

**Oral History Interview**  
**with**  
**Leona “Cissie” Parker**

Interview Conducted by  
Juliana Nykolaiszyn  
June 23, 2014

O-STATE Stories  
Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**  
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# **O-State Stories**

An Oral History Project of the OSU Library

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## **Interview History**

Interviewer: Juliana Nykolaiszyn  
Transcriber: Jo Beth Wasciek  
Editor: Rebekah Spaulding, Micki White

The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

## **Project Detail**

The purpose of O-STATE Stories Oral History Project is to gather and preserve memories revolving around Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College (OAMC) and Oklahoma State University (OSU).

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on October 5, 2006.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Leona Cissie Parker is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 23, 2014.

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## About Leona Cissie Parker...

“Cissie” (Maria Cecilia Leona Louise Crixell) Parker was born in 1928 to parents of Scotch-Irish, English, Spanish, and French descent. As a teen, she moved to Oklahoma and attended a co-ed school for the first time, after attending all-girls schools in Texas. Her brother arranged a blind date for her with one of his friends, which turned out to be a huge success. Cissie and Eugene (Gene) were married in 1945 while Cissie was still a senior in high school. Gene was in the Navy for aviation training since it was wartime, but before he finished his training, World War II had ended. Now able to attend college on the GI Bill, Gene enrolled at Oklahoma State University (then Oklahoma A&M College). The couple lived in a trailer that measured sixteen by thirty-two feet at OSU’s Vet Village, a housing area made specifically for the thousands of military veterans and their wives returning to school. Vet Village was a town within a town, providing its own fire station, post office, and even a mayor.

Gene earned thirty dollars a month on the “sewer crew” at the village, and Cissie earned money babysitting and doing odd jobs she found, as needed. After Gene earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees at OSU, he took a teaching job in Hinton, becoming superintendent in less than six years, and while still in his twenties. The couple, now with a family, moved to Killeen, Texas, where Gene opened an elementary school and assisted with the junior high and high schools. He served as an educator for forty years, touching hundreds of lives. In her interview, Cissie selflessly gives her late husband most of the focus but deserves just as much of the spotlight. She also reminisces about living in Vet Village, the ways they kept busy and had fun, and the challenges they encountered and overcame.

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## Leona “Cissie” Parker

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Juliana Nykolaiszyn

June 23, 2014

Killeen, Texas



**Nykolaiszyn** *My name is Juliana Nykolaiszyn, and I'm talking with Leona Cissie Parker by telephone as part of the O-STATE Stories Oral History Project. Cissie is in her home in Killeen, Texas, and I'm in the library at the Oklahoma State University Campus in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Today is June 23, 2014. Cissie, do we have permission to record this phone interview today?*

**Parker** Yes ma'am, you sure do.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, well, let's begin by learning a little more about you. Could you begin by telling me your full name and the year you were born?*

**Parker** My full name is—you really want it? It's Maria Cecilia Leona Louise Crixell Parker. (Laughs)

**Nykolaiszyn** *Wow.*

**Parker** I know, and Crixell is spelled C-R-I-X-E-L-L. It's Spanish from Spain.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, and what year were you born?*

**Parker** Nineteen twenty-eight.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, and tell me a little bit about your parents.*

**Parker** My parents, my mother was a Yankee from Ohio, Scotch-Irish and English. My father, his parents came from Spain and France. His mother was from France, and so he was born in Corpus. He was half Spanish and half French.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Wow, and how did he end up in Texas?*

**Parker** Well, my grandfather and his brothers came from Spain. There used to be a little town (it was a port, actually) below the Rio Grande in Brownsville.

That's Texas, of course. It was called Baghdad, and that's where the ships landed. They came up into the States from there, and his folks went to Corpus, and that's where he was born.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And what did your parents do for a living?*

**Parker** My mother was a homemaker. My father was an entrepreneur. I'm getting to the age where I'm having difficulty pronouncing things. (Laughs)

**Nykolaiszyn** *And what type of business did he engage in?*

**Parker** Well, in Mexico at one time, he had, I guess you'd call them bars, restaurants, you know, that type of thing in Mexico. Then in the United States he ran one of the first trolleys across the border from Matamoros to Brownsville. He was a very interesting person, and he lost all of his money when I was about three because Pancho Villa's lieutenant, who was called Caballo Blanco, (that means "White Horse") Daddy wouldn't serve them, and they burned him out. (Laughter)

**Nykolaiszyn** *Very interesting. And do you have any siblings?*

**Parker** I had four half-siblings, and one full sibling.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, and how did your mother meet your father?*

**Parker** I'm not sure. They met in Brownsville, I'm sure. My maternal grandmother and grandfather had a farm. They lived in Oklahoma, and they had this farm down in Brownsville. I think they came down to check on it, and Mama was with them or something and met Daddy then.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay. Well, let's talk a little bit about your early life growing up. You grew up in Brownsville, I'm assuming?*

**Parker** Yes ma'am, until I was thirteen, when my mother died.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, and tell me a little bit about the types of schools you attended as a young girl.*

**Parker** I attended the convent, Incarnate Word Academy, and then Villa Maria, which was the high school, until I went to Oklahoma.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, and what circumstances brought you to Oklahoma?*

**Parker** Well, my mother passed away, and my older sister, Ardoth's mother, was fifteen years older than I, and she became my little sister's and my guardian.

So we moved to Oklahoma where she was, and my grandmother lived in Cleveland, which is about sixty miles east, I think, of Stillwater.

**Nykolaiszyn** *So when you came to Oklahoma, what were some of your first thoughts?*

**Parker** Going to a public school for the first time, and there were boys.

**Nykolaiszyn** *That was a big, big change?*

**Parker** Oh yes, I went to an all-girls school. That was a shock, believe me, a culture shock.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And in Oklahoma did you live in the city or on a farm?*

**Parker** We lived in the city. Cleveland is a very small town, until I went to Oklahoma City to live with my sister and my brother. Of course, that was a large town.

**Nykolaiszyn** *So as you're growing up and you're in Texas and then you came to Oklahoma, what would you do for fun? What's an ideal time you would have?*

**Parker** Well, we went to Christian Endeavor on Monday evening. That's the young people organization in the church there, and for fun we'd go get in the back of one of the boys' pick-up and go in and drive through the graveyard. That was a big no-no, but we did it. We got caught, too, and so I was in big doo-doo then. (Laughter)

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, how did you meet your husband, Eugene?*

**Parker** My brother and Gene apparently worked together in a gas station while in high school in Brownsville, to my knowledge. I never saw him before. My sister and I, when we lived in Oklahoma together in the city, my sister and I went to a movie one Sunday afternoon, Gene was stationed in Norman. He was a—no he was in Purcell then because he was in gunner's school then. Believe it or not, the Navy was in Norman and Purcell. He came in to visit my brother, and Katie and I got home from the movie, and he said, "I made you a blind date for next weekend." I was so mad I could've killed him. Of course, then, the end of that story is we were married sixty-two years when he died, and this coming January would be seventy.

**Nykolaiszyn** *So where was your first date to?*

**Parker** We went with my brother and his fiancée, whom he later married, and we went to a night club of some sort. There's a picture in there of Gene and I

sitting at a table with beer bottles in front of us, and that was our first date.  
(Laughter)

**Nykolaiszyn** *Would you do much dancing?*

**Parker** No ma'am, we didn't because my husband, God love him, he had two left feet. (Laughter) He liked to try, but, you know, that's the way it goes.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, and what year were you married?*

**Parker** January 21, 1945.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, and so while you were courting and dating, he was in the service?*

**Parker** Yes ma'am.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, and did you travel with him to the different locations, or did you just stay put in Oklahoma?*

**Parker** Only after we were married. I was still a senior in high school, (I hate to say it) and I was going to a Catholic school. I didn't dare let the nuns know I was married. Then as soon as I graduated, he was sent to flight training in Iowa City, Iowa. I was going to go out there. Well, I had an attack of appendicitis, and I had to go to the naval hospital and have my appendix out. That was delayed, but as soon as I got out of the hospital, I went out to Iowa with him.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And was he ever, did he ever serve overseas?*

**Parker** No ma'am. What happened was he initially got in the—he was a cadet in the aviation training. All of a sudden they had too many pilots, so they put him in gunner school. He received his gunnery wings. He was in Jacksonville, Florida, getting ready to ship out, and all of a sudden too many pilots were getting killed, and so they called him and others, naturally, back in the flight program. He was the only married cadet, but they needed them, so they took him back in. Then the war was over with before training was finished.

**Nykolaiszyn** *I see. I see. So after World War II, what happened next?*

**Parker** Well, back then, you didn't receive a discharge immediately. You had what you called a separation, and so that meant that they could call you back any time they wanted. We were in Oklahoma City. That's where my brother and my sister—my sister was married by that time to Dr. Hassler, Ardoth's father. Gene had gone to junior college in Brownsville, but he wanted to go back to college. He could have the GI [Bill]. It was hard to get in, but Dr. Hassler, he kind of paved the way. He was able to get in Oklahoma A&M,

and so that's when we moved there. I became pregnant while we were in Stillwater. We initially were in a little sixteen-foot trailer. Fortunately the married ones, when they got—I'm getting ahead of myself, aren't I?

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, let's back up just a little bit.*

**Parker** Okay.

**Nykolaiszyn** *What were your first impressions of Stillwater?*

**Parker** It was a small, sleepy town at that time, and coming from Oklahoma City, it was fine. Of course, we stayed in the Village most of the time, except when we went to work.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And so Vet Village was kind of like a city unto itself.*

**Parker** Oh, yes ma'am.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Could you describe it for me a little bit?*

**Parker** Well, my understanding is that all of a sudden, the college was inundated with, I think they said ten thousand vets going to school. Maybe there weren't that many. We had our own post office, our own mayor, our own fire station, everything. We were a little town, all on our own.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, so let's talk about the first place you lived in Vet Village. Could you describe that for me?*

**Parker** Yes ma'am. As I started to tell you, it was a little sixteen-foot trailer, and I was pregnant. I'd go in to the little stove—the stove was coal oil, kerosene, and you'd have to pump it. I'd be at the stove, and if I wanted in the little fridge, I'd have to go out into the living area and turn around and come back to get in the fridge. There wasn't enough room for a pregnant woman to turn around. (Laughter) Then they started building the hutments. The married ones without children had a single hutment which was sixteen by sixteen, and those with children had a double hutment. They put two of them together. It was sixteen by thirty-two. We, fortunately, were able to move into a double hutment.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And did you make any additions to your hutment?*

**Parker** Oh, yes. Do I tell her? (Laughs) Okay. Gene, he was a fix-it person. I mean, he could do anything. He and one of our neighbors—his last name was Solomon. I can't remember his first name. Gene called him by his last name. The school had some lockers that they'd received, and they were in cardboard boxes, and so they went and told the school they'd unload them



for them if they'd give them the boxes, which they did. Then they did some midnight requisitioning and came home with some tar paper, and they put the tar paper—you understand the hutments were just the outside wall and the studs, and that was it. They put the tar paper on the wall, and then they put the cardboard from stud to stud, taped it, and we Kem-Toned it. Then I raided, my grandmother in Cleveland, raided her basement for all sorts of curtains and things, and we fixed it up really nice. We had the nicest one, I think, and Gene planted flowers out in front and put up a little fence.

**Nykolaiszyn**

*Wow.*

**Parker**

Yeah, he was always fixing it up. That's working, going to school full-time. He worked on the sewer crew, and studying and keeping up his grades.

**Nykolaiszyn**

*Did you add a garden?*

**Parker**

No ma'am, we didn't have a garden.

**Nykolaiszyn**

*Okay. So what was your husband studying while at A&M?*

**Parker**

Well, he started out as a chemical engineer, and he was a junior when all of a sudden, engineers were coming back to school to use up their GI because there were no jobs. He took tests, and he came home, and he told me that he was going into education. I nearly died laughing. I couldn't imagine him as an educator. He was one of the best ones ever.

**Nykolaiszyn**

*And so while he was working on his degrees, he was also working, you mentioned, the sewer crew?*

**Parker**

Yes ma'am, that's what we called it. He made thirty dollars a month, which paid our rent. What they would do is, they'd go around in the village only and fix any commodes or any type of plumbing that went wrong.

**Nykolaiszyn**

*Wow.*

**Parker**

The sewer crew. (Laughs) I guess you'd call them the plumbers.

**Nykolaiszyn**

*And so while he was working and studying, you were pregnant.*

**Parker**

Yes ma'am.

**Nykolaiszyn**

*Did you do anything else around the village?*

**Parker**

Well, I babysat one couple's little boy. Then when my little sister got out of school in the summers, she'd come down and stay with our child, and then I'd work at whatever I could find.

**Nykolaiszyn** *What were some of the jobs you did?*

**Parker** Well, I worked at a drugstore for sure, for a couple of summers. Then there was a gentleman at this college. His name was Andy Anderson. I'll never forget him. He's gone, isn't he? I'm sure he is. My brother-in-law, Dr. Hassler, knew him, and they had what they called Series A and Series B for the students. They'd bring in—Series A was classical musicians. Series B were the, like, big bands. Another lady and I, we were able to get jobs ushering at those things. We made fifty cents an hour, and that was great.

**Nykolaiszyn** *That's good money back then.*

**Parker** Yes ma'am, it was great money. It helped, too.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Was it difficult raising children in Vet Village?*

**Parker** You know, we were so young, I don't think we realized just how bad off we were. I think you just go with the flow. You do what you have to do. All of us had children. Very few people didn't have children. There's one picture of my daughter's first birthday party, in that bunch, (I think she sent it) all of the little village kids around us.

**Nykolaiszyn** *What would the kids do for fun in Vet Village?*

**Parker** Just play, yeah, just play together. They didn't have any type of playground or anything. They'd just play together.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Would there be any types of family gatherings?*

**Parker** Oh, yes, we'd get together. My grandmother would come periodically to see us from Cleveland, and everybody on our street knew her big ol' (what did she have, a Packard?) Packard or a Buick or something, a great big ol' car. They knew it when she drove in because she always had food in the car. (Laughs) Everybody'd come running out to see Grandma Sadie.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Would you visit much with your neighbors?*

**Parker** Oh, yes, yes. Yes, some of them became pretty good friends, and the thing of it is, most of them are gone.

**Nykolaiszyn** *When y'all would get together, what were some things you would do with your neighbors?*

**Parker** Well, play cards. Gene, once he decided he was going to make some hooch, some moonshine. He had a great big water bottle, one of those ozone-like

water bottles, and he put canned peaches and I don't know what all in there. Well, we had a party, and one guy went to the hospital. That was the last of his whiskey making. (Laughs) No more of that.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Would you do all of your shopping in vet village?*

**Parker** No ma'am, we didn't have a commissary there. We had to go to town.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay.*

**Parker** We used the bus.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, I was going to ask you how you got around.*

**Parker** Yes, there was a bus.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay.*

**Parker** Gene walked to school, mainly. That's how Nina, our daughter, got her name. One day, I think he was running late or something, and he took the bus. This lady got on, (this was before she was born) got on, and she called her daughter Diana. He loved it. He came home, "That's what we're going to call her," and we did.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Were there any popular places in Vet Village that y'all would go?*

**Parker** No ma'am, we didn't have any particular place.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, what about off-campus?*

**Parker** Well, we didn't do much. We went to ballgames some because the vets got tickets, you know. Gene liked the basketball games, so we went to a couple or three of those. Otherwise, we just kind of entertained ourselves.

**Nykolaiszyn** *So your husband not only finished his bachelor's degree but also his master's degree at A&M...*

**Parker** Correct, yes.

**Nykolaiszyn** *...in a real short period of time...*

**Parker** Three and a half years.

**Nykolaiszyn** *...which is quite impressive. So both were in education?*

**Parker** Yes ma'am.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, so what happened after graduation?*

**Parker** Well, he got a little—have you ever heard of Hinton, Oklahoma?

**Nykolaiszyn** *I have not.*

**Parker** Well, it's west of El Reno on [Route] 66, a little south of 66. Anyway, it's a small consolidated school, and they ran big buses. In '49, he was able to get a job there teaching. I think she took pictures of his certification thing. Then in '50, he became secondary principal, and in '55 he became superintendent. There again, he was the youngest—no, in '57, I'm sorry. Wait a minute. In '50 he became principal, and in '54 he became superintendent, yeah. There again, he was the youngest superintendent at the time because he was just in his twenties.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Wow.*

**Parker** Well, late twenties, but he was still in his twenties.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And did he move on from that post?*

**Parker** Well, we came to Texas then because his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and she was here in Killeen. He's only been to two schools, two places. He applied down here so we could come and take care of she and her sister. He was able to open a new elementary in '56. He opened it, and it stayed open until this year.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Oh, wow.*

**Parker** I know. He opened the elementary, and then a couple or so, maybe four years, I don't know—that was in '56. In '64, then, they built a new high school. They wanted the old high school converted to a junior high, so they asked him to convert that, which he did, but he wanted his elementary back. He loved that. He was able to go back eventually, and that's where he retired.

**Nykolaiszyn** *How many years as an educator?*

**Parker** Forty.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Wow.*

**Parker** Yes, and as I said, if you could see some of the pictures and some of the—if you could have been at the visitation at his funeral, I had never realized how many lives he touched. I knew he had, but I never realized how many.

Anyway, he was a good one. I still have people to this day that tell me what a wonderful educator he was.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, you raised three children.*

**Parker** Yes ma'am.

**Nykolaiszyn** *You had one at Vet Village, Diana.*

**Parker** Yes.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Were your other two born in Oklahoma, or in...*

**Parker** No, here in Killeen.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay.*

**Parker** We were older, and the good Lord didn't see fit to give them to us earlier. Nina was, I say she was fifteen. She says she was fourteen, so somewhere in that vicinity, we had two more, fourteen months apart, two more girls.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay, wonderful.*

**Parker** We consider Ardoth ours, too. (Laughter)

**Nykolaiszyn** *You know, thinking back of your times here in Stillwater with your husband and with the different families and, you know, having your first child in Stillwater, are there any memories that really just stick out in your mind from this experience in Vet Village?*

**Parker** Well, we had to make our own entertainment, of course. There was a waterhole somewhere in Stillwater. It seemed like it was by a refinery or something. Do you remember, Ardoth? Anyway, it wasn't a swimming pool, and we'd go there. I made me a swim suit that fit over my fat belly. (Laughs) We'd go swimming in there. I remember one time we were standing outside, and I was very tall at the time. I was a little over five-seven. This one young man, he looked at Gene, he said, "Parker," he said, "you'd have a tall wife if so much wasn't turned under," meaning my big feet. (Laughs) But oh, we had a lot of fun.

One year, Vauda Hill, his father worked for Halliburton. He had an old clunker of a car, and we decided that we were going to go down to Turner Falls. Three or four of us couples went. He got used oil from his dad, and we'd have to stop every few miles and put another one of those quarts of oil in. (Laughs) We got down to Turner Falls, and we just camped out with nothing. The guys put some stones together for us ladies, you know, for the

necessary, and we washed dishes in the stream. We'd get under the falls. That was before it became a state park. Out in Hinton, well, we did that a lot because Vauda had a car. He was the only one at the time.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Lots of good memories.*

**Parker** Oh, yes, and I'm sure there's many that I'm forgetting. I remember the little boy across the street. Their name was Roberts, and I remember the wife's name was Delia, but I don't remember the husband's name. The little boy was called Tookie, and he was about Nina's age. He would run across the street every time Nina was outside and bite her and then run back home. One day I told her, I said, "Well, bite him back." She got her mouth on him, all she did was get his arm wet, and he went screaming home. He never bit her again. (Laughs)

**Nykolaiszyn** *What about, did—was it easy to cook meals in your hutment?*

**Parker** Oh yes. Of course, everything was kerosene. One year at Christmastime, a lot of the kids went to their folks' that could, and it became eighteen below zero. It was cold, and everything, of course, would break, like commodes. Those people weren't there, and so Gene goes out with the sewer crew trying to help that. Well, we had this little kerosene stove in the middle of the living area, and the pipe went up through the ceiling, the vent pipe. It was so cold, and I had Nina's little baby bed pushed up against it, everything I owned on top of her. Had a cap on her head and everything. The snow would come in through that vent pipe and collect around the stove on the floor, believe it or not. (Laughs)

**Nykolaiszyn** *Wow.*

**Parker** It was cold that year. I don't remember which year it was.

**Nykolaiszyn** *How would you do your laundry?*

**Parker** By hand on the scrub board. Gene, the only clothes he had were his Navy khakis, and that's what he wore. I'd starch them and iron them.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And did you have a radio?*

**Parker** That's what we moved to Stillwater with. That's all we had. It was an old, old upright radio that one of the family had given us, and that was it. Yes ma'am, we had a radio.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And what were some of the shows you'd listen to?*

**Parker** Oh, I don't remember. I was trying to remember. *Fibber McGee and Molly* was one, and *Amos 'n' Andy*. I know there were others, but I just can't—oh, *The Green Hornet*. I can't remember, but there were bunches of them.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Would others come over to listen to the radio, or would you go to other hutments to do something like radio?*

**Parker** Yes, they would come over to the house. I gave all of the women—I was fortunate to have a set of Toni curlers, and I would give permanents, as long as they'd buy the permanent. I would give them permanents and cut their hair. Now, I know nothing whatsoever about hair dressing, but I did it anyway. That's how we got our hair done. That was women getting together and enjoying. We did all sorts of stuff. There was a phone booth; it was by our hutment. We lived in, Number Eight Kiowa was our address. I'm sure there were phone booths situated around the village. It would ring, and I'd always answer it for some reason or the other. I became the telephone operator. They knew to call—families would call that phone for different people, and we'd go get them. That's how we communicated. (Laughs)

**Nykolaiszyn** *Great memories of Vet Village.*

**Parker** Oh, yes. It was something else, I'll tell you.

**Nykolaiszyn** *I bet it was.*

**Parker** Yes.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, let's learn a little bit more about what you ended up doing.*

**Parker** Well, I didn't work in Hinton, in Oklahoma. We came to Killeen, and I started working the bank in '57, and I retired from there. I took time off in between when the little two were in elementary. The bank was—they never paid well. I wasn't making a whole bunch, anyway, and I was ruining more pantyhose than I was making, I think. I finally came home and told Gene one day, I said—they needed me there to help at the school and all. I told him that we were going to eat beans and tortillas, and I was going to stay home for a while, which I did until they were in junior high. I realized we had college again, coming up. The first one, Diana, she graduated from [Mary Hardin-] Baylor, and received her master's at Stephen F. Austin. I went back to work, and we got them through college and married. All three of them married, and still married, fortunately. Nina will have her fiftieth anniversary next September. I mean April, next April.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Wow.*

**Parker** Yeah, she's sixty-seven now. She'll be sixty-eight in September. Can you believe it?

**Nykolaiszyn** *That's amazing.*

**Parker** Yeah, I know.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, looking back on your life, how would you want to be remembered?*

**Parker** Oh, that's a hard one. I guess as a good mother, a good wife, good aunt. I guess just the best person I can be. I have never had any great accomplishments. That was up to Gene. (Laughs) He had all the kudos. Now, one thing in Vet Village, I was the Queen at one time.

**Nykolaiszyn** *You were?*

**Parker** Yes.

**Nykolaiszyn** *How did that come about?*

**Parker** Well, there were different queens in the school. Each club, I guess, had a queen, and I think it was the Photography Club. I'm not sure. Don't ask me how I got roped into it because I was working. All I remember is that I was nominated, and so were a bunch of other girls out there. I got home from work one day, and they were going to take a group picture. Well, they weren't working. They had time to gussie up, and I didn't. Anyway, I ended it by winning. The picture's in one of the yearbooks...

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay.*

**Parker** ...of my husband and the baby and I. It's in our hutment. It's in a chair in our hutment. The picture was taken, and I can't remember what year that was. Probably his last year. That'd make it '48, '49 maybe.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, what are we missing?*

**Parker** I don't know. What do you think?

**Nykolaiszyn** *Any other family stories you end up telling about Vet Village when you all get together?*

**Parker** Can you think of any I've told you, Baby? I told her about Grandma Sadie coming in, yes. Everybody'd come over, and they knew that big car had food in it. Told her about how we'd go to Turner Falls, and about the year that it was eighteen below zero and how I kept you warm. Well, it was three



and a half years, and it becomes a blur. I mean, I'm eighty-six years old.  
(Laughter)

**Nykolaiszyn** *But it sounds just like yesterday.*

**Parker** You're lucky I remember anything.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, is there anything else you'd like to add or talk about that we have not spoken about today?*

**Parker** I'll probably think of something later, but at the moment now, I can't.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well Cissie, I really appreciate your time today. It's been really interesting for me to learn more about Vet Village and your family...*

**Parker** Yeah.

**Nykolaiszyn** *...and your husband, as well.*

**Parker** I'm so glad that you're going to have at least some kind of a history because we drove up, not too long before Gene died. We were in Stillwater, and he was bemoaning the fact that there wasn't even a plaque to tell where the village was, you know?

**Nykolaiszyn** *That's right.*

**Parker** Like I said, there were so many veterans there, and the fact is, I think we made the town grow. (Laughter)

**Nykolaiszyn** *Absolutely.*

**Ardoth Hassler** Juliana, earlier she mentioned Andy Anderson and my dad helping get Uncle Gene into OSU.

**Nykolaiszyn** Yes.

**Hassler** My dad was an OSU alum, as was his brother. He was Ferdinand Rudolph Hassler, and then John James Hassler. My Uncle John married Pauline Dark, and I believe that her sister was married to Andy Anderson, and he was on the faculty in Stillwater...

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay.*

**Hassler** ...because it was all intertwined. I suspect that if Daddy had a hand in helping get Uncle Gene into OSU, it was, one, his alumni ties because he

maintained contact with a lot of people up there, and also probably Andy Anderson had a hand in it, as well.

**Parker** Yes, the reason you needed help getting in, because so many veterans were coming back, wanting to go to school, and they were full.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Right.*

**Parker** It was hard to get in, yeah.

**Nykolaiszyn** *And since he was looking at engineering, is that why he came to OSU, or was he looking at OU or other schools?*

**Parker** No, no.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Okay.*

**Parker** It was just, he was able to get in, and he was just glad to get in a school.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Right.*

**Parker** Of course, we were from Brownsville, but my family was there. All he had left—his father was FBI, and he was killed when Gene was nine. Gene had two younger brothers in Brownsville. There was really nothing to keep us from staying in Oklahoma, which we did until we had to move back to Texas, which we did also, and been here ever since. Like I said, he didn't go from school to school. We would've probably stayed in Oklahoma, had it not been for that.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Right.*

**Parker** We came here, and at one time I was working full-time, had a teenager, two babies, two older people, my husband, (Laughs) and did all my own housework and cooking and washing and ironing and everything. I have gray hair now. (Laughter) It gave me gray hair.

**Nykolaiszyn** *You kept everything going.*

**Parker** Yes, well, we did. Gene, he was so conscientious. We're a military town here in Killeen. I don't know whether you've ever heard of Fort Hood or not?

**Nykolaiszyn** *Yes, ma'am.*

**Parker** Okay, well that's where we are. During the Cold War, he was told that the Army would send buses in an emergency for the military children. Gene

asked, “Well, how about the civilians?” “Well, they can’t get on the bus.” Gene said, “That’s what you think.” (Laughs) He stayed with them. He told me I was responsible for getting his mother, his aunt, Nina, Genie, and Paula all out of town. We had our route mapped out because we had atomic weapons.

**Nina Bible** This is Nina.

**Parker** The one that was born in Stillwater.

**Bible** In 1963, we lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis...

**Nykolaiszyn** *Ah.*

**Parker** Yes.

**Bible** ...and so we were number four on the list to be bombed. I was a junior in high school. Mom had, she had provisions in the trunk, and in high school we were afraid to even go anywhere. We did the practice where we would get under the desk like if a missile was coming, and, yeah, a lot of good it would have done.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Wow.*

**Bible** We were probably more in danger of tornadoes than actually being hit by an atomic bomb. It was very scary during that time. We had a lot happen in a very short period of time.

**Parker** Yeah.

**Bible** But I will tell you that Dad, his education really made a difference in this town because he opened one of the really most favorite—did you tell her about Fowler?

**Parker** Yeah.

**Bible** Also, he hired many people who one of them went on to be a very beloved superintendent, and many people who are still educators or retired educators were hired by my dad and learned a lot from him. The education he got at OSU really did a lot for Killeen Independent School District.

**Nykolaiszyn** *That’s wonderful to hear. We always love to see that impact, right, because you never know as we have young students in college the great things they go on to do, and to see that impact is always so rewarding...*

**Bible** Right.

**Nykolaiszyn**      *...ten years, twenty years, fifty years down the road.*

**Bible**              Yeah, exactly, yeah. Something else he did, this is probably kind of insignificant, but he was very, very proficient in, of course, math and science, and that was not my forte in high school. He got many a friend through the higher mathematics and science. They spent a lot of time at our house on the floor with Genie and Paula climbing all over them, and that's how they remember learning, like, Physics and Chemistry and Algebra II. He helped me a lot. They remember him not only as their principal, but as their tutor for my class at Killeen High School. One of my classmates, Stan Schlueter, went on to be a state representative. He said that he owed Dad a lot for him getting through Baylor and then...a state representative. Dad's reach went a long way...his education.

**Parker**              I was going to tell you about one more thing he was responsible for. He was responsible for a lot of good things around town, but one of them was he was—in Oklahoma, he was in the Kiwanis Club.

**Nykolaiszyn**      *Yes.*

**Parker**              He came here and was in the Kiwanis Club, the civic club, and he was president. Well, Killeen didn't have a library, so when he was president, they rented a storage building downtown, and they gathered books from all of our homes. That's how our library started.

**Nykolaiszyn**      *Wow.*

**Parker**              Now we have a gorgeous library building, but he was one of the ones responsible for starting the library here in Killeen. I thought that was—I came home from work, and all my favorite books were gone. (Laughter) I was unhappy. That's all right. They were in the library. He had a lot of good things that he accomplished, and a lot of rewards and awards.

**Nykolaiszyn**      *It's a great family legacy. It really is.*

**Parker**              Yes ma'am, it was. All of our children, of course, remember him, and most of the grandchildren. He didn't live to see them all graduate from high school, but he did some of them. Now we have a great-granddaughter which he never saw. He loved all his grandkids, and he loved to fish. He'd take them fishing with him, just he and the boys. They'd go fishing and stay a week or something. (Laughs) He got a lot out of Oklahoma A&M, and that's how I still think of it. I know you're Oklahoma State now, but it'll always be Oklahoma A&M to me. (Laughs)

**Nykolaiszyn**      *And that's just fine.*

**Parker** Yeah, oh, and he had the cowboy, you know, the A&M cowboy?

**Nykolaiszyn** Yes.

**Parker** He had a little wooden one. He and another principal were always teasing each other. He had him on his desk, and he'd come in, and the cowboy would be hanging by his neck. Norman Hall was the other principal. He'd come in and hang Gene's cowboy when he wasn't looking because he was a Texas alumni. (Laughter) We still have it. That's one thing that I—oh, I told you we'd go to ballgames there, yeah. You know what? The student body really, really didn't mingle with the vets for some reason or the other. I don't know whether they thought they would catch something or what, but they would not mingle with us.

**Nykolaiszyn** *That's interesting, you didn't have that interaction with others.*

**Parker** No, no, not at all. Gene, like I said, he wasn't the only one that had to work. We ate squirrel and rabbit after it had a frost, and they fished, just to have meat on the table. Nina was brought up with tough ol' squirrel, and that was our meat because we couldn't afford to go out and buy meat. Then when he was at graduate school, he got what we called a glory job. He was off the sewer crew, and he swept out the labs. He went in one time to sweep out the lab, and there was Ardoth's brother working in the lab. He said, "Guess who was in there." (Laughs) He didn't care. He didn't mind working. He'd do it, and so that was all that mattered. He'd do anything for the family, and he did.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, what a great life and a great story. Any other memories you'd like to share before we round her out today?*

**Parker** Can you think of anything I've ever told you, Nina? Ardoth? They're shaking their heads no.

**Hassler** He was a wonderful uncle. He treated all his nieces and nephews like his own.

**Nykolaiszyn** *Well, it's just been a pleasure for me to learn more about him and you and your family, and I appreciate you taking time out of your morning to talk with me today.*

**Parker** Well, make sure that he's the one that's remembered because he's the one that did all the hard work and got through school and everything. He went August intercession and everything just so he'd get through in good time. He's the star, and we thank you so much. He'd be delighted to know that finally Vet Village is going to be remembered.

**Nykolaiszyn**      *Absolutely, absolutely.*

**Parker**            Have you found many other vets? Have you found any vets?

**Nykolaiszyn**      *Well, you know, I've talked to some people who've lived there, but they weren't vets.*

**Parker**            Oh.

**Nykolaiszyn**      *They lived there as students because that's where they placed the families, but they were non-vets living in Vet Village.*

**Parker**            Oh, okay.

**Nykolaiszyn**      *We're just kind of starting to interview our veterans now. We've started with our Korean War vets, and now we're working through several World War II vets.*

**Parker**            Yeah, well, Kelly Evans is dead. I know that. There was one named Hugh Smith and Vauda Hill. I was trying to remember some names. I know Clementi's dead. He became a lawyer in Chicago, but he's dead. That's going to be your problem. You'll be lucky to find wives.

**Nykolaiszyn**      *Right, absolutely.*

**Parker**            I wish you luck, and I'm so glad you're doing this. We appreciate it.

**Nykolaiszyn**      *We do, too, and thank you, and thanks to Ardoth for getting ahold of us.*

**Parker**            Yes.

----- *End of interview* -----