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**KAY ANN SMITH**

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LEVINE: Okay. Today is August 18<sup>th</sup>, the year 2000. I'm here at Ellis Island with Kay Ann Smith, who came from England in 1946 with her mother, who was a war bride. At that time, Kay Smith was three years of age and is fifty-seven at the time of this interview. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay. If you could start at the beginning with your birth date.

SMITH: Okay, Janet. I was born July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1943.

LEVINE: Okay. And where in England were you born?

SMITH: Royston—R-O-Y-S-T-O-N. Royston, England.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: Which is right next to Bassingbourn Base—

LEVINE: Okay.

SMITH: —where my father flew out with the B-17s. (chuckles)

LEVINE: Now, do you, personally, have any recollections of life in England before you came here?

SMITH: I—I have just some glimmer of recollections and sometimes I wonder if it was that I've been told this or if I really realized this, that it did happen. But I—I think it—I think I do have a few recollections. And that is I remember playing in my grandparents' garden in Chipping Norton. Chipping Norton is a village about fifty miles away from Royston. And it's where my grandparents lived and my mother lived until she married my father and, at which time, he moved her to Royston to be close to the base because they couldn't stay on the base in Bassingbourn at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: So once—I'm getting away from kind of the question you've asked me—but once my father was shot down, my mother and I went to Chipping Norton, where we remained for the rest of the war. So that's where I was raised is in Chipping Norton, because my father was shot down July 10<sup>th</sup> and I was—he was shot down four days after I was born. So we, in turn, went back to Chipping Norton, which is in the Oxfordshire region, and lived there throughout the war.

LEVINE: Now, just to—were your grandparents from England—

SMITH: Yes.

LEVINE: —going back further?

SMITH: Yes, my—yeah, my grandparents are English. My grandfather is from the Derbyshire area. And they were farmers. My grandmother was from the Newport area in Wales. And they met—I could go on to all that, how they met and everything. But anyway, they're both English. But my grandfather worked on the dockyards and building the dockyards, actually during World War I. Okay? So they moved up to Edinburgh, Scotland. And it's right out of Edinburgh where—it's near Limekiln, Scotland where the English built a big—building shipyards. Okay? They had to build the dockyards in that area. So my grandfather had already by this time married my grandmother in England and moved up into Scotland in the—right out of Edinburgh. And he was the engineer over the dockyard construction in Limekiln, Scotland, which is now a nuclear submarine base of England.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SMITH: And I've been there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: All right. So then they had three children, which of course were all born in Scotland but of English parents. My mother and her two brothers were born there in Limekiln, Scotland but of course, the two parents are of English heritage.

LEVINE: Okay.

SMITH: Very shortly after they were born—not too long after -- several years -- they then came back to England and my grandfather found other work. Or he w— actually came back to the farm. After the dockyards were completed, he moved back to England to the Derbyshire area. And eventually, they got to Chipping Norton in the Oxfordshire region, which I know all how they did this. But anyway—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMITH: So that my grandparents bought this house. It was a council house, actually, was a council house in England.

LEVINE: What does that mean?

SMITH: A council house is houses provided to the people in the village and they pay the town rent. You know, pay them rent for these houses. Well, my grandfather had an opportunity to buy his council house. And in turn, he bought it in something like 1929, 1930. And, you know, that's where my mother and I lived during the war because of my father being shot down.

LEVINE: Do you remember your grandmother or grandfather?

SMITH: (Coughs) My grandmother died six months before I was born. I do remember my grandfather. I'll—I was the only grandchild. I am the only grand—grandchild of the whole family. And my grandfather doted on me. Doted. He didn't—he didn't want me to come to the United States. He turned his back on my mother and I and w—it was just terrible. He would—he couldn't—couldn't stand it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Now, what was your mother's name?

SMITH: Eva.

LEVINE: Eva Bennett?

SMITH: Uh-hmm. Eva M. Bennett.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, and actually, what was her maiden name?

SMITH: Naylor. N-A-Y-L-O-R.

LEVINE: Okay.

SMITH: Yeah, my grandparents were Naylor. N-A-Y-L-O-R.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, do you—can—can you tell the story a little bit of—about how your mother and father met?

SMITH: Yeah, I can tell you how they met. It sounds a little far fetched but my—my—my father was from Montana. And he was underage and he went to Calgary to—excuse me—to Regina, Saskatchewan to join the RCAF. He joined the Canadian Air Force. The reason he joined the Canadian Air Force is my grandfather on my father's side had a charter flying service in Great Falls, Montana. And my father learned how to fly very, very early. He loved flying. (sniffs) So (coughs) when World War II broke out and Canada was, you know, recruiting and—and—pilots—my father was—was young. I think my father probably was, like, twenty—nineteen or twenty. And he went to Regina and that's where he actually got his pilot's license or his flying license. And he—so—excuse me, was—he joined the RCAF. Well, then he went over to England with the RCAF. Ah -- he flew with the RAF. I don't know how many months. I don't—I—I don't have that put together as how many months he was with the RAF. But he flew a little Spitfire. (coughs) And I don't know if

he actually did missions in this Spitfire or if he was trying to keep up his flying time at this point. But anyway, he—I—I—I—the reason I'm telling you about this Spitfire, it'll—it'll—it'll—you'll understand just a little bit about that.

Anyway, so he was with the RAF. Okay, now, when the Americans joined—when the Americans entered the war and they brought—I mean, they came into England, the—he transferred to the United States Air Force, pretty much encouraged a transfer to the United States Air Force because they wouldn't have had any benefits or pensions afterwards. So he—he's—he—he joined up with the United States Air Force at Bassingbourn. And—and what he did was he then flew B-17s out of Bassingbourn. Okay. Now, back to how my parents met. Now, Chipping Norton, this little village, is about fifty to seventy-five miles away from Royston. And I might not have this exactly accurate but anyway, it's in the vicinity. And for some reason, my father, and I—I'm not sure about this, Janet, whether he was already at Bassingbourn or if he might have been at another base with—still with the RAF before he had transferred to the United States Air Force at Bassingbourn. But anyway, he was coming through the village of Chipping Norton through the town and was actually in the back of a—a Jeep or a pick—or a—a—a truck. My mother, who has had a little beauty salon—beau—beauty shop right there in Chipping Norton w—had come out the door and was walking—it's just a short walk—walking to her parent's house. And my father told the guys—he—they'd gone by her and she was walking, you know, down the street and the (chuckles)—he told the guys to stop the truck. Well, she went in the house. She went up into the house and he—he was very brazen, very bold, as all typical Americans were, I think, you know, at that time. He went to the door and knocked on the door and my grandfather answered the door. He came to the door and—and—and my father asked if there was a young lady that had just come in the door. My moth—my mother was at the top of the stairs and she heard him. And of course, she came downstairs and he introduced himself and that's basically how they met.

LEVINE: Wow.

SMITH: Brazen. He was just—he saw her, thought she was very pretty and, of course, wanted to meet her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMITH: So he did.

LEVINE: And so then did—did—did—do you know anything about courtship, how long it was, what happened?

SMITH: No, I don't. I don't know. I don't actually know when they met. I don't know when they met.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: I mean, as far as the month. I haven't—I haven't got that far with it. But anyway, they married in March and I was born in July so she was obviously pregnant when they—when, you know, when they got married.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

SMITH: And—but that—that's it. I don't know when this—you know, when they actually started the courtship. It could have been a very quick one, as things were. I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you know anything or can you say anything about, you know, what it was like in wartime with these GIs? Like you said, most Americans were sort of—

SMITH: Very brazen.

LEVINE: —[unclear] brazen.

SMITH: Yes, and I don't because I was too young. And I can't recall, but I—I—I have a lot of English friends and—older friends, you know, that have told me a—as we see in all these historic films, that the Americans were very—very brash. And they weren't af—afraid to speak to the women. And they weren't afraid to ask 'em out. And when they did, you know, they had—showed 'em a good time. And my uncle, my mother's brother, my Uncle Bob -- that was her brother -- he said—of course, they couldn't—he—they didn't like the Americans. I mean, he was the same age as my father or, actually, I think he was two years older than my father. But anyway, he said, "Oh, we didn't like the Americans because, you know, they took our girls away, took our girlfriends away." But he did like my dad. He really liked my father.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How—how would you describe your father?

SMITH: Ah—

LEVINE: Temperament, personality.

SMITH: Very gregarious, very adventurous, extremely adventurous, very kind and thoughtful but a risk taker, big risk taker.

LEVINE: At—what—what makes you say that?

SMITH: Well, because this is a young boy of eighteen or nineteen years old that comes out of Montana and goes to Regina, Saskatchewan and joins up with the RCA—AF just because he likes to fly planes and then is willing to—when he joined, he knew he was going to war. He knew he was going to England,

you know. I—I think you have to be somewhat of a—he wasn't with his friends. He—you know, you're—it's not like you're with your college friends or your high school friends doing something. He was totally on his own doing this. So I think he had to be a little bit of a risk taker.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And how about your mother? How would—how would you describe her as a personality?

SMITH: I think my mother—I think my mother was probably, oh, a little self-centered. I think she was—she was extremely beautiful.

LEVINE: I was just going to say.

SMITH: Yeah. She—extremely beautiful. I have pictures of her and—and—and when she actually got to Great Falls, Montana with this—the war bride, they—they have—they have—they did things on—about her, you know, in the newspapers and things, because she's absolutely a beau—beautiful woman. And I think she probably was a little self-centered.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: I think she was very—I think she was a little unrealistic.

LEVINE: In what sense?

SMITH: In what sense? She thought the United States was the land of opportunity and a little more than what she—I—I don't know that what she was absolutely expecting. But sh—I think she thought her own personal problems would be resolved by coming to the United States. Personal problems within herself. I'm not talking about personal problems with she and my father but her own

insecurities about things that the Uni—United States was going to resolve all those and, for some reason, resolve her own personal insecurities.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So maybe—are you saying that she—maybe she was a little disappointed when that didn't happen or—

SMITH: I—I—I think that the letters I have got that she wrote her father back in—the one nice—the kind—she was kind also and devoted to her father, devoted to her father and her oth—her brother, Bob, my Uncle Bob. And she wrote—I have all their letters and they're absolutely just a treasure. But all of her letters that she would write back to my grandfather, she would indicate that she was having problems. She was having problems with my father and—and I'll get to that. They did divorce, okay.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: But she was having problems with my father. She was having problems with the wealth, the wealth that she was around. She was around a lot of wealth. And she had just come from a country where everything had been rationed. And she s—was now into a country of—of—of a lo—of plenty. You know, there was a lot. And she would keep talking about how—how spoiled and how s—the—the people were and that they had so much. But then, at the same time, she would be saying grandfather or her father—"They—they—the women here don't have—you know, I—I go to look for a piece—a—a li—a linen." And I—I assume she might have been talking about, maybe, bed sheets or pillowcases. And she would be complaining (chuckles) about they didn't have the nice linens and things that they have—that she had back home. So w—I'm talking about material things here, that she seemed to be a little self-centered and was hoping she could have both the things from home and all the wealth that she saw the United States providing.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: And she got disillusioned. I guess that's—yeah, it's just -- enough. Anyway, she got a little disillusioned.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. (clears throat) Let's see. So I'm trying to think if there's anything more about life in England and maybe the departure. C—can—can you remember leaving or no?

SMITH: I—I can't. I—I—I cannot— I can't remember leaving but I know that leaving was a—was very traumatic. The reason I know, my Uncle Bob, who just died a—a couple of years ago, I knew that—that he had taken my mother and I to London. But I'll—I'll go back to that. But he told me a lot about the departure. Okay.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

SMITH: See, my father, by this time, was a POW in Stalag Luft Three, and he was there for two and a half years. So—

LEVINE: C—could—let's see. So in other words, your mother and father were married. Then your father was taken as a prisoner of war?

SMITH: Yes. Yeah. See, my parents were marr—my father and mother were bor— excuse me, married in March.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: I was born July 6<sup>th</sup>.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: My father was shot down over France July 10<sup>th</sup>, four days after I was born. And then was, of course, interned as a—a prisoner of war for two and a half years at Stalag Luft Three. Okay. So during that time, they—you know, my mother and I came back to Chipping Norton to live with her fa—her father and her brother, Bob.

LEVINE: You came back—

SMITH: Back from Royston. Royston is a place that I was born near Bassingbourn Base.

LEVINE: Right, yeah.

SMITH: He—my—in fact, Uncle Bob went up to Royston to get my mother and I because—and back then it was quite a journey.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: You know, and she didn't have a car or any—any way to get around. Oh, in fact, he probably didn't even drive up there to get her. He probably took the train and we came back on the train to live in Chipping Norton throughout the war.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: Now, my—my Uncle Bob, her brother, was the—in the fire brigade in Chipping Norton, which was just as important—it was just as important, really, as—as the people in the military, because they had—with the war going on and the bombing of England and the bom—and the planes and all, you know,

he was very involved with—with that, you know, with the—the fires that were caused by this war.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: And also, I—I know he told me that he went to London, that after the Battle of Britain they had to go to London. A lot of the fi—the volunteer firemen or the firemen, not—not volunteer. They were actually part of the fire brigade. They had them go into London to rebuild a lot of the homes so that the people could come back out of the country, back in—that had been taken out into the countryside, bring them back into London. So he was involved with that. My—actually, World War II just—really, it destroyed my family. It—it just about destroyed 'em because he was—like I said, my Uncle Bob was basically in the fire brigade. And my mother's husband—my father was shot down over—you know, a shot-down prisoner of war. And then their other brother, Norman, Uncle Norman, he was twenty-four years old and he was a radio operator with the RAF, and he was shot down over the channel and never found. And the plane was, you know—so all this went on within about six months.

LEVINE: Hmm. So in other words, when you and—when your mother went back to Chipping Norton with you—

SMITH: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —the baby.

SMITH: Right.

LEVINE: Your father was a prisoner of war. And so while you were there for some months—

SMITH: We were there for two and a half years.

LEVINE: Oh, two and a half years.

SMITH: Yeah, two and a half years.

LEVINE: While he was still in—

SMITH: It—being prisoner of war, yeah.

LEVINE: So now, as a prisoner of war, could he and your mother correspond?

SMITH: Yeah, they corresponded all the time through the Red Cross. The British Red Cross was very, very good about getting their parcels and mail to—to the prisoners. And I have a lot of photographs with Stalag Luft Three written on 'em because they were sent directly. They were of myself and my mother—directly to him—

LEVINE: Hmm.

SMITH: —you know, in the prison camp.

LEVINE: Well, maybe, could you say something about what the correspondence contains? And what were the kinds of things that—did he tell about his life—

SMITH: Now—

LEVINE: —in prison?

SMITH: Let me say this, I don't have any letters. I don't know what c—the correspondent—I—I don't know what they said to each other. What I've got is photographs with "Lieutenant John Bennett, Stalag Luft Three" on it, which indicated they were sent to the prison camp. But I don't have any letters, any correspondence between the two of 'em, which I'd have loved to have had.

LEVINE: Mmm.

SMITH: I'd love to have—

LEVINE: Did your mother ever tell you anything about what your fa—or did you—or do you know from your father?

SMITH: I know what—I know what went on.

LEVINE: What it was like?

SMITH: I do know what it was like. Yeah.

LEVINE: Could you say a—a little—

SMITH: Yeah, actually, he was shot down. The B-17, he was—he was a copilot and—the pilot and a copilot. And—and a B-17 carries about ten people. Well, they were shot down on a mission n—I—I don't know exactly what the mission was as far as what area they were bombing, but it was over France. It was occupied by that time and it was over France. Anyway, they were shot down near Caen, France.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: And—but they were shot down in the channel—in the plane. Excuse me. When I say shot down, it was—it was hit and I don't know if it was hit by—if they got into flack or—or if they got in—if it was enemy aircr—excuse me. It was enemy aircraft. I do know that. I do know that. They—they were hit by enemy aircraft. They were in a big formation. They were in a tremendous formation of B-17s on this mission. They were in a—they were in a very vulnerable place in this formation. And actually, the—they have a name for the for—the place that their plane was located. But it was a low place on this tremendous formation of—of probably, I don't know how many B-17s there would have been. But anyway, they were hit and the plane went down or was going down, and the—the pilot, he told him—told him to bail out. And I'm in touch with the pilot right now. He's eighty – eighty-seven years old and he lives in California and I've just been in touch with him recently, and we've had a wonderful communication back and forth. He didn't know that John, my father, actually had a child, which was really of interest to him. He—he didn't know it because in Stalag Luft Three, this was a tremendous compound, I mean of prisoners, was something like six thousand prisoners there. So he didn't reali—he knew he had an English wife. He said to him—he said he knew he had an English wife but he didn't know that there was a child. And that was interesting when I found that out because these pictures, these photos my mother had kept, you know, sending to my dad—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —while he was there, but Leland told me that my dad and he were not like personal, close friends. They saw each other but they weren't personal, close friends. But anyway, to make that long story short—

LEVINE: That's kind of men to men, you know.

SMITH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Where they don't talk about (chuckles)—

SMITH: Yeah, that's the way they are, isn't it?

LEVINE: (chuckles)

SMITH: I know. But anyway, Leland said that he—he yelled for them that one of the engines was out. One of them was on fire. He knew the plane was going down. They had—they had to make—they had to get out of it. He told about—yelled—or he—he told the crew—

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMITH: —to bail out.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: He ran to get one one—the navigator by the seat of his pants to get him out. But when he told him ba—bail out, my father said, "You go first." My—my father said to him, "You go first." You know, after—and Leland said that he just remembered him saying that. He said—and my dad's eyes were bug-eyed and said, "You—you go first." Anyway, Leland—Leland, the other pilot, had gone up to—to a—I guess another area of the plane. But anyway, the last thing he knew, he did see the parachute go out. My father was bailed out. And he bailed out and he really never knew what happened to the rest of the crew. I mean, it was just a instantaneous going on and he—he—it was impossible to know what happened, okay, to everybody. All of the other eight were killed. All the other eight were killed in the plane. Anyway, my father landed in the English Channel. He was in—in the channel about two and a half hours in the water. And a French fishing vessel came out, French—

French fishing boat came out and had two German guards on it. And of course, they pulled my father out of the water. And then Leland, the other pilot, he was about another two miles away from this location. And the fishing vessel, of course, went down and picked him up. They'd—they'd obviously seen this plane go down and seen these guys parachuting out. So they went down and picked up—picked up him. And Leland told me that he said when they—they got him out of the water my dad was up on—on, you know, on deck.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

SMITH: And he said—he said, "Christ, I am glad to see you. What happened to the others?" And Leland had to report to him he didn't know what happened to the others. And of course, as it turned out, they were all killed in action. You know, the other eight. But anyway, then they were interrogated for about ten days in probably a local jail. And it—I—I don't know what—what the name of the town they were taken to and they—you know, interrogated. And then after they were interrogated they were in separate cells (sniffs) in this jail. And after the interrogation, then they shipped them both—the Germans shipped them both to—to Sagan—S-A-G-A-N, Germany where Stalag Luft Three Prison Camp is. And then they were interned in that prison camp for two—the rest of the war.

LEVINE: And what kind of treatment did he get? Did he—

SMITH: They were officers. My dad was an officer. And my dad even told my husband this. He said it was a good thing they were officers because he thought they were treated very well. You know, I mean as far as being a prisoner of war—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: Now, they were cold.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: They were very cold.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SMITH: I mean, you know, you're in Germany and the—Germany's in a war and they don't have a—a lot of things to be able to give prisoners. So you know, you—I—I—I can understand this. He said they were cold and they were hungry. But they—he said basically, they were treated with—they were fairly much treated with respect.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SMITH: But he said that, of course, this was his opinion as—as an American—he said because he was an officer, that made a difference because the Germans really respected officers.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: So, you know, that's kind of—

LEVINE: Wait. We're going to p—[tape off/on]—okay. We're resuming here.

SMITH: Yeah. I was going to say this. My dad—after the war—this is just an after comment, he said he'd never be hungry again. Hungry. My dad was a large man and he—he was—(chuckles) he was absolutely starved to death because he was so large, you know, and he just couldn't—well, they—they

just couldn't get enough to eat. They couldn't really—they tried but, you know, and they got a lot of red p—the Red Cross parcels absolutely saved him. You know, that was what really saved him was these Red Cross—and the Germans were good about allowing these Red Cross parcels to get in, you know, to him.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SMITH: Yeah, so that really helped with chocolate bars, and some little rations like that really helped.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But—

LEVINE: Do you think your father had—what repercussions do you think maybe your father had as a result of—of his being incarcerated and hungry and cold and—

SMITH: Well, number one, he said he'd never be—number one, psychologically, said he'd never be hungry. He didn't care what it took. A—as a result, he always (chuckles)—

LEVINE: Ate a lot?

SMITH: Yeah, he ate a lot.

LEVINE: (laughs)

SMITH: But he was—he—he n—he—he—he wasn't overweight but he ate good food. It was always—I always kind of had to laugh because he would always buy

the most expensive roast, the most expensive. And I knew—and I knew, but probably other people didn't realize that he had made that decision. He would use his money (chuckles) to buy good food. But anyway—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: I—I think he had other problems. Yeah, I think that he had a lot of other problems. I—

LEVINE: That—that stemmed from that, you—

SMITH: Yeah. I think so. He—he had medical problems because of it. But I think he probably had some psychological problems too. And I—I—I'm just not an expert in that—

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMITH: —to be able to tell you exactly what, you know, what kind of problems he had.

LEVINE: Hmm.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1

LEVINE: Now, was he—when your mother came over—oh, then he—did he return to England then—

SMITH: Yeah, and—

LEVINE: —after the war?

SMITH: Le—let me tell you a little side thing about this—

LEVINE: Okay.

SMITH: —about being in Stalag Luft Three, which I think is fascinating. You know, they—it surprised me, as like their daily activity. I asked Leland, the pilot. I said, “What did you do during the day?” He said, “Well, we were under such good disciplined”—we—because the officers, the high-ranking officers, it was still run just like a complete military base. And the Germans allowed the American officers, high ranking, to run it and take complete responsibility for themselves as long as they followed the rules that the Germans put down. So Leland said that, basically, was just a—a—not just, but they were disciplined. They had to do what they were ordered to do by the American officers. You know, whatever—

LEVINE: You mean the other incarcerated POWs—

SMITH: Uh-hmm, yeah.

LEVINE: —were under—

SMITH: Under whoever—

LEVINE: —the officers.

SMITH: —the highest commanding officer was in that POW camp. They were actually under that. They had a band. They had a, you know—you know, as you probably know, education going on, classes. Now, I don't want to make this out like it was the Holiday Inn.

LEVINE: Because they were cold and hungry and [unclear].

SMITH: But they trying to have normalcy in their lives and so be—they, in turn, did things that would either entertain, educate, you know, help each other in that way.

LEVINE: I see. So your father in—in a sense was responsible for—for the running of the POW camp of his men under him?

SMITH: No, no. Not my dad.

LEVINE: No.

SMITH: My dad was actually under whoever the commanding officer was. My dad was under—

LEVINE: The American commander.

SMITH: Yeah, the American command—

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SMITH: It would have—if they had a colonel there—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —or, you know, that—that's what I meant as far as the—whoever was the highest commander—

LEVINE: I see.

SMITH: —or highest ranking officers. The highest-ranking officers then were the commanding officers of that compound. And all other officers, of course, obeyed them. I always was kind of—thought—yeah, I always thought maybe it was that the Germans, basically, c -- commanded the compound as far as telling e—them exactly everything. But because the Germans respected the officers, they knew they could take care of themselves. And if they would obey, basically, the—the—the laws of the—of the prison camp, they could self govern themselves. Well, o—of course, as you know, the na—the game of the day was always to escape. I mean, e—you know, they all tried to escape.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I mean, that was—that's part of the soldier's duty, I suppose, back then was to try to escape. It's all—it's a deterrent to the Germans. It co—it was costly to them because they'd always have to use extra guards to go find people or ha—extra guards. It was—it was just a big distraction and that's basically, I think, why many of 'em did that, I suppose. But my dad tried to escape one time. It was called the white sheet (chuckles)—

LEVINE: The—

SMITH: —caper.

LEVINE: (laughs)

SMITH: And he got permission from the security bunch there at the POW. They—they had to give you permission to try escape plans. The—your escape plan had to be approved by a committee. A committee actually approved your escape plan.

LEVINE: Who was on the committee?

SMITH: Well, a select—a—select officers who might have been experts in forgery, documents. I don't know. Different facets of—

LEVINE: So this is within the American—

SMITH: Yeah.

LEVINE: —hierarchy?

SMITH: In—yeah.

LEVINE: You—if you wanted to escape, (chuckles) you had to—

SMITH: You had to get—you had to go to the committee to get permission to escape.

LEVINE: [unclear].

SMITH: Yeah. Anyway, his white sheet caper was simply p—it was snowing. It was in—it was in the wintertime in Germany and—and the—he—he—they had to dye a—a sheet wh—bleach that sheet and bleached it completely and, of course, put the sheet up on—and he—and he managed to get to the wires. But when he started trying to clip the wires in the wintertime—now, I—I'm not sure I quite understand this, but in the wintertime, being cold and you're clipping wi—wires, it makes a terrible, terrible—

LEVINE: Crack.

SMITH: —crack.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: Uh-hmm. And he—of course, he was found out—found immediately and put in solitary confinement for two weeks. But his comment about that was he liked solitary confinement because it was warm. Because in solitary confinement, they were probably put into a small room but there was a potbelly stove in the little building of solitary confinement. And he—he said he was kind of warm. So it was nice to be warm. (laughs)

LEVINE: [unclear]

SMITH: I don't know what that did to his head.

LEVINE: (chuckles) Yeah.

SMITH: But, you know, at least he said it was, you know—

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But they—they—it was a hard—a hard thing. And then they marched all these Americans and, well, all of Stalag Luft was marched to Moosburg -- a terrible, terrible march because the Allies were moving into that area. And they—and the Germans knew the Allies were close by so they had to—they moved the POWs and it was a terrible march. And you can read that in history about—about the march to Moosburg. It was terrible.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: Very bad conditions. Extremely. Sixty miles in freezing cold and—

LEVINE: Wow.

SMITH: —it was awful.

LEVINE: Did your father ever talk about when he was liberated?

SMITH: Yeah, uh-hmm. Yeah, he did. He—actually, the Russians were nearby, very nearby. And they—nearby this—when they—when they were actually moved from Sagan, Germany to Moo—Moosburg, Germany. And I think Moosburg was the last place. This—it went on for, I think, about a week of moving these men, walking. And they—and they also loaded them on train cars for two days, I believe, with—they don't have any—anything to eat. I think they might have had a little water they could give 'em. But that was about it to try to get 'em down here to this—to this other camp. Or that's what they were trying to do is got 'em to another place, that Moos—at Moosburg, Germany. Anyway, when they got to Moosburg, Germany—and I may have this incorrect again. I'm—I'm not sure. But when they got there it must have not been but a few more days after that, or maybe a month or so. But they started hearing the Russian artillery. The Russians were—were advancing. And my dad said they actually—the German guards left. They just left the camp because the Russians were coming, you know, were advancing on 'em. He said, really, they got up one morning and all the guards were gone. It was just—they were gone, you know. Everybody—they cleared out. And in turn, the—I—I—I don't have this exactly right but Moos—but you could read—they've got this down in history about Moosburg, how—that Patton's Army was not too far away. And they needed a lot of help. I'm talking about the actual compound, the prisoner of war compound. They needed a lot of help, food, medical supplies, all kinds of stuff. And they co—I know they asked—asked Patton's—to try to—but Patton couldn't—they were—they were fighting. I mean, they couldn't even s—anyway, it took, I think, several weeks to really be able to get the—for the Allies to get in there and get this all sorted out, get all these POWs sorted out. And eventually, they went to Camp Lucky Strike,

which was Le H—Le Havre, France, and then they were shipped to the United States. But my dad came back to England because of my mother and myself.

LEVINE: Now, how long was your father in England after he returned from the war?

SMITH: You know, Janet, I—I don't know. I honestly don't know. I will tell you this. I had a hor—now, I've lived in the United States all my—after—after I came here. I had a terrible time getting American passport. Here's why. Because when my dad went back to England, he was supposed to registered my birth with the American Consulate. Well, he didn't get it done. He didn't do it. Well, nobody even thought anything about it then. Nobody thought a thing about it. He didn't. I didn't, until I went to get—apply for an American passport, well, many years ago. And when I went to apply for an American passport, it was then that we realized, or my dad realized he never followed through and we had to—he had to do a lot of little documentation, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: Provide documentation. But he went—evidently, he went back there to England, saw my mom and made arrangements with my mother to—for her to come to the United States, meaning—when I say “made arrangements,” renewed their relationship, their married relationship. And she begged him, obviously begged him that she wanted to come to the United States to be with him. Now, Janet, be quite honest, I don't know if my dad really wanted her to come to the United States. I don't think so. I don't think so. He was psychologically, biologically, medically, everything in not too good a shape at that point.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: And my Uncle Bob, which is my mother's brother, kind of told me she just wor—she just kept insisting as far as she was going to go to the United States. So—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —you know, in—in my dad's defense later on, I'm not sure he was really eager for her to come. He was—it was a wartime romance and she didn't probably understand what he had been through for the last two and a half years in—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMITH: Yeah. But anyway—

LEVINE: But do you think that he was going to go to the Uni—was he—did he ever have plans to stay in England?

SMITH: No, never had plans. Oh, no. No, no, no. Never, never.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: Never even crossed his mind. He was from Montana. He was going back to Montana and that's where his home was and he would—never even thought about staying in England.

LEVINE: I see. Now, did they travel—no. Well, you traveled with your mother.

SMITH: No.

LEVINE: Did he go first?

SMITH: He—he ca—yeah, as—as a POW, he was shipped back to, I think, California to the hospital, to—

LEVINE: Did he spend much time in Chip—Chipping Norton?

SMITH: He must have spent some time there but I don't think—but days. Maybe a few days. Do you see what I'm s—

LEVINE: Well, you describe him in such terrible—

SMITH: Yeah, he had—they had to send him back to—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: And I—don't have all that clear. I just know he probably was granted permission to go to England because he had a English wife.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: From this Luc—Lucky Strike Camp—

LEVINE: Right.

SMITH: —they were dispersing the POWs back home to the States. He probably said, "I've got an English wife. I must go see about her—and a child." And so they probably allowed him to come to England. And maybe he was only on a three-or-four-day leave—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —or something like that and probably said to her, “Yes, I suppose you—you and Kay can come.” You know. I—I don’t know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But—but anyway, then the next thing I know or I—I understand has happened, he is in a hospital in California, a veteran—or Veteran’s hospital or military hospital, you know, Air Force—Air Force hospital being treated for various things from—from the, you know, from the war.

LEVINE: Now, was he still in the hospital in California when you and your mother arrived?

SMITH: I think—I think, Janet.

LEVINE: Oh.

SMITH: I think.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: I think. Now, here’s what happened. Six months after my father came back to the United States, which would have been what, in probably around June—June of—of ’45—oh, ’45, probably.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SMITH: Approximately around June or July. I don’t have those dates.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: But he would have been—then she and I came six months later. All right. She—Chipping Norton is about seventy-five miles west of London. She had made arrangements to go as a—to go as a war bride. And I understand it took quite a bit of work for her to do the paperwork and whatever she had to do. Uncle Bob said she was back and forth to London doing this paperwork, whatever she had to do. And she finally got it together and—and whatever she had to do. And—and she—we left. But—or we were going to leave. Well, my grandfather, who was begging her, literally begging her not to go to the United States and take me away, because I was—I was literally the apple of their eye at this time because he—my grandmother had died during the war. He lost his son, Uncle Norman, during the war.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SMITH: Then my dad, his son-in-law, was a POW and now his daughter was going to take his granddaughter away to the United States. And he went in the back garden and he would not come out and—and hug neither one of us and I think was absolutely distraught to—to no end, you know. And I never saw my grandfather again.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SMITH: And I—I think I—I—you asked me if I remember him and, yes, I do. In some ways—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —of familiarity, I do remember him. I remember he held me and—and he was—

LEVINE: Kind of the feeling—

SMITH: Yeah, very, very, very tender and—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: He—he wro—I wrote to my grandfather all throughout my life and he did me until he died. And so anyway, she had to get Uncle Bob, her brother, to drive us. He drove us to London. And from London, we took a train to a holding camp somewhere on the coast of England and—and I don't—I don't know the name of it. It—it's where—it might have been near Dover. I don't know where it is. But anyway, it was a holding camp for the war brides, at which time they would then been loaded on boats, ships to go to the United States.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: Being processed and being loaded, you know, to these ships. So we—she wrote her father from there, from that location. I remember what she said. It was lots of children running around and lot—she couldn't get any sleep because all the babies were crying and all the children were crying and everybody. But anyway, she said that the Germans—the German POWs, who were POWs in England, were the cooks. They were the ones—they were doing the cooking and everything. And she said they were—they were such nice blokes, is what she wrote in—you know, in her letter to her father that they were nice blokes. Anyway, now, she—and she indicated she was going to be getting on a ship. And I can't remember the name of it. Anyway, we got on the ship and to come—you know, to come to the United States. The next thing is the letter that comes back from her to her father, which is—I'd—I'd like to share it with you if I had it but I just—you know, I'll send you a copy of this letter. It is unbelievable. She said this was—a lot of the ships were fairly nice that these war brides came over on. She was not on one of those. It had evidently been a hospital ship.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SMITH: And—I think. Now, I might—I might have this wrong. And there was something like four hundred and fifty women and children on this ship, and there was only a couple of nurses and maybe one or two doctors. And she said she thought some kind of a deadly disease had broken out because everybody was in their bunks, the—or their beds the entire trip, sick—sick. And I—the only time in my life, didn't eat one bite from the time I left to the t—it—it—and I—she told my grandfather she thought I was going to die. In the whole trip, she—she was so s—worried because she—she thought I was dying. I wouldn't say anything. I was sick. And she even tried to get the doctor to see me, you know, and he said there was really nothing—nothing to do, just go back and lay down. And she said she laid in that bunk for two weeks with me and she thought I was dying. I wouldn't eat a thing. The boat listed. It was a terrible storm one night. It listed—she told her dad that she thought this—the boat was going to go down. It was such a tremendous storm they were in. And it actually listed very badly. And she said everybody on the ship thought that—that it was going over. Anyway, she said the women were just—the—the women and children were so sick. And she said, “I just thought a—a fatal disease was breaking out on this ship. It was so bad.” But anyway—

LEVINE: Hmm.

SMITH: Um—

LEVINE: Could you say anything about the war brides as a group? Did—did your mother ever comment or c—

SMITH: I'm trying—

LEVINE: I mean, it's kind of the—

SMITH: —to think if she said anything about the other women.

LEVINE: Was there a lot of camaraderie—

SMITH: Camaraderie.

LEVINE: —or—

SMITH: I—I don't—I don't know. She didn't make any references to—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: I could reread those letters again and kind of look and see. But I—I don't remember that standing out in my mind.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: That—like, she didn't indicate a friend, like a person's name—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —that was maybe near her or something like that. I think she was so sick.

LEVINE: Sick, right.

SMITH: —and worried about her baby—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —that she couldn't even think about anything. And all she did was lie in that bed the entire two weeks. Terrible. Well, the thing that bothered her the most, I think, (chuckles) of—of this letter, she said, as sick as they were, that when they got here to—to New York, she said that—she said something about, obviously, the Americans must have been on holiday. “They wouldn't come out and get us and we were so sick.” You know, and—and it just was like—but I—I don't know. It could have been a Sunday. So I—but I keep thinking maybe it was like a holiday.

LEVINE: Like—

SMITH: A holiday.

LEVINE: —Washington or Lincoln's birthday.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, that's what I'm thinking.

LEVINE: [unclear] the ones, I think, in February.

SMITH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So here's everybody sick. The—they're in the harbor (chuckles) but they can't get off the ship. Right?

SMITH: Yeah.

LEVINE: D—do you remember getting to this country? Or did your mother ever say—like, what happened when she did get off?

SMITH: When she—she said, “I was one of the fortunate ones.” In this letter, she said, “I was one of the fortunate ones,” because my father’s mother lived in New York City. Now, this I—I only know bits about this. My father’s parents divorced—divorced when he was very young. But his mother still lived in New York, whereas his father had gone to Montana and remarried.

LEVINE: Oh.

SMITH: So it was this—his mother lived here. And even though he’s in a hospital in California with the Air Force after w—after the war, he was able to get his mother, who really he didn’t even have much of a relationship with, but made her aware that my mother and I were coming over. And so she came down and collected us from—however they processed them, she was—I don’t know how she would have contacted—I don’t—meaning—

LEVINE: Unless your father contacted his mother and his mother contacted the authorities—

SMITH: That’s what I wonder. Maybe she—

LEVINE: Right.

SMITH: —contacted authorities, knew another boat was coming in, then on the manifest, what they had this listed.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: That—that’s probably what happened. But she—she came and was able to take my mother and I away. And because—I suppose because we had somebody to—

LEVINE: Do you know if you were detained at all?

SMITH: I don't know.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SMITH: I don't know. But I know my mother said in a letter—she said, “I—thank”—something about, “Thank God Johnny’s mother was able to take Kay and I away to”—because she said, “Otherwise, we’d have been”—something about, “Otherwise, we’d have been detained for days”—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SMITH: —“and weeks.” So, we were—

LEVINE: Oh, so maybe she wasn't detained.

SMITH: Yeah. I—you know—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SMITH: So, obviously, we—because we had somebody to support us or vouch for us or something—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SMITH: —we were then able probably to be processed pretty quickly, I suppose.

LEVINE: So then what—where did you and your mother go?

SMITH: We went to my—her house.

LEVINE: Right.

SMITH: And according to the letter—I don't recall this. I probably was so sick.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: And I do know this though. As soon as we got to her house—and I don't know if she was from Manhattan, the Bronx. I don't have any idea but I know, strictly, New York City is all my—my mother said in this letter. Said, as soon as we got to the house she called a doctor in and had a doctor look at both of us. And of course, the doctor said—I mean, I was just, you know very good—bad condition, of course, almost dehydrated and that sort of thing, and advised them what to start feeding me and—and—and to bring my mother back to good health too. And so my grandmother actually sort of nursed us back for about three weeks. Obviously, we stayed there before we made the journey then by train to Great Falls, Montana.

LEVINE: Now—

SMITH: And this English girl—I can't tell you how much I admire her, my mother, this English girl, that young, making that journey and then getting on that train and going to Great Falls, Montana by herself with a sick child. I—I cannot tell you—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —what I think about, you know—no matter what happened to them, no matter what, I think she was extremely courageous, you know—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —to do this. But she loved him and she was determined to get to him. And it—she'd do anything it took and she did.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, when you got to Montana, what happened?

SMITH: Mmm, when we got to Montana, I—even—my—my father—I don't know when he was released. I don't know exactly what happened but he came to Montana. I—I—I don't know exactly all the circumstances. But I—I'll—I'm going to abbreviate this part. They only stayed married one year. My mother and father only stayed married one year. And I have just some faint recollections about it. But the biggest recollection I have is how much I missed my grandfather. And I—I missed—even though I was that young, I—I was so unhappy. I cried all the time and nobody knew what was wrong with me. They thought I'd gone nuts, so to speak. You know, they were just, "What's the matter with this child?" And I—I was just com—remember just wanting to be where I felt secure. And I didn't feel—I just was lost. I mean, I felt very lost, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: That's—that's—and they're not clear recollections. It was just a sense of feeling lost. I remember I ran out of my mother and dad's house in—in Red Lodge, Montana. They were in Red Lodge there for some—a few months. And I ran out of the house. I don't think I had a thing on, running in the snow. You know, that type of thing. And then I must have been extremely—very upset.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: You know, and probably was very awful, really, child but—and unhappy. And that—I'm sure that's why. Because actually, the letters that my mother would write back to my grandfather was always that she would be saying Kay always asks about her Pappy, her grandpappy and how—and wants to come back to England so bad. It was always th—that kind of comments, you know. So I was probably unhappy.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Because I'd lived in a beautiful little garden and happy with my grandfather and—and my mother and my Uncle Bob's all around me, you know.

LEVINE: What was it like for you, getting used to having your father come back?

SMITH: I—I don't think I saw my father too much because he traveled. He—when he came back to Montana, he worked for his father. And his father was a contractor. And I think my dad was sent out to different towns in Montana to bid on jobs and things like that. I don't remember. I don't remember seeing him much.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: But the few times I do remember seeing him, you know, I remember—I remember thinking of him—of him as being kind.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: Janet, can we turn this off just a minute.

LEVINE: Sure.

SMITH: My friend—[tape off/on] anyway, so I—I just—like I said, I don't have a whole lot of memories of my father. But I just remember him being kind and that sort of thing. And I—but I think I remember my mother and father fighting. I have faint, faint recollections of hearing screaming back and forth with each other.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you think—I mean, is there anything that you could say about, you know, what kinds of frictions—because I'm sure other war brides experienced—

SMITH: Yeah.

LEVINE: —similar kinds of things with their American husbands. Do you—do—could—could you say anything about, like, maybe what it might have been like for your mother to be now in this new culture and—

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. I think my mother, with her accent—I think my—my mother with her—her culture, used to things being, you know, the way it was there in England and then getting, especially in Montana, because Montana, at that time back in the forties, still was being pretty well established. I mean, it—you know, it was a—well, I don't say established but it—it didn't have all the things that the East Coast cities had, okay, or the West Coast cities have. I—I think that she—she missed—culturally, she missed some of her—the foods that she h—you know, had in England, because she'd write and—and tell her father she missed the cooking. She missed the cooking at home. She—

LEVINE: How about friends? Did she make friends with the women—

SMITH: She did—I think that—be quite truthful, Janet, I don't understand that a whole lot. But I think a lot of women were jealous of my mother. But I can't say that my—I don't know, factually, if my mother made them jealous of—of her

purposely. I don't know that for a fact. She could have been doing that. But at the same time, I don't see her that way but then I'm her daughter, right, so you saw her not to have—be biased about this. But she was such a spectacularly beautiful woman that when—honestly, she is one—I will show you a picture of her. I will send you a picture of her when I send you this letter and you're going to see what I'm talking about. I mean, she went onto—she—she could have gone—actually, she was asked to do some screen. I mean, actually—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —in Chicago later on, after they divorced about doing some modeling and— and some—doing some things, maybe for—for movies or something like that. So this—this woman was really spectacular. All right. I think when she walked in a room, so—so to speak, of what other people have told me, my aunts and so said, you know, she was just a show stopper. You know, everybody—so I don't know if she set up this jealousy unconsciously or consciously. She didn't make good friends with Americans but she f—ha— found another war bride from Australia, same situation, little girl, came, husband rejects her. They divorce. And she and the Australian friend found an apartment together. And she—my mother went to work and the Australian girl went to work. But the custody—excuse me, the divorce was this. My father had six months custody and my mother had six months custody. But I could not be taken out of the state of Montana. There. My—limited my mother. Now, here's my mother, doesn't really know too much about American culture or business, is now on her own. And she can't exercise her rights of getting her child for six months because she's having a problem making money, place to stay, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So in turn, my mother is then starting to get very irrational. And she even wrote the American Consulate—I mean, the British Consulate in Chicago, or she went to them in Chicago. By now, she has left Montana. I don't have all this in

order. Has now left Montana. I am left with my father. She goes to Chicago. I don't know if she went with another man, she went by herself, exactly—goes to British Consulate, asks for help to get me. And I have a letter from the British Con—my father to the British Consulate saying, “If you have any questions, you contact my attorney.” And in turn, her Australian friend ve— writes my grandfather in England and says, “Mr. Naylor. You've got to help Eva. She's losing it, both me-- physically and mentally.” And—and she was.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SMITH: In turn, my grandfather—it was very difficult for him to get up the fifty pounds to get my mother back over to England. And this is like '49—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SMITH: —or '48. I might have my dates wrong because I don't have anything here. But he event—he manages to get her back to England, back to Chipping Norton and—and my mother was mentally ill the rest of her life, never remarried, never had anything to do with any other man, tried to commit suicide five or six times.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SMITH: And was mentally ill for the—and she died in '85, 1985.

LEVINE: Wow.

SMITH: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Well, we're—we're exactly at the end of the tape.

SMITH: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is there anything quick thing? I mean, that's probably a good (chuckles) place to close. I mean, that kind of sums it up, doesn't it?

SMITH: Yeah. Uh-hmm. My father died in 1987. He remarried. He remarried and I went to boarding school all my life.

LEVINE: Oh.

SMITH: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Okay. We're going to stop here. It's the end of the tape. I want to say that Kay Smith is writing a book about this—this story. And it will be available. So if there's someone interested, you can look for—

END OF INTERVIEW