



**Margaret “Bonnie” Briggs  
Interviewed by Beverly Bishop  
November 18, 2004**

**Beverly Bishop:** I'm working with the Town of White River in Hartford to do an Oral History Project and today I'm talking with Margaret better known as Bonnie Briggs of White River Junction, and it's November 18th, 2004 and Bonnie is it okay if I, if I call you Bonnie?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yes most people do.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah. I'd like to just start with just some of your thoughts about yourself and where you came from, you know roots?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Where I grew up?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, where you grew up and what about your parents and grandparents and?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well I'm, I think I'm a sixth generation member of a family in, that started in Thetford, Vermont by the name of Wilcox but I grew up in Lyme, New Hampshire. I went to Thetford Academy and that's where I met my husband we were in the same class in high school

and after high school I attended the University of New Hampshire. I also was a student nurse at the Peter Brent Brigham Hospital in Boston graduating as an RN in 1934. My husband had to go off to World War II and he was a Marine.

**Beverly Bishop:** His name?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Frederick, Frederick Briggs and he was in the Pacific area during the war most of the time on the battleship USS Indiana. Fortunately he came home unharmed and his wish was to always have his own business, he always wanted to be self-employed he loved clothes and he loved sports so he really wanted to have a clothing store plus sporting goods but because we didn't have any money but we were having babies which took a lot of our extra money, most of our money he had to start out the hard way so he started out by running a gas station, a Esso gas station in downtown White River because he was born in White River Junction but moved to Thetford when he went to school, high school, that's how he happened to go to Thetford Academy but he was born in White River Junction right on One Maple Street in the apartment house that still stands in 1922, so he wanted, he always loved to, loved White River and he was happy to come back here and at that time I was working at the VA Hospital as an RN and so it was just seemed right that we settled here and he, starting with the gas station and he had a partner whose name was Elwin Philips who was a life long friend, they grew up in the same apartment house at 1 Maple, they both had to go to war Elwin was in the Air Force and they both got discharged about the same time and they were both wondering about their future so they became partners and known as Briggs and Philips Esso Gas Station.

They ran that gas station I don't know how many years maybe ten and in between because it really wasn't quite enough to support two families we did run a little rope ski tow in Norwich, Vermont called Ski Alto during the winter. It didn't make any money because it never snowed at the right time and when it did snow everybody wanted to go off to Sunapee or Stowe. We had fun doing it but not, didn't make any money and the man who owned it didn't charge us any rent because he was the father of Betsy Snite and he told Freddie my husband that if you will come here every afternoon and run the rope tow so Betsy and Sonnie, that's her sister, can ski I won't

charge you any rent on this hill which was a blessing cause we couldn't afford it to pay the rent anyway and we ran that for four winters had a lot of fun but didn't make any money.

**Beverly Bishop:** Where did you say that was?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Norwich Cemetery Hill, Ski Alto.

Am I going too fast?

**Beverly Bishop:** No.

**Bonnie Briggs:** I didn't think I knew anything but I guess I do.

**Beverly Bishop:** I think you sure do.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Then in the summertime's to supplement our little gas station we ran a restaurant in Fairlee, Vermont called the Neo.

**Beverly Bishop:** How do you –

**Bonnie Briggs:** Because when we were growing up that's what it was, it was called the Neapolitan because they made Neapolitan ice cream out in the back so it seemed right for us to call it Neo. We ran that for four summers, hard work but fun cause we were on Lake Morey and it was a different kind of life but we both enjoyed it, so then.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did you live there too?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yep, I worked there too.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did you live there?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah for the summer, just for the summer we rented a place for a couple of months because summer up there you know starts Fourth of July and it ends Labor Day.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So then the boys had a chance to sell the gas station when, oh 1953 they had a chance to sell the gas station and took the little money that they got out of that and started an Army Navy store because at that time Wilder Dam was being built and it was a good opportunity to sell rugged work wear to the construction people plus all the Navy people too because it was at that time there were still farms around here and lot of people need, needed work clothing and they sold a lot of Army surplus things.

Well then a discount store came along called Rockdale in Lebanon, New Hampshire, it was the first discounter in this area and the boys quickly saw that it was gonna knock us right out of business so they started to sell name brand things like Woolrich, Johnson Woolen, Curlee clothes, Bates shoes, Arrow shirts, getting into name brand things and that was the beginning of a good future. His partner left in 1962, his partner left because he really wanted to get out and sell real estate so at that time I went into the store to work with him.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Gave up my nursing.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Because he needed me.

**Beverly Bishop:** How did you feel about giving up nursing?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well I liked it because it was so good for my family I had four children and if I was in the store and they got home from school and they needed me I could come home I was only a mile away. When I was nursing three to eleven there's no way I could come home if there was a problem so it really fit in with my family much better and I found out that I really enjoyed retailing I really did and but I, I thought I would go in to help him temporarily but I never left. I stayed there forty years.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And in 1972 the Gates Block which housed our store, the block became for sale so we bought it and at that time it was a rooming house for older men on the second and third floor.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Very bad condition, very bad, needed a new roof, it needed a new heating plant, it needed new windows, I don't know why we had the courage to do it but, but my husband was very optimistic and he was always saying we can do it, we can do it and so and he enjoyed it, he spent many evenings and weekends painting, fixing it up as best we could as we went along and, and soon we were able to turn those second and third floor into office space and that's what it is today.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So.

**Beverly Bishop:** So tell me a little bit more about the Snite family and the ski tow you were just?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh, well his name was Albert Snite and he owned property he lived in Norwich and he owned this hill that was already a ski tow called Al Peades's Ski Tow which I think Al put up during or before World War II, anyway he, he gave it up and that's when Freddie my husband decided he'd like to try it and Betsy was Betsy Snite was how old, maybe ten and her sister Sonnie was probably eight, I think they were just two girls might have been three, but their dad was very determined that they were gonna become good skiers and he could see that they had the ability and the love for it and because he was, he could afford to provide this hill rent free because you know his finances allowed him to do that was the only way we could run it.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And she came everyday after school.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Everyday no matter what she was up there and that little rope tow was running unless we had a breakdown, you know rope tows. Did you ever ski a rope tow?

**Beverly Bishop:** We actually did have one on our farm for a short time.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So you know.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Things can break down. I think it was the motor that came out of a Ford truck and of course we had no grooming, you'd have to get out there and shovel snow into the tracks.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** We also had night skiing there.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh wow.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And that worked quite well because doctors and nurses from Dartmouth Hitchcock which is just across the river near Hitchcock Hospital would come for night skiing and there were lights on the hill and they'd ski from seven to nine I think for seventy-five cents and I would serve the hot chocolate and Coke and hot dogs in a little log cabin hut, it was fun.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** I don't ever remember seeing Betsy and Sonnie skiing up there at night because they're probably home doing their homework.

**Beverly Bishop:** And you have two sons and daughter?

**Bonnie Briggs:** We had two daughters, one isn't living but our Betsy was partially named for Betsy Snite.

**Beverly Bishop:** Because?

**Bonnie Briggs:** I liked the name anyway and then when I suggested it to my husband he said yeah, that would be good.

**Beverly Bishop:** Because?

**Bonnie Briggs:** I knew that's what he was thinking.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh, yeah, that's a good name, she'll be a good skier and my Betsy had a chance to meet her just before she became ill. They were having a special celebration at Suicide Six at Woodstock and our Betsy is a very good skier too

**Beverly Bishop:** Of course.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And they were having a celebration at Suicide and she lives in Woodstock I was in Florida so I wasn't there but her dad wanted very much to go and he wanted to make sure she was there so he could introduce her so at that time that was the only time she ever met Betsy Snite and right after that I don't know she might have been sick at the time because right after that we heard that she had cancer and the next thing we knew she was gone.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, it's sad.

**Bonnie Briggs:** You knew her quite well.

**Beverly Bishop:** I didn't know her, I had seen, seen her with bill before but no I didn't know her Bill Reilly is a member of our church and so I do know him from our coffees on Sunday mornings.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh, well you tell him.

**Beverly Bishop:** I will.

**Bonnie Briggs:** You tell him that his wife has a namesake in Woodstock, Vermont.

**Beverly Bishop:** Okay.

**Bonnie Briggs:** She's fifty-one years old.

**Beverly Bishop:** Okay.

**Bonnie Briggs:** She was born in 1953.

**Beverly Bishop:** Can you talk about your family a little bit, sons and?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Our children?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yes.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well you know David.

**Beverly Bishop:** A little.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Who runs the Hotel Coolidge? He's a civil engineer.

**Beverly Bishop:** Right.

**Bonnie Briggs:** By profession but he came home from the mid-west to, he wanted to buy a country inn and he bought it, it's been very difficult but he's making it work and things are looking better all the time. Peggy is his second wife and she's extremely helpful to him she seems to really enjoy hotel work and she does all the sort of things that a woman does in a house you know every house needs a woman.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well every hotel needs a woman. She's very good running the front desk, checks the chamber maid meticulously, everything is nice and clean and that frees him up to do the banquets and the functions and selling the rooms so they work well together, that's David and David has three sons grown and gone. I don't know how much you want to know about them but they had their turn at cleaning bathrooms and making beds in the hotel as they grew up but they've gone off to do other things now.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And Dianne our second, our number two daughter, lovely girl but she died at age eighteen, she had a very rare liver disease. She was a student at Green Mountain Junior College in Poultney one day she was skiing Pico, she was a good skier too, the next day she was

in the hospital with jaundice and we thought it was mono because college kids you know get that, well it wasn't mono, it was a very serious illness that she only lived one month.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So she went from a very healthy robust eighteen year old, we lost her.

**Beverly Bishop:** That had to be the most --

**Bonnie Briggs:** Broke our hearts. Betsy, there's our Betsy.

**Beverly Bishop:** Cute.

**Bonnie Briggs:** She graduated from Johnson State College and for fifteen years. She taught kindergarten and first grade in Woodstock. She is now working in the Woodstock Inn and Gift Shop. She got laid off because the enrollment in the school system is decreasing and they didn't need two first grade teachers. She's happy.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Got a new, a new vocation and it's easy. I mean no homework she's happy about it.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And Jack our youngest lives in the Twin Cities in Minnesota and he's very successful businessman, married to a lovely girl. So that's our four children.

**Beverly Bishop:** Thank you. Can you tell me a little bit more about Freddie's --

**Bonnie Briggs:** Freddie.

**Beverly Bishop:** -- family?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah.

**Beverly Bishop:** Where he came from because he --

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well his parents met at the Balsams In Dixville Notch. Ever heard of it?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yes.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Of course, wonderful food.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yes.

**Bonnie Briggs:** She was fifteen years old and she was the pantry girl that means she cut the pies and got the desserts ready and he, he had drove a team of horses that delivered supplies to



the Balsams cause they had seven farms this is back in 1915, he either worked on the farms or he delivered supplies to the Balsams and that's how they met and married and they had a little girl who died at age two, the way they could explain it to me it sounded to me like it might have been meningitis or encephalitis she had an extremely high fever and convulsions and back in those days they didn't have a diagnosis but they were just besides themselves with sadness just couldn't get over it so they decided to come to White River Junction and make a new start.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** From Colebrook because she had a sister living here, Freddie's mother had a sister who was living here and I think that's why they chose White River Junction so when they got down here they had three more boys but and they never did get their little girl which I think was a disappointment and Freddie was the second son born in 1922 and when he first came he drove a team of horses and he delivered coal to homes and you know how people, how everybody burned coal must have been a rough job and then I think he always wanted to be self-employed himself because he bought a bus and he started taking people around the Upper Valley with his bus and he also did charter trips like I told you he would take Dartmouth students coming in off the train no, no, from the college to Woodstock to ski at Gilbert's Ski Tow which is the first rope tow, you know that, first rope tow, he would carry them out there and Freddie would sit on the front seat of the bus with his dad age five years old and that was when he was determined that he was going to be a skier too cause all these big Dartmouth students were skiing and that's how he developed a love for it, he was gonna do what they did when he got bigger.

**Beverly Bishop:** What was his name?

**Bonnie Briggs:** My husband?

**Beverly Bishop:** The one who bought the bus?

**Bonnie Briggs:** The father, Caccius.

**Beverly Bishop:** Caccius?

**Beverly Bishop:** C-a-c-c-i-u-s and everybody called him Cash or Caccie and he would also pick up when they had winter carnival he would pick up all those pretty young girls drive them up to

Hanover for a big weekend he did a lot of charter work and then, oh they bought the farm oh, oh then, then Freddie's mother had a nervous breakdown and the doctors said the best thing for her would be to put her in an old house and let her fix it up because she had a liking for interior decorating so Caccie bought her an old farmhouse in Thetford and she went to work on fixing it up and it was a gorgeous place when she got down with it.

**Beverly Bishop:** What an idea.

**Bonnie Briggs:** She went to all kinds of auctions see that chair there she bought that at an auction and you wouldn't believe how little she paid for it. She bought four of them it's just one of the many pieces she had a knack for it, she wasn't educated but she could in decorate she made a beautiful old farmhouse oh it was a showpiece and but all her life she did have some mental illness. Unfortunately her last years were not happy years but she had a great talent and I think Freddie had a lot of that in him too because he built a lot of stone walls around here, he decorated our store with old pine boards, made it very attractive did a lot of it himself and he didn't have to ask anybody if they thought that would look good he just sort of knew it would look good I couldn't do that but he, he had that flare I'm sure he got it from his mother.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah. Did he learn to ski?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Did I?

**Beverly Bishop:** Did he?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh my gosh yes he was one of the first skiers at Thetford Academy he, I remember telling one of the teachers that skied that he liked to ski so they created a little ski club and I think that they had maybe a half a dozen boys that would ski together on terrible equipment this is before World War II not much money you got hand me downs or second hands or anything you could get, gather up so he started skiing at a young age and when he came home from World War II he said now we're going to be a skiing family because of it helps to get you through the winter you have got to have another sport and he more or less said to me you better learn to ski or you're gonna be staying home alone. I got the message so I learned to ski.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** But I was never a skier he was and I was never the skier my children was, I stuck to the green and the blue, never the black stuff, average, but I enjoyed it.

**Beverly Bishop:** Where was your favorite place to ski as a family?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh, we just always had a season pass to Dartmouth Ski Way, which is up in Lyme, that was part of our Christmas present for the children that they could ski there all they wanted. If they wanted to go and ski anywhere else they had to earn their own money so if they ever had a chance to get a Pico or Okemo or maybe Stowe just once it was because they earned their own money so they had a chance to ski because of that season ticket.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And like I said they're all good skiers because he started them out I don't know maybe four years old.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Probably you could tell the same story.

**Beverly Bishop:** Now when you were working the store were the children old enough to help in the store?

**Bonnie Briggs:** They all worked there. They all had their turns.

**Beverly Bishop:** In forty years I guess they finally were old enough, weren't they?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yes, yes, they all worked there. I think they all liked it.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** But not well enough to take it over. They had their own ideas of what they wanted to do.

**Beverly Bishop:** When your husband and his partner started out working on, in the gas station can you kind of close your eyes and bring yourself on to the streets of White River like just outside the gas station for example what you'd see and smell and hear?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well it was pretty smoky, pretty dirty, it was still steam engines, lot of smoke there were fifty-four passenger trains.

He's begging.

**Beverly Bishop:** Are we over that laughing, what the heck.

So you are also a golfing family?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yes, ski in the winter and golf in the summer.

**Beverly Bishop:** It looks like you do it together?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well, we do, we do once a year, they take me to Maine for my birthday in August and we always have a golf outing while we're there. I just got this, some, one of them just gave me that picture.

**Beverly Bishop:** That's wonderful.

**Bonnie Briggs:** There's my Betsy all grown up, right next to me. She's very proud of the fact that there was a Betsy Snite.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, that's very cool. So anyway we were, we were just talking about the sights and smells and sounds and you were telling about how smoky it was because the steam engines were around?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Fifty-four passenger trains came through within a twenty-four hour period.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And there were people all over downtown getting off or getting on staying overnight, that's why our building the Gates Briggs building at that time was called the Gates Hotel, the Hotel Coolidge took the white collared people, my block called the Gates Hotel took the blue collared people. They even had a little suite in the corner that was for the colored people because they had to be unfortunately, terrible thing to say, segregated and like the porters and the workers and all kinds of eating establishments, some stayed open twenty-four hours a day, most famous one was the Mayfair run by some Greek brothers and no matter what time of night you could always plan on getting something to eat at the Mayfair. There was always a lot of night life, bar rooms, dance halls Dartmouth students loved to come to White River to have a good time, Teddy's Grill was their favorite spot and it's been mentioned in several novels that have been written about having night life fun in White River Junction. It's a lively, lively place, diners, lots of taxies, besides the gas station there would be about six taxies lined up waiting for a fare. There was Hanley's Taxi and Jacobs' Taxies. You should talk to the Jacobs family about their taxi business because Mr. Jacobs ran it for years.

This downtown had probably six or seven family physicians. You didn't go to Mary Hitchcock unless you had something very serious or complicated you had your own family doctor which you don't have now, lawyers, merchants, every store was busy with retailing because that was before the outlets, a bustling, bustling village and a fun place to live but dirty.

**Beverly Bishop:** Any sounds come to mind?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Sounds?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Train sounds, always a train going through always and the hustle and bustle of taxis and people and shoppers. There was a JJ Newbury's store that was build that came into our block in 1938 and that was the first what'd you call discount store and they bought stores store all up and down the Connecticut River, this Jewish family in Boston bought deserted blocks and put a JJ Newbury's in to just so they could have the JJ Newbury's name in all these villages. If you go up and down the river, you'll, you won't see it anymore but you would have twenty years ago, there was one in Springfield, I'm sure Bellows Falls, Brattleboro, Wells River, White River was one of them. People still miss JJ Newbury's store, they still say, oh, I wish we had that Newbury's store, it was so easy to get there and get exactly what you needed without having to go to the shopping center on 12A, that's so congested, so busy, hard to park, hard to get in and out. They still miss it.

**Beverly Bishop:** Was it competition for your store though?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No because we went, we went with name brand after we got out of the Army Navy era ours was clothing, fishing gear, skates and skis, we went name brands so we were not competition.

**Beverly Bishop:** How was a helpful to have stores notice same area where people could go get at variety of goods?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh yeah right yes at up with time there were four clothing stores in downtown White River one that was very well known was called Colodny's, the people still miss that one, Fonda Fucci that had a very nice lady's shop and then there was Briggs and Philips, there's

another one but I can't remember the name of it because, oh Nat's was here for awhile, bustling town.

**Beverly Bishop:** When you started out the store can you think of some of the major changes that took place over those forty years of doing business? What were some of the hugest changes that really made a difference?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well the biggest change is the loss of retailing. We were hurt terribly because of the Vermont sales tax which Governor Davis insisted we have, telling us it would be three percent and it would be temporary, we'd only have it for six months but to get us out of a financial situation well of course you know it went from three percent to five and now it's six. It's been sad that up, uptown White River where the big Post Office is that would have been a big shopping area if we didn't have the sales tax and this big name store that was interested in coming there was called Jordan Marsh which was a Boston store and when they found out that Vermont was getting sales tax they didn't want any part of White River and then 12A started up, you know about that.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh you mean --

**Bonnie Briggs:** It's in West Lebanon.

**Beverly Bishop:** West Leb.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Shopping area we call a Route 12A that started up and the retailers just started to go there and then the, they just, just grew and grew and it's still growing, still growing so that's the biggest change I think we, we've lost our trains, our town became cleaner, we became fairly well known because the Interstates crossed in this town 89 and 91 brought some transportation businesses like trucking, that sort of helped to replace the trains but it didn't do anything for downtown they were in the outlying areas so now we call ourselves a village of specialties, like arts, like we have the Briggs Opera House which we started in the early, late '70s the Tip Top Bakery rows is full of artists and specialty trades and our downtown are specialty shops like the Bakers Studio, the frame shop, the lamp shade hand painted guy, Felix who makes costumes and gowns. It's all specialized.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** My store has been divided into two stores now where I was on the corner.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** The first one is a vintage clothing store called Revolution.

**Beverly Bishop:** Do you still own?

**Bonnie Briggs:** I still own the block. I have twenty-four tenants.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah, the next door I'm showing it tomorrow to somebody who's very interested in it, it was an arts, an art gallery but they moved out a year ago, my, my block is doing very well.

**Beverly Bishop:** What about could you tell me some stories about running that store?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Running it?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah. Were you alone at first or did you have employees?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well at first it, we, the two of us were able to run it together except on weekends we would have part-time help and we always had extra help at Christmas time, hunting season was very big because we sold hunting and fishing licenses and lot of guys will tell you stories about standing in line down the sidewalk way down around the corner waiting to get in to buy their hunting license and they love to talk about that so many still talk about it cause we sold the licenses and we sold the ammunition, the guns, the Johnson and Woolrich hunting clothing. We had to hire a lot of extra help situations like that and then was Easter was big people had to get new clothes for Easter, every man at least got a new shirt and tie, sometimes a new felt hat so.

**Beverly Bishop:** Was it a store before, what was in there before you took it over, I forgot, in that space?

**Bonnie Briggs:** It was a clothing store called Nat's, Nat's had three or four stores in Vermont, one of them was Burlington, Saint Albans but they only stayed in White River for two years and they said the reason they couldn't make it here was because they didn't have a family member to run it, all of their other stores had a Nat's family and when they got here they had to hire a manager and they always said that was and they only stayed two years and that was when Freddie and Phil decided to jump in on that corner which was in '53.

**Beverly Bishop:** So you two handled it for a while, quite awhile then?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Together

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh yeah 'til he died, he worked there until he died in 1991.

**Beverly Bishop:** What, I know you said he had the more designer type mind and you had more of the business end or retailing, the selling part?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well I became the tailor.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh, did you?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh yes, we had a temperamental tailor and when I would go to take some things to be altered I didn't think she had a very good attitude so I took some tailoring lessons and I did the tailoring and that was wonderful because it saved a lot of money I didn't do a lot of the complicated part of it but I did eighty percent of it, I had it, a shop set up downstairs in the basement, we had lovely basements in that store I had my own department plus I did the windows, I liked to decorate the windows and I bought the ladies wear so we, we worked very well together for a husband and wife we enjoyed working together and.

**Beverly Bishop:** So did you have any employees?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh yes.

**Beverly Bishop:** A lot?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No but we always had two.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** We always had four people there.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh, at the same time?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And special seasons we would have more, like Christmas of course our children would fill in, they, they were good, made some good sales, brought some of their friends in, we also sold Boy Scouts and Girl Scout things and that brought a lot of young mothers and we still sell 'em, I, when I went out of business two years ago I told David that we really should hang onto the scouting business cause it was a nice service to give to people and nobody else does it, so I



moved the inventory over to his Coolidge Card Shop and I still run that for him, I mean I go in once a week I do the inventory and the ordering.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Not because I have to but because I like to.

(The end of side one of tape one. The beginning of side two of tape one.)

**Beverly Bishop:** Cause I'd like to hear a little bit more about before you even got here like in school what kind of a student were you?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Average.

**Beverly Bishop:** Just average, what was your favorite subjects?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Biology, anatomy, I guess that's why I became a nurse.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Zoology.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow, they teach at Thetford Academy.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Either that or I had a good teacher.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did you have a favorite teacher?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yes, I did and she taught science, general science.

**Beverly Bishop:** Who was that?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Her name was Edna Parks, she taught science and her husband taught agriculture.

**Beverly Bishop:** When you think about the town and the early days are there people that come to mind that you think influenced the way the town grew, I'm sure you and your husband were big influences but other than that can you think of any people that stand out in your mind or?

**Bonnie Briggs:** That showed leadership?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, that, that, that maybe influenced the way that the town did grow at important junctures. Nobody pops in?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Not, not at the moment.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep, no, that's fine. Sometimes, sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well we always had the board of selectmen, my husband was a selectman.

**Beverly Bishop:** Was he?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah, they had a great influence depending on who the board was but to single out certain people.

**Beverly Bishop:** What were your topics at home, you know, in your family life what were some of the things the family talked about a lot, did you have, were you into?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well, my husband and I always talked a lot about business downtown and what can we do to improve it, we used to like to come home and have a fire in the fireplace and have a drink and sit around and talk about how our day went, what we could do or what went wrong or what was fun or what our mistakes were. As a family I think we just talked about things that every family talks about, school activities, church of course skiing was a big item, neighborhood fun we really have very nice neighborhood here and all built our houses at the same time because we were all friends and our children are still friends even though they scattered, so I just think it was what most families talk about.

**Beverly Bishop:** Now you were in politics weren't you, no or so just the stint as a selectman?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh yeah he was selectman, yeah but he, he was always, always, always interested in the downtown area what can we do to make it better and he went to many, many, many meetings where I think he came home pretty discouraged like we talk but we don't get anywhere and what are we gonna do but he never gave up, he always said we can do it, it'll, it will happen and now it has happened and it happened because we got that theater going that really gave us a good reputation, people have had a tendency to look down on White River because we are a blue collar town and dirty and we don't have the culture that Hanover does, Lebanon was always known as a shopping town because they had a lot of mills and factories at one time too but people were known to say oh, you live in White River well we didn't feel that way we liked White River, we really did and so he did spend a lot of his years going to Chamber of Commerce meetings or Town, Town business meetings or anything he could get his hands on that might be helpful to give us rebirth and when he bought that block and got that old theater going that hadn't been going for years and years it was the beginning of an uplift. I went to the theater last night and it was three-fourths full and they come from Woodstock, Quechee, Hanover

all surrounding areas because it's very good theater professionally done. They are going to put on My Fair Lady in December, which is going to be a big extravaganza, and then Nat Bussey got the Tip Top building. He's been just wonderful, he's just brought everything alive.

**Beverly Bishop:** Is he an old-timer here or newcomer?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No, he's, he's an architect very well educated I don't know if it's Harvard, Yale, very well educated, I call him young who had a dream I'll take this old bread factory and I'll bring it back and he has done exactly that, the place is full, he doesn't have any empty spots in there, including a restaurant called the Lobrow, he wanted a new sidewalk put in as a beginning because it was so decrepit and the selectmen told him that they couldn't put it in their budget for five years so you know what he did, he paid for it himself and that made a good impression on the outside of the building to have that lovely wide pleasant and clean sidewalk that was, it's just one of the things that he started with, and so people have taken a new look at White River and it's thing likes that my husband was instrumental in getting the courthouse downtown when Madeline Kunin was Governor there was a man, a business man named Frank Gilman recently died at age ninety-four owned all of the uptown area and he wanted very, very, very much to have the courthouse up there and he almost got it but we have a little influence from people that went to Montpelier and they told Madeline Kunin that downtown was really hurting and it could be the starting of a rebirth and Madeline liked that idea and she went to bat for downtown and that's how we got the courthouse otherwise it would have been up there in a corn field so that was another good sign for downtown the courthouse cause more recently Byrum Hathorn has brought back the railroad station.

**Beverly Bishop:** Say the name again, Byrum?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Byrum Hathorn, he owns the railroad station, he has houses, that welcome center which is furnished by the State of Vermont and he also has a tenant upstairs called Vital Communities and Amtrak comes through twice a day.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** A lot of freight trains and then just recently with funding where I, I don't know really where it came from they were able to put a beautiful new covering over our old 494 train

that was given to us in the '50s and it was left uncovered all those years and it's beautiful with a copper roof, it's a show piece and then over on Railroad Row we had a disgusting old building called Twin State Fruit which was a very, very busy business for years and years and years, sold fruits and vegetables for miles around but it was, it went out of business of probably twenty-five years ago and was just wearing itself into the ground was torn down and it's a new office building there and it's called Railroad Row and they're going to have sixty employees in there.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow. What kind of businesses are these?

**Bonnie Briggs:** There's a firm, I don't know if it's an engineering firm or what kind of firm it is that's rented all one floor.

**Beverly Bishop:** Who owns that building or is it?

**Bonnie Briggs:** I know the name but I can't think of it.

**Beverly Bishop:** Is it local?

**Bonnie Briggs:** It's a developer he, he builds property.

**Beverly Bishop:** Well I've been surprised to find the hill, that motel is gone now?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Where? Oh Culture Forum, that used to be a nice one.

**Beverly Bishop:** I was so surprised, disappeared.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yep, the time had come.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, wow.

Tell me a little bit more about this neighborhood that's interesting?

**Bonnie Briggs:** This neighborhood?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, how did it develop?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well my husband started an archery club in the, archery club probably late '40s maybe, oh say maybe 1950 he and some of his pals organized an archery club and this whole area was farmland but it really wasn't being used as a farm anymore so they came up in here and went off into the woods and they set up bales of hay and they called themselves the Hurricane Archers it was just a fun thing to do and they probably had a dozen members and one day my husband said to me I found just the place where we should build our home he says it's up in that field where we have our archery club so he drove me up here to see it, I like it, I like it because

it's near the school and I didn't want my children to have to ride on a school bus like I did although they probably would've loved it but I didn't so we decided to sell our four bedroom house that was a 1910 vintage but it was a good home and see if we could sell it and build a home up here so when that happened one of the other friends that was in the archery club was about to get married and he had just bought a house lot in Norwich and Freddie said you don't want to live in Norwich come and live up in that field where we're going to build our home so he did, he gave up his Norwich idea and then another fellow that was in the archery club worked at the Post Office and he was living in his parents home down on South Main Street but he wanted to have his own home too so he had enough time built up in the post office he took a year off and built his own home which is way over there and then down at the other end of the street was some other friends of ours they were outgrowing their small house cause they already had four children they came along and here we are.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow.

**Bonnie Briggs:** All friends building homes.

**Beverly Bishop:** That's great so there was nothing but a field here?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah, yep, undeveloped field and we were the ones to start it. He had a vision he seemed to know what was the right thing to do.

**Beverly Bishop:** Sounds like quite a man.

**Bonnie Briggs:** An ordinary man.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** But just can't tell you how much he loved his hometown, he, he really didn't care if you made a lot of money he wanted to live comfortably but he wanted to see things, he wanted people to be proud of his hometown, he told me that when he was in the gas station which is across the street from our block that he would look over at that building and say I hope some day I can own that building now that was back in 1946 I hope I can own that building and he didn't have a cent to his name you know.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow.

**Bonnie Briggs:** No, he did it, we did it all without any family help because family couldn't help and I know they would have if they could have but they couldn't and I think David feels the same way as his father because he gave up a very nice position to come home and take over that Hotel Coolidge he and his dad worked very closely on things because David was an engineer and he could give a lot of helpful advice engineerwise, but they work well together, had a nice relationship.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah. How long has your husband been gone?

**Bonnie Briggs:** He died in '91 so it's thirteen years, yeah they have a little place where the gas station was is called The Fred Briggs Park.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, I was there when they had the opening on that.

**Bonnie Briggs:** You were?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep, you spoke didn't you?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, I remember that.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh for goodness sake.

**Beverly Bishop:** Well I worked on that project I was with the Community Development Program at that time.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh you were?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh interesting, yep, he would have been very pleased that they wanted to do that for him, it started with one, one of our friends whose Paul Bennett, oh gosh you got to know more about him too because he's the one who started the Hartford Garden Friends but cause that's not going back too long ago but anyway he's very important to helping White River look pretty. Freddie used to plant trees along the railroad tracks, he got a bunch of Boy Scouts one time to go into northern Vermont and bring back some of these little cedar trees and they planted them along the railroad tracks and he would mow the grass in the summertime just doing what little bit he could to make things look a little bit better and this man Paul Bennett about when Freddie died he wrote a letter to the editor which is a little letter but the name of the article was I

think we ought to name that little park The Fred Briggs Park because he mowed it for so many years and that's how it got started because of Paul and probably never would've happened if Paul hadn't written that letter.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And now Paul is gone but he has his garden, his garden is over by the Municipal Building and it's beautiful the Hartford Garden Friends which is very active in this town. I'm a member of it we have thirty-four members and they call that the Paul Bennett Memorial Garden and it has a lot of perennials in it but it also has annuals, it has a nice bench to sit on and it's beautiful stone with his plaque inscribed into it. It's well deserved.

**Beverly Bishop:** Is it right by the bridge?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yep, Paul Bennett Memorial and he's the one that started the gardens. I told you we have thirty-four members and we have about thirty gardens and it's all volunteer and we all have our own gardens. Mine is over by the courthouse.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh so you each tend a garden for the beautification of the whole town?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh.

**Bonnie Briggs:** We have meetings every month. I'm the secretary.

**Beverly Bishop:** You compete?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No, but we compare notes we say well my zinnias didn't do very well I'm not going to do that again and somebody else will say why don't you try this and so no we complement each other. It always pleased me when I was running the store and all these kids would come home for alumni day Hartford High School they would come into my store because I had been there so long I was about the only one that they knew and it would please me they would come into the store and invariably they would say gee White River is looking so much better, there's flowers here, who plants all those beautiful flowers and I always said well when I get out of the store I'm going to join that club because I couldn't do it when I was running the store so a woman's son died suddenly this summer probably fifty years old of a heart attack he lived in Maine and his mother gave a nice donation to the Hartford Garden Friends. She said

every time Jimmy came home he'd say I just love to see all these flowers in White River they are so beautiful and wasn't that a nice thing to do?

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh.

**Bonnie Briggs:** In memory of her son.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So we get a lot of compliments and I don't do my two gardens alone I have a partner cause I think she's better qualified than I am but we do it together.

**Beverly Bishop:** Great.

**Bonnie Briggs:** It's fun.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh, it's always fun when there's more than, you know when you have a partner doing it.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh yeah.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So I and a lot of nice flowers thanks to Paul Bennett.

**Beverly Bishop:** What was that for?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well he said once in awhile I just like to shake.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Let you know I'm here.

**Beverly Bishop:** Would you like a little break?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No. Do you want a cup of tea?

**Beverly Bishop:** No I'm all set really.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well how much more do you want to know?

**Beverly Bishop:** We can meander through this life for a long time but if you're tired.

**Bonnie Briggs:** No, of course I'm not tired, no.

**Beverly Bishop:** What, what role has religion played in your family life?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well we belong to the Methodist Church which is downtown White River near, near Arnold yeah what's the name of that street, I don't even know my street, we, we joined that church when we first, when David was born we thought he ought to get baptized and we ought to



have a church so we, we started going there and we've been going there ever since all our children went to Sunday school there and became members. They aren't now but they were at that time and we've seen a lot of good ministers, ups and downs.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Going through hard times right now our church and when you don't have a minister that's appealing or inspiring people don't go to church and if they don't go to church they don't pledge and we're ending up with a part-time minister but we saw the church through a lot of good years, we, we were very active in it when they built the parish house in the back of that church in the early '60s, parish house was built for mostly Sunday school reasons for other functions.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** We saw the steeple come down, a new one go up. We were twenty-five years without a steeple.

**Beverly Bishop:** Really?

**Bonnie Briggs:** And about twenty years ago a group organized and raised enough money to put the steeple back up. It's in bad shape, it needs a new roof. What's the name on that, slate roof and then falling out and some big work to be done?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah what about the, did you have much socialize life with the church people and more built around your business and stuff?

**Bonnie Briggs:** More around our business, yeah.

**Beverly Bishop:** What about things like the library for example?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh I was president for ten years.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh.

**Bonnie Briggs:** It was called The Loyal Club.

**Beverly Bishop:** The Loyal?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Now this is interesting. Yes, The Loyal Club was formed over a hundred, well no before the Civil War because one of their functions as The Loyal Club was to preserve a Civil War monument that was erected in the Hartford Cemetery. They were to keep it mowed and

clean and so forth, they were also their duty was to do upkeep of downtown and this man Mr. Barnes gave the library in memory of a friend named Gates because he was a railroad buff and with all his money he wanted to do something for White River because he made his money on the railroads. The Gates Library was built about 1900 and the family took care of it as long as they could but when they died off they announced that The Loyal Club would take care of the library, it was their duty and it was made up of a group of women like a ladies group and they would have socials and card parties, feed the Rotary Club, do whatever they could to earn money to keep the library open and they did for many, many years and of course then they ran out of people and so forth so the town had to help but it always remained a private library run by The Loyal Club.

**Beverly Bishop:** And you were president?

**Bonnie Briggs:** I was president for ten years.

**Beverly Bishop:** Wow.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yep and then because the building was getting so beat up we just knew we couldn't keep it open without big bucks and we decided that we would like to put our energy into a central library up here near Hartford High School so we decided to close our library and we gave it to the Good Neighbor Clinic which is a wonderful thing, they give free dental care and free medical care to low income people.

**Beverly Bishop:** What's the name of it again?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Good Neighbor Clinic, the reason we got it, the reason they could take it over was Jim Jeffords is chairman of health, health committee in the State of Vermont he can get money for health reasons, I don't know the real title, but he was able to get I think \$250,000.00 which is just what it took for a new foundation, a new heating, new windows, new floors, new everything we couldn't get that money as a library but because Jim Jeffords was on this particular committee and comes from Vermont he got the money and I work there too. I volunteer there.

**Beverly Bishop:** As a just, as a nurse or?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No I'm on the admissions desk just one night a week and it's pretty sad the people that come through there pretty sad they need so much help, so we're still working for a central library but it's not going to come right away because the other villages don't agree with us

they want to keep their own little library in their own little village, they don't want to give it up, so I probably won't see that happen in my lifetime but it will some day.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So The Loyal Club goes back a long, long way and in their day they did a lot of good things for downtown White River it was like a ladies aid or benevolent society but it was called The Loyal Club.

**Beverly Bishop:** Now is it, was it already in existence before that library?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yes.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh, okay.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yep, The Loyal Club came first.

**Beverly Bishop:** How long ago did that start do you know? I mean were you around here?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh no long before me.

**Beverly Bishop:** Way before you?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yep before the Civil War.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did you say that, I'm sorry I must have I missed that.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Before the Civil War.

**Beverly Bishop:** That's right.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Or about that time.

**Beverly Bishop:** I do remember you said that earlier.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah that was sort of their social life you know the ladies would gather and have tea and maybe.

**Beverly Bishop:** Make things?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Plant flowers around or do something for downtown and the family that gave the library had to ask The Loyal Club to take it over.

**Beverly Bishop:** Right because they were, are they still in existence now?

**Bonnie Briggs:** The Loyal Club?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** No we disbanded five years ago because we were giving our library away, well actually the way that deed goes I think we lease it to them for a dollar or something like that it could come back to a library but I, I don't think it will.

**Beverly Bishop:** It sounds like the club though was independent of the library for most of its?

**Bonnie Briggs:** The Loyal Club?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yes, The Loyal Club?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well over the years that was their main job was to keep that library going.

**Beverly Bishop:** Back?

**Bonnie Briggs:** I guess they did other things too like take care of the Civil War monument and maybe put flags around on our patriotic holidays and things like that but mostly all their energy went into taking care of the library the downstairs had a reception hall which we would rent out for wedding receptions or anniversary parties, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts would meet down there.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** But it was in very bad condition at the end you could just see it falling in.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** It's a pretty building, pretty row building if you drive by there you ought to go in and look around.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Because Karen, Karen Woodbury whose the manager up there is so friendly she'd love to show you around, in fact they named the children's room for our daughter who died.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So her picture's in there and they call it the Dianne Briggs Children's Room.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Which pleased us.

**Beverly Bishop:** That's very nice. How did you spell her name just?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Dianne, two "n"s D-i-a-n-n-e.

**Beverly Bishop:** What about the schools, do you have any comments on the schools in the area?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Our school Hartford, I think a fine school, I always have.

**Beverly Bishop:** Always been?

**Bonnie Briggs:** It was very adequate for all four of our children; I can't say anything against it.

**Beverly Bishop:** Where did they go to, did they have an elementary school and then a regional?

**Bonnie Briggs:** The high school is at the end of the street here.

**Beverly Bishop:** So that was pretty close?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yes, they could walk to it see I didn't want them to ride on a bus.

**Beverly Bishop:** What was wrong with the bus by the way?

**Bonnie Briggs:** I had to ride on the bus and I didn't like it.

**Beverly Bishop:** What was about it that you didn't like?

**Bonnie Briggs:** I wanted to walk to school.

**Beverly Bishop:** More freedom?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well I think I could be more independent, you have to wait for the bus and you have to wait until it's drop off other kids you can't go right home and maybe my children would've loved the bus but they never had that opportunity, when well they had basketball practice or choir they could walk home, they didn't have to go down there and wait for a bus to come in.

**Beverly Bishop:** Right, no.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Pretty nice.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** I think it's a great advantage to be able to walk to school.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, how about some of the events of your and my lifetime let's see you were born what year?

**Bonnie Briggs:** '22, 1922.

**Beverly Bishop:** And so you wouldn't remember much about the crash, but prohibition probably?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh I remember um-hmm when Calvin Coolidge became president I was going to a little one-room school and my mother came down to the school and let's see who was it that died before Coolidge?

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh boy.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Became president.

**Beverly Bishop:** I'm terrible at this.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well anyway she announced, was it McKinley?

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Isn't it awful I should know that.

**Beverly Bishop:** That makes sense but I'm not sure.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well she announced to the whole little school that Calvin Coolidge would be our new president and he was from Vermont and we thought that was really big news.

**Beverly Bishop:** What grade were you in?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Probably first grade. Yeah Calvin Coolidge was going to be president. I remember during the Depression reading about all the unemployment, all the people that were starving in the cities, how badly we felt and we weren't hurting at all because we lived on a small farm which we had vegetables and beef and pork and my father was the RFD mail carrier so he always had a pay check but my father instilled it into us how fortunate we were that we weren't going to bed hungry and you've heard the old story that every parent tells you better clean your plate cause there's kids going hungry tonight and we heard that all our growing up years and it was true because you'd, you'd read about it in the newspapers.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did you read the newspaper?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yes, we always took the Boston Globe.

**Beverly Bishop:** Children read it?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well I remember reading the headlines I might not understood everything but the Boston Globe was our paper.

**Beverly Bishop:** How about, so the Depression really didn't affect your family that much?

**Bonnie Briggs:** It really didn't.

**Beverly Bishop:** Because of your own resources that you had back then, and by the time and you graduated from high school?

**Bonnie Briggs:** 1940.

**Beverly Bishop:** 1940?

**Bonnie Briggs:** We didn't have many extras but we were well fed and well clothed or adequately clothed. I can remember wishing I had more than I had but it was adequate.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did people talk about sharing what they did have with others that didn't do you remember that?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh yes my parents were very good about helping people in the community that were hurting.

**Beverly Bishop:** Was there something set up to help people do you know or was it just good neighbors and?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well I remember there was money allocated in the town report for people who were in need of food there was so much pride involved that I think a lot of people hesitated to ask for it and they should have.

**Beverly Bishop:** Was that in Thetford or here?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Huh?

**Beverly Bishop:** Was this in Thetford or here?

**Bonnie Briggs:** In Lyme, Lyme is my town.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh, I don't know why I was thinking you were brought up in Lyme?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yes.

**Beverly Bishop:** I'm sorry.

**Bonnie Briggs:** But I went to Thetford Academy.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, that's what I guess was confusing.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well my parents were very kind people. I can remember my mother packing up clothing and taking it to a family that had twelve children and the father, oh my God, he drank too much and the mother was the sweetest, loveliest lady and her children were all clean and nice and smart and it was quite satisfying to go with my mother and take some clothes that we had outgrown but you see that today that hasn't changed, you still have that kind of problems.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** I don't think you see families with twelve children anymore.

**Beverly Bishop:** That's true.

**Bonnie Briggs:** You do see.

**Beverly Bishop:** Not too often.

**Bonnie Briggs:** You do see alcoholism, and I can remember my father pitching in if somebody's barn burned and they would all get together and have a barn raising and give just as much money as you possibly could to get them going again.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Kind, they were kind people.

**Beverly Bishop:** And so by the time the war came along you were already married right?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No I was in nursing school.

**Beverly Bishop:** You were in school?

**Bonnie Briggs:** In Boston, Peter Bent Brigham, is now called Brigham and Women's Hospital you've heard of it, it's famous, it's connected with Harvard Medical School and.

**Beverly Bishop:** How long was that, a couple of years or three, four?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Three.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did you go right from high school?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No I went to UNH one year, they'd like to have, they wanted you to have at least one year of college before you went to nursing school at least this particular one.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Brigham.

**Beverly Bishop:** How hard was nursing school for?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Hard, hard work it was during the war years everybody had gone off to war and you didn't have orderlies, you didn't have aides, you didn't have enough cleaning people. There were really times when they, that really patients didn't get the care they should have because they took so many people.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah, how -- When you were in school did you at the same time work in a hospital, I mean when did you, was it combined? I don't really know too much about nursing schools.



**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh, you don't?

**Beverly Bishop:** No, I don't know really how they work.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well.

**Beverly Bishop:** Do you --

**Bonnie Briggs:** When you go into a, get accepted into a nursing school you, you study for six months.

(The end of side two of tape one. The beginning of side one of tape two.)

**Beverly Bishop:** Number two, Beverly Bishop speaking with Bonnie Briggs in White River Junction on November 18th, 2004 and we were just talking about the days that Bonnie was in nursing schooling down at Brigham Brent Hospital, is it a hospital? It is a hospital, right. Yeah, and what, and what it entails, what it entailed to become an RN at that time?

**Bonnie Briggs:** The first six months you just studied you're called a probie, you're on probation at the end of six months which is just books you were given a cap and you are allowed to go on duty on the wards and take, do take care of the patients but you still had classes everyday but not all day and as time went on you had to spend so much time in each department, so much time on the medical floor, the surgical floor, pediatrics, obstetrics, the Brigham was doing a lot of research at that time on dialysis, that's where dialysis treatment was first started and muscular dystrophy they were doing a lot of research and Atkinson's disease. We also spent three months doing public health nursing, my, my assignment was in the north end of Boston working with the Italian families and at the end of three years, oh you spent time in the operating room, you spent time in the dietary department so at the end of three years you are qualified to become an RN if you can pass the State Boards which lasted for two days and you took those at the statehouse in Boston and of course everybody shuttered and thought we, you wouldn't pass but as far as I know we all did and then we became RNs and you would become registered every year, you would pay your dues to, to maintain that registration and, and because I went to a very fine school of nursing I had reciprocity in every state in the Union wherever I had wanted to go to work. There would be no exams required because it's, it's a very fine school and I first came to work at Mary Hitchcock Hospital and I worked there until my boyfriend came home on leave from the Marine Corps.

**Beverly Bishop:** Was he your boyfriend from high school?

**Bonnie Briggs:** He took me to the senior prom that's when it all began before the --

**Beverly Bishop:** Did you not care about him before that?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well I think I always had my eye on him but he dated other girls and I had other boyfriends but something I think it was there and he said the same thing he said he tried the all out then he chose the best.

**Beverly Bishop:** Okay.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So he asked me to go the senior prom and that's when it all began and then of course he had to go off to the Marine Corps so when he came home on leave we were married on Halloween Day because that's just how it happened and I went back with him to Seattle, Washington for six months while his battleship was being repaired, his battleship was rammed into by another battleship and it had to come into port, yeah, several, several marines were killed on that ramming because it happened in the middle of the night.

**Beverly Bishop:** Was he in the Marines?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah, he was in the Marines, yep.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh my.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So when it came home for repair they all got leave and he dashed home, said let's get married and then you can come back to Seattle with me.

**Beverly Bishop:** What did your parent all think of this?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh, they loved him. Oh, they were, loved him and they were proud because he was a Marine and they quickly put together the nicest little wedding you ever saw, I didn't have time to buy a wedding gown so I wore my cousin's which I loved, we were the same exact size and I was a bride's maid for her two years before so I didn't have to buy a wedding gown, my mother dashed off and got herself a pretty dress and we were married in my parents' home, they made a nice arbor way, it was fall and they decorated it with bittersweet.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh, pretty.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Pretty, in front of the fireplace. My sister was maid of honor and Freddie's little brother was eight years younger than he was because Freddie's older brother was in the Air

Force in England so of course he couldn't come and we went off to Seattle and then when his battleship was repaired he had to go back overseas again so I came home and I got a job at VA in White River and that's where I was working when he came home, he came home and said he wanted to be self-employed, he wanted his own business.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Was when the little gas station came into being and we worked our way up an inch at a time, sometimes it was an inch forward and an inch backwards but.

**Beverly Bishop:** Feel like you're going in the same spot?

**Bonnie Briggs:** They weren't all good years, no we had, we had hard moments but I just can't tell you how much of an optimist he was.

**Beverly Bishop:** What did -- How did you get through those rough times?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well I think the toughest time was when we lost our daughter and you know other people their marriages falling apart.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yes, I know.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And ours was closer we just clung to each other like you know how are we going to get by without her but it made us closer.

**Beverly Bishop:** How about the rest of your family?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh, it was hard, awfully hard, but kept going, you do what you have to do, you know we went right back in the store to work and the same with Freddie I watched him die inch by inch with melanoma and the day right after his funeral I was right back in the store.

**Beverly Bishop:** Were you?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yep, because that was where I belonged and that was where he would want me to be he would feel terrible if I was home crying all day so I went right back into the store and, and said I kept saying what he always used to say we can do it you know and then we had some hard financial years before our partner left it got to the point where it really wasn't enough there for two families and a little bit I will of feeling when things are down you know you kind of fall apart a little bit and that ended with unfortunately a little bad feeling. Yeah we did get patched up later on which was good, his partner just died last June, they, they were living in Florida but he came, they

brought his ashes home for a funeral and those two guys aren't buried very far apart, the same cemetery they always thought a lot of each other but those are hard times so when I went into the store with him he really needed me because you see he could, he didn't have to pay me to get us going again, he didn't have to give me a salary so we worked our way through it.

**Beverly Bishop:** Well during the war years that must have been a pretty scary time for you?

**Bonnie Briggs:** For everybody, everybody you never know if they're coming home again you never knew if you'd ever get another letter from them.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did you keep your letters?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yep.

**Beverly Bishop:** Have you done anything with them?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No, no.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did he keep the ones that you wrote to him? Do you have those too?

**Bonnie Briggs:** I don't know. I don't even know where mine are. I say I kept them, I don't know.

**Beverly Bishop:** It's quite a diary when you --

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah.

**Beverly Bishop:** -- put them together?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah. What year were you born?

**Beverly Bishop:** '42.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Right in the middle of the war probably your father was in the service.

**Beverly Bishop:** My father was a machinist at Bryants.

**Bonnie Briggs:** So he didn't have to go.

**Beverly Bishop:** No, they kept him there.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yeah.

**Beverly Bishop:** But do you remember where you were the day that war was declared?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh my gosh, yes, I had come home for the first time from Boston, I went into nursing school in September and the first weekend I came home was December 7th, 1941 and we were waiting on the Main Street of Hanover for me to get a ride back to Boston with another person who was going to Boston and my parents left me off there and the person that I was

gonna ride to Boston with said, "Have you heard the news?" I said no, Pearl Harbor has been bombed, where's Pearl Harbor, never heard of it, well what does that mean, does that mean that we're at war and just couldn't happen to us, you know World War I was the war to end all wars it's never gonna happen again and then we started thinking about all our boy friends who would have to go and what's, what's going to happen to this world are they going to bomb us up here and Boston went into a black out situation they didn't allow street lights because it being where it's located even though it was on the east coast they just didn't know what was gonna happen so all the cities on the coast were blacked out and, and before you know it this one was going off to war, and this one was going, and Freddie says, well I'm not going to get drafted because I don't want to be in the Army I'm going to be a Marine so he went off to Paris Island where all the Marines trained or at least on the east coast they, they all went to Paris Island.

**Beverly Bishop:** Well what did he train for?

**Bonnie Briggs:** To be a Marine.

**Beverly Bishop:** What did, what was his job in the Marines?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well he, everybody had their own gun that they were in charge of and then he worked in the clothing department. He issued --

**Beverly Bishop:** Of course he did.

**Bonnie Briggs:** He issued the uniforms, measured them up for the right size but they all had their battle stations, you know if.

**Beverly Bishop:** He was on active duty?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Yes, oh yeah he was on active duty.

**Beverly Bishop:** Do you remember any of the devastating floods and hurricanes?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Floods.

**Beverly Bishop:** That hit this area?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well 1927 there's a lot of pictures around they had them on display at the voting the other day down at the school because it really hit White River terribly.

**Beverly Bishop:** Where were you?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Well I was in Lyme.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did you see anything in Lyme?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No but we had a flood of '36 that or was that a hurricane?

**Beverly Bishop:** '38?

**Bonnie Briggs:** '38.

**Beverly Bishop:** I think the hurricane of '38?

**Bonnie Briggs:** That was the, that was the hurricane, yes. I can remember that was, I remember that vividly, the winds started to blow terribly, my mother sent me out to the clothes line to take the clothes off the line I don't know why she didn't go, I got all twisted up in the sheets.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh my, gosh.

**Bonnie Briggs:** I know it was blowing so hard and then I remember the telephone wouldn't work and of course living in a rural community you, you're desolate if you don't have that phone working and then of course the lights went out we had no electricity but we had plenty of those kerosene lamps, you know you can get by with those okay and one family was flooded out completely because we lived on the banks of the Connecticut River a family was flooded out and they came and moved in with us and I don't know probably stayed a week or two which us kids thought it was kind of fun, we had company.

**Beverly Bishop:** Sure.

**Bonnie Briggs:** And all so many trees down across the roads and just took, took so much time to get things back to normal and I think, I think that's one of the reasons that the CCC Camps got started, Franklin Roosevelt had to put these unemployed young boys in the cities to work and they came to our town and started a CCC Camp and did a lot of that clearing.

**Beverly Bishop:** Oh yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Built fireplaces in State Parks and benches and that was in '38 before the war and then of course the war came most that generation really had to grow up fast.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep by the seat of their pants.

**Bonnie Briggs:** By the seat of their pants and then go off to war and then some of course didn't come back and it's like the war we are in today some of them that do come back are injured.

**Beverly Bishop:** Yep.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Not just physically but mentally as well.

**Beverly Bishop:** Right, tell me I was just curious how the other women of the town saw you, you were a working women when it wasn't all that common for women to be working?

**Bonnie Briggs:** No it wasn't.

**Beverly Bishop:** Did you ever get any feeling?

**Bonnie Briggs:** Feedback?

**Beverly Bishop:** Yeah.

**Bonnie Briggs:** No I think a lot of people admired us because we worked well together you're lucky I could never work with my husband that wouldn't work at all I said well we have our little tiffs he gets mad and he walks out the back door but he always comes back so I think I thought it was okay, you were running the family business, it was okay.

**Beverly Bishop:** Well you know I could talk to you for a long time but I think I should really thank you very much for --

**Bonnie Briggs:** You know I, I didn't think I would have anything to tell you but I did, didn't I?

**Beverly Bishop:** You have a lot more in there.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Gosh, I'm surprising myself.

**Beverly Bishop:** I really try not to have people talk more than an hour and a half and we're going into the second hour now and I mean now we're into, we're already past two hours so I really I don't want to tire you all out and everything so I want to thank you so much for --

**Bonnie Briggs:** I've enjoyed it too.

**Beverly Bishop:** Well I'm glad because --

**Bonnie Briggs:** I've enjoyed it.

**Beverly Bishop:** You just have an incredible story to tell and you have so many more. I hope you have an opportunity to continue to tell your stories, you should tell them to your family.

**Bonnie Briggs:** Oh, I think they know it all.

**Beverly Bishop:** You think?

**Bonnie Briggs:** I think.

**Beverly Bishop:** Well thank you very much anyway I'm going to turn this off now.

(The tape ended.)