in and thereby I was losing my bonus. We had a bonus program and if we did so many over our allotment, we got a bonus, and I told her she was making me lose my bonus and I wasn't going to train anymore. So sure enough she brought me in another one and I said I'm not going to train her. Well she said you will have to walk. And I said well I'm walking, and I got up and left. But I couldn't get a job. But you know, God was taking care of me because I had got home and I had a notice that I was to go to San Antonio -

*For your training.*

**Frances Relyea:** Yeah, well I was going down there because they called me to come down there. So I went down there and I was supposed to be a sheetmetal worker because I had a shorthand, and I don't know what happened to the woman that was doing it at the office, but she left and they put me in there and I was doing sheetmetal and doing shorthand.

*Was that a good deal?*

**Frances Relyea:** It was a real good deal because I made more money as a shorthand, I mean a sheetmetal worker than I did at the other one. But anyway it all worked out.

*And so you were in the Navy doing clerical work.*

**Frances Relyea:** I was the bookkeeper for Ships Store Ashore.

*Where did they keep you the whole time? Were you stationed in San Antonio most of that time?*

**Frances Relyea:** No, I was at Whiting Field which is a Naval air station belonging to the main side was in Pensacola.

*I know exactly where that is. Where did they have you living? Did you live in barracks?*

**Frances Relyea:** Yes, I lived in barracks to begin with and then I got married and we had quarters.

*Oh, so you got married during the war.*

**Frances Relyea:** Yeah.

*How did you and your husband meet?*

**Frances Relyea:** Well he was in charge of the Wave's chow hall and my roommate was working in there and he was always saying, blah-blah-blah, fill up those sugar, just like a sergeant. And so I says, I can't remember her name but I called her ma'am, I said I wouldn't take that from anybody. I'd go for the old man and take a court marshal for it before I take that off of anybody. Oh she says, he's real sweet, he never reports us when we're late. Well so later on she had a date with him, and we were going to the library and the canteen roll in one building, and we were going to return some books, and she was sitting over there by herself, and she wanted us to sit down with her. Well we told her we would when we come back from the library if she was still there, and she was, and she was still alone, so Edna and I sat down with her and some sailors sat down with us. I do not know to this day why or how it happened, but before the night was over I was sitting with him and I've been sitting with him ever since.

*That's great. Where was he from?*

**Frances Relyea:** Out of New York. I married a dumb Yankee.

*Yeah, so he was then stationed at Whiteman or –*

**Frances Relyea:** Whiting Field.

*In Whiting just like yourself.*

**Frances Relyea:** He was in charge of the brig when we got out.

*OK, how long did ya'll date before you got married?*

**Frances Relyea:** Not very long. He thought he was going overseas. He had been called up for submarine duty. Well for submarine duty you have to be in perfect health, not one thing can be wrong with you, and he had high blood pressure so they wouldn't take him. It worked out real fine for us because I didn't want him to go. So we were together the whole time. I would get

sick every time we'd go down to that, I think it was Corpus, and that water would be coming up, I mean the waves, and that would make me sick.

*Oh really – so when you got married, where did you get married at a base chapel?*

**Frances Relyea:** Uh-huh, we sure did.

*And then you had married quarters then there at the base that you moved into.*

**Frances Relyea:** Well yes we did, but they didn't have marriage quarters and non-married quarters. Men all had to sleep in one place and we had the other.

*Even though you were married?*

**Frances Relyea:** Even though we were married. Well it didn't last very long, that rule didn't last long. Yeah, then we had base quarters. It was just a little small, like an apartment, and we had a bedroom and living room, and real small kitchen.

*Was he still your boss during that whole time? Was he still running the chow hall when you were working there?*

**Frances Relyea:** No, he didn't work at the chow hall very long. They made him, he was in charge of the brig.

*That's probably, too, so you wouldn't be working together, right, if you were married?*

**Frances Relyea:** I don't know, I don't have any idea, but it didn't make any difference anyway.

*How long did you end up spending there in Pensacola?*

**Frances Relyea:** I wasn't in Pensacola maybe a month before they sent me out to the Naval air station.

*I mean how long were you at the Naval air station. Did you spend several years there?*

**Frances Relyea:** I know two years. Other than that I'm not sure.

*Did they move ya'll somewhere else eventually after a few years or did you get out of the Navy?*

**Frances Relyea:** Well, we got out. I didn't want to get out, but my husband did want that. He said he was tired of being told what to do. I said well it don't make any difference what kind of job you have, you're gonna be told what to do.

*You're gonna have a boss somewhere, right?*

**Frances Relyea:** But anyway we got out, and that worked out OK because we moved to Texas and had to ship our furniture on a train, and one of my bed posts got broken and a man right down the street from where we lived – we was living in a duplex that my dad owned – a man down the street would fix that bed and didn't charge anything because we were veterans. So you know, God's had his hand on us the whole time. Moved us to Albuquerque out there. I adopted

a little girl, a baby before she was born. I knew I was gonna get her, I didn't know it was gonna be a girl. But anyway, I got a daughter out there, and let me tell you she is one smart cookie. She didn't get it from us, but today she's in charge of all Medicare business in the state of Texas.

*Really, wow.*

**Frances Relyea:** She has to go to Houston twice a week I think it is, maybe it's once a week, I don't know, I can't keep up with her.

*Sounds like she's doing very well then.*

**Frances Relyea:** Doing very well.

*Your husband, you said he was from New York, but he wanted to move to Texas with you, or you're the one said let's move to Texas?*

**Frances Relyea:** I think he was really ready to make a change. He wanted to get into Cornell University but he couldn't get in because it was already full.

*Yeah, that's a really good school, too.*

**Frances Relyea:** That's what he had his heart set on but he didn't get to go. He went to Baylor though.

*Oh that's great, that's a good school, too.*

**Frances Relyea:** He only went, I don't know, it wasn't very long, I can't remember now. My memory's not that good anymore.

*It's pretty good so far.*

**Frances Relyea:** But anyway, everything worked out I think. It's still working out for me.

*That's great, and you've got two boys as well?*

**Frances Relyea:** Mm-hmm, all grown.

*That's good.*

**Frances Relyea:** My younger son, he's the one I have to depend on because he lives at Brusoletti, down not very far. It's out in the country. He has a double-wide mobile home out there.

*Yeah, that's great. Excellent. How do you like the Courtney Home?*

**Frances Relyea:** Well let me put it this way. I wouldn't go to another one.

*Well that's good then.*

**Frances Relyea:** When we first came in to here, walked in, Charles was with me. Charles, this is it. He said well mother, how do you know? I says it don't have an odor. Because nursing homes do have an odor.

*That's true, a lot of them do, you're right.*

**Frances Relyea:** Anyway I've been here ever since.

*That's great. I've always heard good things from the folks I've talked to. They do a good job taking care of the veterans. I know there's a waiting list to get in here a lot of times.*

**Frances Relyea:** Well I've heard that, but I don't know anybody that's done it.

*The gentleman I just talked to before you, Mr. Gandy, said he had to wait about a year to get in here.*

**Frances Relyea:** Well, they told me I might have to wait six months, but it was a month, because somebody died and my name was on the list, so anyway I got in in a month. And I wasn't really ready to get in. I didn't have my clothes marked or anything, so we got busy right quick and did that.

*That's great, excellent. We're glad you're here and that you like it and that they're taking good care of you.*

**Frances Relyea:** Yeah, my husband said if they didn't call him a damn Yankee down here, he thought they was mad at him.

*That's funny. What would you say are your best memories of your time in the Navy?*

**Frances Relyea:** It was great. I really liked it, in fact I fought 'em tooth and nails because they were making me get out because our program was over, and I didn't want to get out but I had to anyway. But like I said, everything has worked out for my benefit. I don't have any \_\_\_\_.

*Just the fact you can be a resident here is from your service as a veteran. That's great.*

**Frances Relyea:** I knew about this place but I had forgotten about it and it came up one day. My son and I were talking and I said well do you now, Charles I'm eligible to go to that because I'm a veteran. He said well, mother, let's go see about it.

*That's excellent. That's good to hear. Did your children talk to you much about your time in the Navy or do you have any grandkids?*

**Frances Relyea:** Not a great deal. They just take it for granted that they're going to have a lot to tell their kids and grandkids.

*Do you have grandchildren?*

**Frances Relyea:** Oh, I couldn't tell you how many.

*That's a good thing.*

**Frances Relyea:** My oldest grandson married a lady from I think it was Puerto Rico, and she had three children from her first husband, and then but of course Charles wanted one of his own, and she said well I'll have one for you, but she says you're gonna take care of it, and she did. He's still taking care of him, and he's in school now. He's I believe a first grader. Got in trouble the first day he was in school because the teacher, to the best of my understanding, the teacher was reading some kind of a little story to 'em and he jumped up and said that's not right, the Bible says – something he'd been taught that the Bible said – so he got in trouble.

*That's funny.*

**Frances Relyea:** So his mother and dad explained to him that it didn't matter what the teacher said, that he had to go along with it. So he don't have any more trouble.

*That's good. So before you moved here you were living in Waco?*

**Frances Relyea:** I was living in the country with Charles between Brussoletti -

*So you are a born and raised Texan then.*

**Frances Relyea:** Central Texas. My dad was a sharecropper so we moved around, but always in central Texas.

*Do you have any siblings?*

**Frances Relyea:** I had one brother, no I had two brothers and one sister. One brother passed away when he was six months old.

*How about your other siblings? Did any of them enter the military?*

**Frances Relyea:** Yes, my brother was in Merchant Marines.

*During World War II?*

**Frances Relyea:** Yes.

*That's great.*

**Frances Relyea:** And my sister went out, we were both in the Navy.

*OK, so she was in the WAVES as well.*

**Frances Relyea:** She was stationed in Washington DC and she ran across our records one time and she said mother, they didn't miss a thing. Everything about us is in that record.

*That's great. Well I don't know if they told you, but with this program our goal is to save these stories for future generations, for posterity and we have at the Land Office an archive that goes back to the 1700s, and we have the original Land Grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at The Alamo.*

**Frances Relyea:** They told me about that and I was really surprised.

*Yeah, and we have the original Registro which is the leather bound register that Stephen F. Austin kept of all the settlers that first came to Texas, so our goal is to take these interviews and add them to that archive so that hundreds of years from now people can study those interviews. They can listen to them and get something from them, and with that in mind, is there anything that you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview years from now?*

**Frances Relyea:** The only thing I'd want to say is that I'm proud to have been there.

*We're thankful that you were. Everybody at the Land Office from Commissioner Patterson on down is thankful to you for your service to our nation and also your husband's service, and what we'll do in about a week or two we're going to send a package to you here and it's going to have a copy of this interview on CD's, so you can give them to your kids and grandkids or whomever you want, and then we'll also have a binder, commemorative binder in there with a letter and certificate signed by Commissioner Patterson personally as a small thank you.*

**Frances Relyea:** That's great.

*Well it's a very small thing.*

**Frances Relyea:** I'll be so proud to get it.

*We'll be glad to send it to you. It's just a small token of thanks, so if you know anybody here in the home that you are friends with, tell them about this because our goal is to interview every veteran in Texas that we can. Obviously we won't be able to do that, but our goal is to interview any veteran that wants to be interviewed so we can save those stories.*

**Frances Relyea:** Thank you.

*Oh, thank you. I'm glad that the folks here at the home told you about the program and had you come down and do the interview today.*

**Frances Relyea:** Well I was surprised the interview is so quick. I just was under the impression it was going to be next week.

*Well I don't know –*

**Frances Relyea:** It's fine, it's just fine and I'm proud to get this.

*We're definitely proud that we had a chance to interview you today, too. So I'll go ahead and turn off the recorder.*

*[End of recording]*