

ROBERT SCHINSING ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

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ABSTRACT

Biography

Robert Schinsing was born near Rochester, New York, and had six siblings. Robert's father had served in the U.S. Navy during World War I and his brother enlisted in the Army during World War II. His mother was an air controller during the war and kept her eyes peeled for enemy planes on the East Coast. Robert joined the Air Force after high school and went on to fight in the Korean War.

Summary

In this oral history, Robert recalls wartime air raid drills and rationing. He discusses family life, school, and the impact of the war on his community. Robert further reflects on wartime celebrities, and visiting both Japan and Pearl Harbor years after World War II ended.

Keywords

Rochester, New York, air controller, air raid drills, rationing, radio, German prisoners of war, V-J Day, Japan, Pearl Harbor

INDEX

00:00 – Introductions
01:02 – Family background
02:25 – Remembering the air raids and mother being an air controller
03:07 – Rationing book for stamps; working at a Shell gas station and rationing gas
04:11 – Examining a ration book and service card

05:35 – Parents trying to make ends meet with seven kids

06:47 – Having ice and coal delivered to the house

07:47 – Had a garden in a friend’s yard up the road

08:20 – Mother’s cooking

09:00 – Walking a mile to school past the hobos to get to Roosevelt School

10:03 – Moving across town to Union Street near school

10:51 – Dad working as a carpenter after serving in Navy in World War I and Robert joining the Air Force himself after high school

11:44 – Scavenging for golf balls and ice skating on the canal

12:20 – Started to get to know his wife with a 3-cent postcard and got married while he was in the service

14:05 – Man used to use a horse and plow to clear sidewalks

14:30 – Canal had a lot of Army landing barges coming from Buffalo

15:39 – Using the gas station bathroom; other rationed items

16:20 – Transporting rations with the trucking company and hijacking a sugar ration

18:42 – Getting punished for skipping school and going to Boston

19:33 – Prices of foods at restaurants, everything was pennies and nickels

20:11 – Listening to the radio and having family live close by

21:00 – Friend “borrowed” his bike and he rode along with a cop on a motorcycle to find it

21:28 – War’s effect on his community; German POW camp near Newark

22:22 – Working at Perkins Rose Company and having their sandwiches stolen by German prisoners of war

24:20 – Using the radio and newspapers to find out what was going on in Europe

25:39 – Friend driving a mail truck with friends all night on V-J Day

26:59 – Writing and receiving letters from his brother, Maynard, in the Army and also sister, Mary Jane; eloping to California

27:48 – His wife flying for the first time to Buffalo and being upgraded to first-class for being newly-weds

28:13 – Looking at old family photos and family history

30:50 – Writing a book report for English and struggling through high school; only three out of seven siblings graduated

32:22 – Watching military planes that would fly in the area
33:39 – Delivering newspapers for *Rochester Times* and *Syracuse Newspaper*
35:05 – Working at a five and dime store for 35-cents an hour at age fourteen
37:21 – Says that everyone should serve in the military for a few years
38:28 – Buying property and having a house in Silicon Valley
39:39 – Without the Army, he would have never travelled outside of New York
40:22 – Stopping in Japan and Pearl Harbor years after the war
42:49 – Fighting in the Korean War and flying a B-29
43:33 – Seeing Robert F. Kennedy in California days before he was shot and in Cape Cod on vacation
46:40 – Thank yous and goodbyes

STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Story 1: Winning Over My Wife with a 3-Cent Postcard [12:20 – 13:10]

At that time, she lived across the street from us. [I] never walked to school with her. But when I went into the Air Force, I sent her that postcard, and that started the whole thing. She was in college up in Rochester for medical secretary school.

CSK: *The Rochester Business Institute?*

Yes, that's the one. And I used to borrow her bicycle to do my paper route all the time. I wasn't a stranger. Her father was a plumbing and heating contractor, but ah, very successful. She was the only kid in that family.

And I guess that 3-cent postcard started the whole thing. We got married in 1950, when I was in the service. I home every Christmas the four years I was in, in the Korean War. It was really fun.

Story 2: Plowing the Sidewalks [14:05 – 14:34]

Here's a good story: I remember a DeJohn family. [One member of the family] used to plow the sidewalks with a horse. And he would ride in the back of that plow guiding the horse down through the sidewalks, on the streets, and on where it was the least for him to plow. The plow would go sideways back and forth on the sidewalk and hit trees and all that kind of stuff. Yeah.

Story 3: Gas Station Bathroom
[15:39 - 15:58]

Gasoline was 19-cents a gallon at the gas station across the street. Also, that gas station had an extra bathroom for the customers. And us kids—because we only had one bathroom at our house—we would go over there and use their bathroom when we had to go [*laughing*].

Story 4: The Sugar Black Market
[16:11 – 18:31]

Oh god, a lot of foods, too, right [were rationed at the time]? I think. Sugar of course was.

Oh! This guy that owned a whole bunch of trucks where I worked at the gas station, I used to ride to New York City with him and go all over. We used to get stuff out of Kodak and take it down to the navy yards in New York.

And then, one time [was] the best, only real experience I had [with the black market]. The best experience—I went down there several times. [I went to] Washington and Philadelphia; we used to go. But New York, we went there [and] took a load of stuff from [the] Eastman Kodak [Company] down to the Navy Yard.

On the way back, we were supposed to pick up fifteen ton of sugar to bring back to Rochester. And the guy arranges to go pick up the load of sugar, but they made me get out of the truck when they went to pick it up. And they give me money to go into a restaurant and get some coffee. “We’ll be back in a couple hours to pick you up.” Here I am, fourteen years old; 1944.

After they picked up the sugar, they come back and pick me up. The guy pulled out a little pistol—the guy who arranged to get us—and he said, “If nothing happened, we’re not taking this sugar up to Rochester.” They took it over to Newark, New Jersey.

Once again, they backed up; they wouldn’t let me go with ‘em. They give me money to go to the restaurant [and] says, “We’ll be back to pick you up after we unload the sugar.” He hijacked that whole fifteen ton of sugar and unloaded it over in Newark, New Jersey, someplace. He did pay the driver for our trip back to Rochester; some money. But we never—that guy hijacked that whole fifteen ton of sugar, somehow. Got away with it, too.

CSK: *You knew these people?*

Well—. [*pauses*] We had different guys that get you loads; they arrange to get you loads. And that’s what he wanted, you know? He knew a place where he could pick up the sugar and he must have had that all in line before he’d ever done this. But he said, “Nothin’ ever happens. You come back down here and I’ll give each of you \$100.” I never went back for *months* after that [*laughs*].

CSK: *So, it was kind of a black market for the rationed products?*

That's exactly what it was. Yup.

Story 5: V-J Day
[25:39 – 26:32]

When the war ended [in] 1945, a friend of mine had a truck. He worked for this trucking outfit, hauling mail. He was driving mail 'cause he had a license. And when the war ended, V-J Day—that night—all of us guys were riding in the back of that truck. And I think we had somebody's cider barrel. One of the friends had a cider barrel or something, and we were drinking cider [at] fifteen years old.

We stayed out *all* night long running around town with that truck. Everybody was in the back of that truck, running up and down the streets when the war ended. It was all night long. I think I got home like 6:00 or 7:00 the next morning, we stayed out so long. My mother said, "Where ya been?" And we were just running around with that truck.

Story 6: Graduating High School

I almost didn't graduate in 1948 [after the war]. In my senior year, you're supposed to read a book—in my junior year, it was—and then, report to the class the next morning. And I always refused to report. I said, "I'm not ready, I'm not ready." The English teachers says, "Get out of class. Don't come back until you make up your mind; you've gotta talk." And now I talk too damn much, but anyway—. [*laughing*]

I stayed out of class [for] three weeks, 'til [Norman] Kelley—[who was] the principal at that time and they named a school after him here in Newark—he called me up, "What's the matter, Bob?" And said, "I don't want to talk." He says, "Bob, I'll tell you one thing: there's a lot of things in life you're gonna have to do that you don't like to do. English is one of 'em or you're not going to graduate." He says, "[I'll] tell you what to do: go back to class; outline what you've missed. Outlines," he said, "are easy."

And from then on, she [the teacher] hardly ever called on me. I passed the class and graduate. [*laughing*] I was the only one in my family—the first one, I should say—to graduate. Then, my brother and other sister underneath me graduated. Only three out of seven of us graduated.

Story 7: Seeing the World Outside of Newark

Well, I think [that] everybody should take a few years in the service, for the country. And for one thing, it gets you to travel around, away from Newark. A lot of people right now—I still know people that have never been hardly out of New York State. I never would have got to California, if it wasn't for being in [the] service.

And when I was in the service [during the Korean War], I think we paid forty-five bucks a month out there for the rent. But I ended up—after I left service in California to come back here to Newark, [I began] working. And after ten years of working here, I went back to California and stayed out there for twenty years. I made a fortune on my house. I sold my house here in Newark for \$17,000 in—oh golly, I got to think again now—1964. I sold my house here for \$17,000. I had to go out there and pay [\$26,000] for a house. I said, “I can't pay twenty-six!”

But I paid some guy's GI loan. It was \$216 a month, I paid, right in Los Altos, California: the big Silicon Valley, right next to Palo Alto and Mountain View. Big time. I kept that house for twenty years. And we had our mind made up to come back to Newark. I bought the same house back where I live right now from the people. But we sold that one out there for \$260,000. So it went ten times more than my \$26,000. Now, everything, of course, nowadays—everything is one million dollars in that house.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

Current 1

Robert Schinsing poses for a picture with his ration book (Photo Credit: Celeste Schantz Kovachi)

Current 2

Portrait of Robert being interviewed in Newark, New York (Photo Credit: Celeste Schantz Kovachi)

Artifact 1

Robert Schinsing's ration book from when he was thirteen years old (Courtesy of Robert Schinsing)