

RHODA MCMANUS ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

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ABSTRACT

Biography

Rhoda Kooperstein McManus was born in Flushing, Queens, in 1936. She spent the war years living in Springfield Gardens with her parents and younger sister. Rhoda's father was a business teacher at Newtown High School in Elmhurst and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. Their half-acre lot provided a rural setting within New York City, complete with apple trees, gardens, a barn, and a homemade tennis court.

Although her father was required to visit the draft board, he was not drafted during World War II, likely due to his family status and occupation. However, Rhoda's two uncles did serve in the armed forces during the war. In 1943, construction began on Idlewild Airport—today's John F. Kennedy International Airport—not far from the family's home. The increased air traffic in part prompted the family to move further out onto Long Island after the war by relocating to Oakdale in Suffolk County in 1946.

Summary

In this interview, Rhoda describes life in her Queens neighborhood during World War II. These memories include the large garden her family kept, canning activities during the wartime food rationing, and seeing searchlights in the sky at night. She also relates singing songs in school during air raid drills, the celebrations at the end of the war, and her experience seeing male teachers returning to the classrooms.

Keywords

child, Queens, New York City, school, scrap drives, draft, radio, Victory Gardens, air raid drills, rationing

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25:18 – Seeing more men as teachers after the war

STORY TRANSCRIPTS

Story 1: Reporting to the Draft Board

[4:24 – 4:56]

He [my father] was at the upper end of the age range to be drafted. And he had to go into the draft board—I can't remember how often, but it seemed like frequently. And for some reason, we all went with him. Maybe it was important to show the board that he had three—well, two children at that time. We would go and we would be nervous. And because he was a teacher and because he had two children, he never was drafted.

Story 2: Uncles' Wartime Experiences

[6:00 – 6:32]

It's interesting because I do remember one uncle was drafted after he had furnished his home. And he had to sell everything he had. And we bought some of his furniture [*laughs*], more or less to do him a favor, I think.

Another uncle went into the [Army] Air Force. And I remember that he was sent to Yale University for some of his studies. And I was so proud to take the train and go up with my family to visit him.

Story 3: Air Raid Drills

[8:19 – 8:47]

I was in an elementary school about two blocks from my home. [I] came home from lunch every day. But I do remember when the air raid [drills] happened, and they did happen; I can't tell you how frequently. But I remember sitting in the halls and singing songs. And it happened enough that it's still in my memory today.

Story 4: Listening to the Radio
[9:50 – 10:26]

I know the radio was on the kitchen table. And it would be on and we would hear the news reports, particularly. He [my father] was also a big fan of some of the jazz musicians. And since he taught in the high school, he had students who were very interested.

One of my treasures as a child was a notebook that a student left at the end of the year. And I don't know what was in it; that was discarded, I guess. But the whole cover of the notebook was covered with names of big bands.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

Current 1

Rhoda McManus being interviewed at the Sayville Library (Photo Credit: Chris Kretz)

Current 2

Narrator Rhoda McManus with interviewer Chris Kretz (Courtesy of Chris Kretz)