

ORAL MEMOIRS
OF
NORMA PITTS BEAVER
An interview conducted on
April 2, 2016

Interviewer: Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Norma Beaver are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on April 2, 2016.

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WONGSRICHANALAI: Let's start with some of the basics.

BEAVER: Like what?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, first off, your name?

BEAVER: Norma Beaver. Norma Pitts Beaver is my maiden name

WONGSRICHANALAI: What was your maiden name?

BEAVER: Pitts.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK, and you are from Indiana, you said?

BEAVER: Yes.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Whereabouts?

BEAVER: So was he. Um, well Indianapolis area. However, before he died, he wanted to become a Texan. [Laughs] But we didn't get our house sold and so, uh, he didn't make. Then I . . . After he died . . . He died down here, visiting our daughter. And then after he died, I went back to Indiana for a couple of years like they tell you to do before you make a big decision. But all my family had moved away. You know, once they got their education and everything, they don't stick around anymore like they did during my time, when I was growing up. Our families all kinda stayed in, uh, the same community. They don't do that anymore.

WONGSRICHANALAI: We'll get to that, so what was his name?

BEAVER: Roy, Roy Omer.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And, so, was he also from Indianapolis?

BEAVER: Yes, from that area.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you know when he was born?

BEAVER: Nineteen twenty-six.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And he served in navy?

BEAVER: No, in the army. However, when he was drafted out of his senior year at school and, uh, which he was vice president of. And then, uh . . . he went in Indianapolis when they took him to draft him. He um. . . They asked him "army or navy?" He said, "navy" but they put a big "A" on his paper. [Laughs] He had no choice.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And you say he flew planes?

BEAVER: No.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Oh, no, I'm sorry he sh . . .

BEAVER: No. He was afraid of planes. [Laughs] He never wanted to take diving or, you know, skydiving or anything like that. But, anyway, so, he was in the South Pacific, he was on Leyte Island.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK.

BEAVER: And since I never met his best friend in the army, I don't remember his name. Of course, like I say, this was many years ago. And I wasn't there. I never met him.

WONGSRICHANALAI: But his best friend died in the South Pacific?

BEAVER: Strafing, uh huh.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And so, he got out of the army after the war?

BEAVER: Yes, and then I met him after he got out of the army. And, uh, I was young. He was young but he was an orphan and he wanted his own home and so, he kinda rushed me. He kinda swept me off my feet. And we married quite young. So, we were married 56 years when he died.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How'd you meet?

BEAVER: It was a blind date. You wanna know that? He . . . It was a blind date, um, and it was between the Knightstown/Morristown ball game. He was Morristown. I was from Knightstown and so we went out with two other couples to get something to drink, you know, coffee, not liquor. And so we went out and he pulled out a harmonica and he played a song like "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" and he asked me if I knew what it was. And I said, "Sure," I told him. "Well, I don't mind if you do." I thought, "Oh, what a character." I didn't know whether there'd ever be another date. [Laughs] He was funny.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Very charming, as he thought.

BEAVER: Yes, yes.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And so you stayed in Indianapolis?

BEAVER: Yes, we stayed in that area all the time we were married. And, like I said, the kids when they got their education, they moved away. Well, after Roy died—we had four children; a boy and three girls. And after he died, they should . . . I thought I should live closer to one of them. My son was in Michigan. I didn't want to go there. My one daughter was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. But I chose here so I could drive the year around, cause I wasn't gonna drive in the snow and the ice up there. At my age then . . . I used to but I've kinda gone passed that.

Weather's bad there, you know, in the winter. So, let's see. I don't know what else . . . He was in the army for two years and, back then, you had to have so many points before you could get. Now, I don't know what all the points consisted of. I know part of it was they were given points for each month they were serving but I'm sure there were other reasons that you would get points. Anyway, he had to have so many points before he could get out. So, that took two years, to work all the points out. The, um . . . When he got in the South Pacific, the war in Germany ended and while he was in the South Pacific but, because he didn't have enough points to get out after that, they sent him back to Germany then for another year. He was a clerk in the army. He was in the . . . one of the officer's office and, uh . . . Other than being homesick, I think he really enjoyed Germany. I don't think he did the South Pacific but that was rough. The South Pacific was very rough.

WONGSRICHANALAI: But they sent him there after the war had ended in Europe?

BEAVER: No, well, I don't think it had ended when they sent him but it ended shortly after they sent him. But they just sent him to the South Pacific. That was where he was needed most. I guess they knew maybe the war was ending in Germany. I don't know. I wish . . . I wish I was this age and I would realize what was happening. I was young.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How young?

BEAVER: You know, so, I didn't absorb everything that they told me and everything that I heard. And we didn't have 24/7 news like we have to do . . . today. If we saw the news, we had to go to movie theater. We didn't have TV. God, I feel like I'm talking to a child, cause you don't know about those things.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, I am an historian.

BEAVER: But you're not old. There's a difference. However, my son was a history teacher. He loved history. Still does.

WONGSRICHANALAI: High school?

BEAVER: Yes, uh-huh . . . So, uh. And I'm reading historical novels all about the queens of England, and France, and Spain. But I'm not doing it for test. I'm just doing it for fun.

WONGSRICHANALAI: History is fun.

BEAVER: It is. It's fantastic.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, in the years that you were married, did you ever travel to Europe. Did he ever take you?

BEAVER: Yes, I went to Israel and I went to Egypt and to Germany. My grandson was in Germany so, I went with my son and his wife to Germany. And then I went with a friend to Israel and to Egypt. However, if I were to do it over again, I wouldn't go to Egypt. After I saw

the Pyramids, I was ready to leave.

WONGSRICHANALAI: But did you and Roy ever travel to Europe? Did he ever talk about . . .

BEAVER: Um, no. The only thing that we came close enough. We really didn't have a lot of money and we had four children so, you know, uh and we had three in college, in three different colleges in Indiana. Now, I mean to tell ya, that was rough. So, we didn't do a lot of traveling but on our 30th wedding anniversary, there was another couple that was married the same month. We were 30 years before that. So, we decided to go together and go to Hawaii. Well, when we first mentioned it to Roy, he said, "I've been to Hawaii. I don't want to go back." But by the time we got around to making the plans and we planned a year ahead, um, you'd have thought it was his idea by the time got adjusted to it. Because we told him Hawaii wasn't anything like when he was there. Oh, he was there just briefly when the planes stopped and . . . But, um, no, he didn't want to go back to Hawaii. He'd been there.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did he have a good time?

BEAVER: Oh wonderful, wonderful. And that was the year we had a blizzard in Indiana so, uh, I had. . . . I'm sorry. I don't mean to go off on all this stuff.

WONGSRICHANALAI: This is . . . This is what we're trying to capture, which is that the experiences of being involved with someone who was in the service. So, this is all fine.

BEAVER: And like I say, he was an orphan so he really was ready to come and have his own family and his own home. Um, but he was the kindest man you ever would want to be. And he was in an orphanage where they mistreated him and he was left handed so they'd tie his left hand and make him eat with his right. If he spilled anything, they hit him over the head. So, he ended up in the hospital and he was in the hospital for eight months, paralyzed on the left side. And uh, when they sent him back to the orphanage, of course, he said they treated him like gold then but after what he had been through. Of course, if he'd have had family, they'd have sued 'em already, you know, for what happened to him. But that him . . . So, he was twins. So, that made him a year behind his twin at school and that was embarrassing to him. "Because," he said, "I know people looked at me and thought I was dumb." Which he wasn't. He was . . . He was not dumb at all. But, um, and he came from a large family. His oldest brother got 'em, found them all and got together after they were grown. They did keep the twins together, Roy and his twin sister. And his twin sister's still living.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What's her name?

BEAVER: Mary, Mary Martin. So, she's not well. She's in a nursing home but she's still living. And, uh, but my husband was not injured in the war. He was lucky that way, especially when his friend was killed, when they were on the beach, on Leyte Island.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well tell us about . . . You said that the war affected him?

BEAVER: Oh yeah, well, he didn't like it, I mean he didn't even want to talk about it. And that's not unusual. A lot of the boys that came back did not discuss it much. I had an uncle that was there. He was in Normandy, you know, invasion and he, um, and he didn't talk about it either. If he did mention anything, it was something funny that had happened to him or his friends. But he never told you any of the fighting, any of that. He drove an ammunition truck in France. And, uh, 'course when one of the planes would come over, they'd have to hide so, they'd dig fox holes. And this one field they had shocks of grain and he said one man—after he dug his—he put a shock of grain over the fox hole, then when it was time for him to use, he couldn't find it again. [Laughs] And, he says, "I dug a hole and I can't find it." So, he'd tell us things like that. That was kinda funny.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What was his name?

BEAVER: My uncle? Millard. Millard Gabberd. And that was my uncle on my mother's side. Then I had an uncle that was killed in France, on Normandy. And that was on my dad's side. Yeah, we had a lot. I could tell you more about what we did because I was growing up.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How were old were you at this time?

BEAVER: Let's see, when Germany ended I think I was 13 or 14, I think. And then, um, we would raise "Victory Gardens," you know, and, um, my mother worked in a factory, which she never worked at in her life before. But she worked in an airline, airline . . . where they built tanks for the airplanes.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, she was a Rosie, one of the Rosies

BEAVER: Mhmm, mhmm.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you remember how your family reacted to all these, um, young men, who were in the service? Was there concern about them?

BEAVER: Oh my, yes. And, uh, at times, we had to darken our house. We had to pull the blinds, could not use porch lights. And I don't know why because we didn't have any planes here, over America. But, I guess, they were just practicing with us, in case it ever came to that. I don't know. I'm not sure.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Do you remember what your uncle was like before he went over? And do you . . . Were there any changes to how he behaved?

BEAVER: I can't recall much about changes. Um, like I say, he didn't talk about the army except occasionally funny story. But he didn't . . . None of my family talked a lot about it. I think my uncle that died in Normandy, that was one that hit the whole family pretty hard. He was a single man. He was not married when he went into service and, uh . . . So, he didn't leave a family.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What was his name?

BEAVER: His name was Carl, Carl Pitts.

WONGSRICHANALAI: You say that his death hit the family hard, do you remember specifically?

BEAVER: My grandmother especially, I remember. One time I walked over to her house. We lived in the same neighborhood and I walked over to her house. And she was just saying, you know, "I miss him so much" and "I'm so lonely." 'Course, she was a widow then, by then, and just said, "I miss him so." And, 'course, I was young. I hadn't had the adult feeling that a lot of people had at that time. I know now how she felt, more than I knew then.

WONGSRICHANALAI: True. You mentioned earlier, before we started recording, about how Roy, your husband, didn't want to have firearms

BEAVER: No, no. He had . . . He didn't even want to look at them. He didn't have any interest in them at all. Which my family does. I have a grandson that was a sharpshooter. And he just retired from the military. And they had him exhibition shooting, he was so good. And, uh . . . And, of course, because he was so good, that family had all kinds of firearms. And he went out and shot with them, you know. I mean, not people, of course, but targets. However, they did send him overseas when we were in Afghanistan and Iraq. But they'd send only for maybe three weeks at a time. So, it was for a special . . . He never talked about that either. He couldn't talk about that. He said, maybe 'cause he didn't want to. I don't know, he says "I can't tell you what I did over there." But he's a sharpshooter. So, my family said he was a sniper and, I said, "I don't even want to hear that." I don't want to know I had a grandson that was a sniper. But, there's a lot of thing I don't want that they have, you know?

WONGSRICHANALAI: But your husband was different in that he didn't want firearms?

BEAVER: He had no interest. No, he didn't care to look at him. You know how men will look at something and shake it, you know, and raise it up and look at it, all about it. Roy wasn't like that. He never did. He didn't care for it. He didn't want to touch it. He just didn't want any, any firearms.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And what did he say about not wanting to?

BEAVER: He never wanted to kill another thing . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Because of the war?

BEAVER: Mhmm.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, your . . . What did he do after the war?

BEAVER: OK, when he came home, he worked at a dairy. He was the milk man. I said my three children belong to the milk man. [Laughs] Which is true but it sounds silly. So, he went to work

there and, of course, it didn't pay a great lot. So, he went to work in an automobile factory in Indiana. He built Fords. The rest of my family worked in automobiles too but they built GM vehicles. But we never disagreed. We always thought, whoever put the food on you table, you should be loyal to. So, we had Fords. They had Chevys but we didn't care. Once in a while, my husband would look out the window, when my family was all there, and he'd say, "Looks like a Chevy junkyard out there" in front of our house. Just teasing, you know.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And did any of your children join the armed forces?

BEAVER: My son was called but we had a number system. Do you know about the number system?

WONGSRICHANALAI: The lottery.

BEAVER: Lottery. And, uh, he was called but he didn't pass his physical. He had diabetes and it's really bad. But, no, he didn't go. Um, we only had the one son and three daughters but, of course, they didn't go into any service. Didn't want to.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And then your grandson or, at least, one of your grandchildren . . . ?

BEAVER: They got him. They took him when he was in high school. He was such a good shot here in Texas. He even beat the grown men here in Texas, one time, on a shooting outing they had. And . . . But while he was still in high school, they came and got him signed up. And he went to Ft. Benning, Georgia. And he's still there. He retired from shooting but he's over the shooters, as a civilian. I don't know how . . . Do you understand this? After he served some 30 years, 32 or 33 years as a shooter, then, after he retired, he is now over the same shooters that he used to shoot with.

WONGSRICHANALAI: I suppose he's a civilian adviser of some kind.

BEAVER: I don't know what you call it but he goes to work every day. And they have to mind him. I mean, he's in charge of them. And I don't know enough about all those kind of things to explain it good to you.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And what's his name?

BEAVER: His name's Kyle Ward and he's from Texas here.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, you said that your husband had this fascination with Texas. Where did that come from?

BEAVER: Yes, well that's because my daughter moved down here about 30 years ago due to her company that she was with. And, um, they loved it, she and her husband. And he was from—originally from Louisiana—but he likes Texas. Well, Roy would come down here and he, of course, across the road, they live at the edge of this town, they live in Robinson. So, across the road from them, they built a beautiful home. There, is longhorn, longhorn cattle, you know. Well

people would come down here and they'd drive miles to go see that and she had it right across the road and also the, uh, Oreo cows, you know, the velvet cows. They're right across the road from her. So, we had all that scenery. We have all that scenery, right here. If you know where it is, you know, you can go see it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And so, he fell in love with Texas because . . . ?

BEAVER: He did. He liked the bigness of it and, of course, my son-in-law teased him a lot. Got him. And my husband was funny and he got so . . . When he'd look at my son-in-law, he'd put his thumb in his pants like cowboys and all that. That's funny to me. I know it isn't to funny but it was funny watching him act like. And we went to see a house down here. We were gonna buy a house before he died. And, uh, they had little guns for pulls on doors and drawers in the kitchen. He wanted that house in the worst way and I think it was for those emblems that was on the . . . He wouldn't . . . He didn't want to touch a gun itself but he like those little emblems that was Texas to him.

WONGSRICHANALAI: OK, that's curious.

BEAVER: Mhmm. [Laughs] Oh, I feel so silly telling you all this.

WONGSRICHANALAI: It's up to you. [Laughs] But this is fascinating. So . . . But, when your grandson joined the service, did your husband say anything? Was he OK with that?

BEAVER: He didn't say a word. He, um . . . Well, we raised our children that they were to do what they wanted to do, not what we wanted them to do. I didn't want my son to be a school teacher. I said, "Wait, you got such good brain. Why don't you go do something where you can make some money?" And then, in the end, they don't pay school teachers very much. And, uh . . . But anyway, he wanted to do what he wanted to do and he did and this is the way we brought them up. They were to do what they wanted to do. As much as they could.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And so that probably got imprinted on the grandchildren and so, when he joined the military?

BEAVER: We wouldn't have told him how to live any more than . . . Well, we just wouldn't have done it. We didn't do it. We still don't do it. And when my grandson became the sharpshooter, this is all I would tell anyone. I wouldn't tell them he was a sniper. It probably hurt me more than it did Roy. That was my grandson . . . He shouldn't . . . I didn't want him killing anybody. Which, as far as I know, he didn't. He went overseas. I don't know what for. He never told us. And I think they sent him three or four times. And, um, when they sent him as a sniper, I mean, you know, then they sent a man with him that carried his equipment. I don't know what you call them. I really don't. And, uh, somebody always went with him, to handle his ammunition and stuff.

WONGSRICHANALAI: You knew when he was deployed. Were you worried about his safety?

BEAVER: Yes, yes. Very much, very much. But he came back safely.

WONGSRICHANALAI: I think that's about all the questions I have for you.

BEAVER: Yeah, I'm sorry I don't have more for you.

WONGSRICHANALAI: This is fascinating. Again we're interested in the experience of family members who have loved ones in the service.

BEAVER: It was hard. I was so glad. I didn't know my husband when he was in South Pacific. I think I would've been a nervous wreck all the time. I know I would've been. And I'm just glad I met him after he got out.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, thank you very much for your time.

BEAVER: Well, it's the best I can do.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Oh, it's wonderful. It was very good, so. And, um . . .

BEAVER: I mean, I was so young myself, you know, but if I were this age, I know a whole lot more. But, you know, I had to do my part. I was the oldest child during the war. And, uh, my family, like I said, my mother went to work, like I said, she had never worked out before. And she went to work, and I became the housekeeper. I did the laundry. I did the cooking when I got home. So, I grew up fast in a way. But it was because I had to. We all had to do our part. Were you here at that time? Did you live here during World War II?

WONGSRICHANALAI: No.

BEAVER: It's hard to explain that we had the rationing system, you know, and we would trade stamps, like my aunt was a shoe fanatic. Well, she would trade meat stamps to my mom because she lived alone. Her husband was in service but she was . . . didn't have any children at that time and so, she would trade meat stamps for shoe stamps. And we did that a lot, if we needed something. Like you . . . We had to have stamps for canned goods, you know, and sugar and gasoline. You had to have special reasons for getting that.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Rationing.

BEAVER: Uh huh. So, it wasn't easy, It wasn't hard like in Europe, like in Israel and, you know, it wasn't hard like that. But we had to tow the mark on a lot of things. But we didn't have any war on our land either. We were able to . . . And I don't know how we say that from Pearl Harbor . . . when they took us, supposedly by surprise. I don't know about politicians. I don't believe any of them. I think they lie to all of us. So, I don't know if they knew that was gonna happen. Some people think they did. And even if they didn't, how did we stop them from just walking all over us, I don't know. I don't know. And my uncle had one brother . . . was killed at Pearl Harbor. And, you know, that he was on the ship that went down with all the sailors on the ship. They brought those sailors up and put them in a mass grave. Now, they're running DNA tests on them and they have asked my uncle for his DNA so that if they could find his brother,

you know. But he thought about it and he went ahead and sent his DNA or they took his DNA but he said, "What would I do?" He wasn't married. "It's been so many years. What would I do? Would I put him in the grave with my folks or would I leave him with the friends and family that he died with?" He said, "I don't know." And then my uncle died last December and they've never found his brother. And they might.

WONGSRICHANALAI: They're still looking?

BEAVER: And, uh, because his kids kinda would like to know. But, um, he said that'd just be another decision that I would have to make.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, now his kids will make the decision?

BEAVER: Yeah, mmmm. And I don't know how they'll go. I don't know that they do until they hear something. And they may never hear anything, you know? We don't know.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you visit Pearl Harbor when you went to Hawaii?

BEAVER: Oh yes, oh yes.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And what did Roy think about it?

BEAVER: Didn't look anything like it did when he was there. [Laughs] He was amazed at that. And he did enjoy his . . . our trip to Hawaii, just like we would if we'd gone to Florida. You know, he enjoyed being there and the seeing the things that we got to see. We went to all four islands. So, we saw a lot and enjoyed it.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Very good. Well, thank you very much for your time.