



SG

Interviewed by Barry Chad and her grandson AF

Interviewed at Asbury Heights

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Interviewer's Note

*Tender moments and family in a world where everybody knew everybody else and you grew up and lived in the same neighborhood all your life and where, once upon a time, in the small town of Carnegie, there were four movie theaters, a different time, when romance was couples holding hands in the balcony and marriage to "the boy next door" was more than just a line in a popular song.*

Interview

SG: I am the oldest child of my mother's second marriage. She was first married to a railroader in Carnegie [PA] and she had two children. I had an older half-brother and half-sister. And somehow [her husband] got killed on the railroad. And she was left as a widow with the two children and she supported herself for five years and that was 1911. There was no aid for anybody. She had met my father, oh, years before she married her first husband. They had mutual friends in Natrona where we have cousins. And my Dad came home in 1917. He was getting ready to be discharged. He was just a couple of days shy of having to go overseas 'cause the First World War was going on. But, he was discharged and, a year later, he married my mother. Second marriage for her; first for him.

bc: Where did they meet?

SG: They knew each other from years before 'cause we have cousins in Natrona. Peter, his name's Peter, [my father] knew that side of my family. And I think maybe he thought my mother was cute: she was a little, tiny woman. They got married and I was the first child from the second marriage. Altogether my mother had six children; my Dad had four that were his own. But he raised us all. He used to talk about being in the Army when they were building the canal.

bc: The Panama Canal?!

SG: Yeah. That's when he was in the Service. And he always blamed that job for giving him arthritis because, he said, half the time they slept on the ground. At least that was one of his stories. He was in the Service for twelve years. I don't know what his duties were.

bc: [We spend some time discussing framed family photographs shelved about SG's apartment, as well as several albums full of family photographs.]

SG: I don't even have all [the photographs] out, Barry, 'cause I don't have a lot of room. And the newest baby was just baptized a couple of weeks ago and he's the

one in the middle there. He's wearing a Baptismal dress that my mother made and most of us have worn it.

AF: Everyone one of us.

SG: Everyone has worn it and been baptized in it.

We're quite a big family.

The trouble is, when I lived at home, I had a dining room with a big table and a buffet. So I had enough room for a million pictures. But here I don't know where to put them. I don't have much cupboard space: that one there for odds-and-ends, and here for clothes.

bc: You were born what year?

SG: I was born 1921, January 5, 1921. And I got married to my husband when I was 20. They had started the draft. And we were just about ready to start having a family when they started the draft. So we put it off 'cause Bill wanted to join the Navy, which he did. He said he didn't want to go into the Army. He said he wanted somewhere to sleep. I guess he remembered Daddy talking about laying on the ground all the time. So we got married in May and Bill left for the Service on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January; and he was gone two-and-a-half years. He went to Great Lakes Training Station. That took six weeks. So they sent him home for the initial leave that they gave the Service people. And, while he was home, his father died. I remember. I lived right next door to my in-laws. And my parents lived next door to them. Red Cross got him home for the funeral. So that's what saved his life, I always said, because when he went back to the coast—he only got a week or so—when he went back to the coast, his ship had shipped out. So, as a replacement, he was put on the U. S. S. Columbia—which saved his life, really, technically—'cause his initial [assignment] was going to be the landing craft units, the little boats that [convey infantry and vehicles from sea to shore]: very dangerous. So, instead, he was on the gun crew on board the U. S. S. Columbia and they were part of the Pacific [theater] of fighting. Ever hear of the Leyte Gulf—the biggest [air-sea battle] in the Pacific? His ship was hit three times. But, luckily, he wasn't hit: when they build big ships, they somehow build them that, if they get hit, one bomb doesn't automatically sink everything. They would come into Hawaii for repairs. And...the only time he talked about sad things...so many men were killed in that battle with Japan and, when they came in [to Hawaii], the other boys they had to go in and drag the bodies out. He said...the broken arms here, and legs there.... He only mentioned it the one time, but he said that was the worst thing that he saw in the Service.

bc: I'm going to jump around with my questions: did you grow up alongside where your husband grew up?

SG: I grew up in Carnegie on Second Avenue. And he lived on Fifth Avenue. We moved when I was about 16. We moved up to a street called Cabbage Street. [SG describes the layout of the town of Carnegie.] [My family] finally moved up on Fifth Avenue and that was how I met my husband 'cause we bought the house next to my in-laws...so I ended up marrying the boy next door. He said he used to see me going to school and thought I was cute. [She chuckles.] That's his words.

AF: Tell him about the "intermarriage" that we have too.

SG: When we moved next door to [my husband's] family, my older brother from that first marriage, Eddie, fell in love with Bill's sister. So he married my

sister-in-law, Mary: brother and sister, and brother and sister marrying each other. So we really made it a close family. It was kind of a warm, well-knit family. [My husband's family] owned a house just two doors down and they rented half of it to Bill and I. So, while he was gone, I got a job at the Pennsylvania Railroad clerking, you know. And, when the boys came back, we all lost our jobs because that was the only way they would even hire you 'cause you had to give back the jobs that were the boys' jobs. So, then we started raising our family.

Mom had two children from the husband who died, and then four to my father. So there were six of us. Then, before you know it, we had three of our own. And now there's a bunch of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

bc: When your husband was at War, you worked.

SG: Yes. A cousin of mine who was a clerk [at] Scully Yards—it's in the general area of Crafton and Carnegie, kind of in the middle—they had a place there where you brought the trains in and they had a turn-around, where you can turn the engine around and then head it back out.

bc: Yeah, a roundhouse.

SG: I got a job. My cousin, he was already working for the railroad. So he told me about [the job]. I went in and applied and worked there while my husband was gone. And then, when he come back, I gave up the job 'cause it wasn't mine to keep forever.

bc: What did you do on the job?

SG: It was a clerical job. I called out the crews: the engineer 'n' at—they'd work in pairs. I guess I kept records of that. Then, when I quit and we had our family, I went to work before my husband got sick. That's where I got some clerical experience. In a way it benefited me in the '50s and '60s. When my husband died, I already had experience. I took a Civil Service test and got a job working for the State of Pennsylvania.

[At the Pennsylvania Railroad] I worked the night shift. And they had a stray cat there, Barry. (This is just a side thing.) And that cat loved me and I don't even like cats. I'm "a dog person." And I'd be writing something, doing reports in the middle of the night. (I was never too good at being up all night, but that's the first job I had.) That cat would jump—[SG illustrates her workspace] this is me and this is the desk—he would jump right in front and stare at me in the face so I would notice him. The cat was part of the office there. (You know how a lot of places will have a pet dog or cat?) This cat wanted me to pet him all the time. So, when I got laid off then, we started our family.

We were married 30 years when Bill died. He was a good man; that's his picture over there and he's holding that little dog that we adopted from the pound. That's a story! The people across the street from my mother's—on Fifth Avenue, where we all lived—they got themselves a dog from where they pick up strays. They kept it for about a week or so. They realized they weren't going to be able to handle it. So they were going to take it back. Well, when my girls heard about this...Oh God!..."Don't let them take that doggie back!" She's a smart dog too. Her name

was “Topsy.” I think the first people that had her must have trained her hitting her with newspaper ‘cause one of her ears was hanging down. So we named her “Topsy.” The girls, they said, “You can’t let that dog go back to the pound!” So we adopted her—best thing we ever did. She was so smart and, when my husband died, I got a job. Topsy knew when I’d be coming home. And we had one of our chairs by the window: she would be there waiting. She never made a mess in the house though we had to leave her. My husband died in ’71. And the dog died about six months after. (You’re not allowed to bury on your grounds; but, Christine, my youngest daughter, she wasn’t listening to nobody. She buried that little Topsy in our backyard.)

bc: You went back to work after your husband passed away.

SG: [I had gone back to work before my husband died.] I had gone down to the unemployment office to sign up. The woman down [at the unemployment office] said, Why don’t you take a Civil Service test? I did, and I got a job with the State of Pennsylvania, and I worked about 20 years there.

bc: What kind of work did you do for the State?

SG: Clerical, interviewing; people would come in they wanted to apply for food stamps or medical assistance.

bc: Department of Public Welfare?

SG: Yes.

When I got out of high school, there weren’t any jobs. Finally I got a little part-time job clerking. (Now you won’t believe this, but the wages were 25 cents an hour.)

bc: How did your family get through the Depression.

SG: The Depression—even before I was married—that goes back to when we lived on Second Avenue. My father worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad. He used to take a streetcar from Carnegie to Pitcairn, I think it was. And he packed a lunch. I think he must have made maybe \$3.00 a day. It wasn’t very much. And then, gradually, the wage scale got a little bit better.

In those days you didn’t pay a lot of rent. The rent—maybe \$15.00 a month or something. We didn’t own the house. In those days, those houses—that first house on Second Avenue had a bathroom underneath the back porch. Everybody had a garden. We raised chickens and rabbits to add to the food supply. [My mother] was a beautiful seamstress. She made that Baptismal outfit that baby’s wearing. She made all my girls’ clothes, and mine, and the one sister-in-law....

I never worked in a mill or anything like that. That job with the Pennsylvania Railroad—they had a supply [office] behind [the roundhouse]. So the men would come over and ask for this and that; and we supplied them with what they needed. It was interesting work because I saw when they changed the train and routed it around that [turntable]. It was war-time and it would be filled with

soldiers. And your heart would break, you know. I consider I had a very lucky life—because I had a family that loved each other.

bc: Carnegie is where Honus Wagner grew up. Did you always know it as “Carnegie” or as something else?

SG: Well, I only knew it as Carnegie. [It was, originally, called “Mansfield.”]

AF: There’s still a Mansfield Avenue there, right?

SG: It was a wonderful little town. When we were kids, you could just play out on the street. And there was this one Concordia Club across the street from that first house where we lived. [The Concordia Club] were the ones who always had a Christmas party for all the kids and bought them candy and little [treats].

bc: What was it like growing up in Carnegie?

SG: In Carnegie, like I said, you played on the street. You played “Go Sheepy Go.” [She laughs.] It was the name of one of the games. It was like a Hide-and-Seek. Another was just plain “Hide and Seek.”

bc: But they were different from each other?

SG: Yeah, I think so.

And then we walked to school.

And, I wanted to tell you, about people not having things. The bathroom in that first house was underneath the back porch. Then, when we moved to Cabbage Street, we had an inside bathroom. And then my mother and Dad bought the house up on Fifth Avenue. You didn’t have much then, Barry. I can remember coming home for lunch in the wintertime, never owning a pair of boots or a pair of gloves ‘cause you didn’t have the money to buy them. Then, when we got married and lived up on Fifth Avenue, people then were just starting to get TVs. And we got a TV—the first one on that street. So everyone came to our house to watch some programs. We didn’t have a telephone for years: we’d go over to either my mother’s house or my mother-in-law’s and borrow their phone. Yeah! People think nowadays, when they fill their homes with computers and all kinds of stuff—we didn’t have that kind of stuff.

bc: [I pick up her grandson’s cellphone, and say, “Telephone! Telephone!” AF laughs in response.]

SG: I wouldn’t even know how to use half that stuff.

bc: I don’t know how to use it either. I have other people dial for me. [I say conspiratorially; AF laughs again.]

That creek that overflowed [during the last major storms a couple of years ago] did a lot of damage. My sister is on the board of the Catholic Church that we belong to—St. Luke’s—and they’re in the process of [trying to re-establish the church]. Two of the churches got damaged: no use even fixing them. So they’re going to try to have only one church: combine [with] the church that’s up in Glendale. (That’s the next town up.) But it’s going to cost so much.

bc: Did you use the Andrew Carnegie Free Library in Carnegie?

SG: Oh yeah ‘cause I read so much.... Now I can’t read at all because my eyes went bad. I remember before we moved up on the hill next door to my future

in-laws, and I was in high school, I read through two books in one day. (I think I probably ruined my eyes then.) I read a lot. Now I can't read 'cause I can't see; I can't see to read now.

[bc suggests Talking Books.]

SG: I know. We have a big library here. [At her Asbury Heights residence.]

[SG, AF, and bc briefly discuss Mr. Andrew Carnegie, his gift of libraries around the world, and specifically his gift of a library to SG's hometown. We note that Mr. Carnegie made his money in steel.]

SG: My husband was a steelworker.

bc: What mill? Where?

SG: Right there in Carnegie. It's still there. But, when they came back from the Service, there were quite a few mills around. A couple of them [foundered]. But my husband, he started working when he was about 17, I guess, in a mill. And that's mainly what he did. He only had an eighth-grade education. In those days everyone didn't go to high school.

bc: So you've lived your whole life in Carnegie?

SG: Yes. And I'm here—[Asbury Heights]—four years.

AF: You realize: you lived within one square mile your entire life.

[We discuss Aging and the nature of Memory.]

bc: Your grandson makes a really important point. You basically lived in a very small space.

SG: Yeah.

bc: In terms of Carnegie.

How often did you come into Pittsburgh?

SG: I used to have to come every day when I worked. I used to shop, once in a while, in town. (My Dad worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad and, for a while, I could take a train to Fourth Avenue station. (I had a pass.) We had very good streetcar service. And eventually buses came in.

bc: So it was a big deal going into Pittsburgh.

SG: Yeah, 'cause we didn't have to really do it. [AF, SG, bc laugh.] 'Cause we had everything in Carnegie.

But Carnegie, at one time had every store you could imagine. They had four movie houses, two pharmacies (just in that little section). I think they had four other...kind of like a [G. C.] Murphy's. You didn't have to go to Pittsburgh. They had nice shops for women and men. They had quite a few [shops] that did the same thing. But it was a marvelous little town. It really was. What ruined it was when they closed some of the mills. (They had about four mills at one time. "Branches," you know.) And, when the boys came back and there was no work, that's when they started moving away. See—at one time Carnegie was a typical small town that you didn't have to go to Pittsburgh even to buy. You could get anything. They had marvelous—I think this one's still there—a marvelous store that made men's clothes. Miller's, I think their name was. (I didn't buy too many suits; my husband was a casual dresser.) The only thing we didn't have—when I look back on it now—(that's our wedding picture up there on the wall—my husband and me)—nowadays they have places all over where you can make an appointment and you go and have a picture taken—well, I think, [near] Carnegie

there was just that one guy that had a [photography] shop, and it was located, [outside of] Carnegie. That [wedding] picture was put away because, when we got married, you couldn't go and get a frame any size. When [I] moved here [Asbury Heights], that picture was put away in my cedar chest for years. And then, when his mother [AF's mother] found it, she took it home and his Dad [AF's Dad] made the frame for it. Did you know that? [SG asks her grandson.]

AF: I did not know that.

bc: Your father?

AF: Yeah.

Hey, Grandma, tell Barry about your first date.

SG: With Billy?

AF: Tell him about Jimmy too.

Tell him the whole story....

SG: In high school there was a real nice Italian boy [named] Jimmy. And he went to the high school that was up in Scott Township right up on the other hill, like towards Glendale. This was the time we didn't have cafeterias so we had to walk back and forth for our meals. Well Jimmy would—I guess he must have gulped down his food—because he managed to be there to walk me home, hold my hand. We never got to the kissing stage. (Things were different then.) And then he'd walk me back and manage to get back to school on time. Well, when I met Billy, my husband next door, you know, and Bill asked me out: I was supposed to see Jimmy that night. (There were four movie houses in Carnegie and we used to sit up...Oh God love him...we used to sit up in the balcony and we'd sit there and hold hands.) But anyway, Jimmy was walking me home and I was such an honest.... (Honesty is something that's inbred in you, you know.) And he says, "We'll go see this movie." And I say, "Jimmy, I have to tell you, I've met somebody else that I've fallen for." I knew Bill was the one for me. And I wasn't going to lie to Jimmy. He took it like the good guy he was. (I bumped into his sister—I can't think of her name now—they lived in East Carnegie. I was there for supper one time—a complete Italian meal—homemade stuff. And she told me that, after I broke off with her brother Jimmy—it sounds like I'm bragging—he never dated another girl for a year, she told me. So I don't know what happened to him 'cause he ended up in the Service. I think he was in the Vietnam War. And I don't know if he still lives in Carnegie or what. He married somebody else. But, I guess I broke his heart. Oh dear. I didn't mean to. I was such an innocent thing too. In our time we were different.

Well, when Bill died, the kids used to say, Mummy, why don't you get married again? I remember telling them, Well, you find someone like your Dad, then I just might. But I was never interested in finding somebody else. He was my true love; he really was. I'm not saying that we didn't sometime argue.... (I can tell this one:) The ones in my family that have gotten married...[I've told them this:] I want to tell you the secret of [grandpap and I], why we had a good marriage and a loving marriage—even if we had an argument, at night, when we went to bed at night, my husband always slept with his arms around me. Never once, even if we were mad about something.... In fact, when he would come home from the mill,

from second shift—it'd be eleven o'clock and I'd be in bed and sometimes I didn't hear him...he'd come in.... We always had a double bed, and he would pull me over and he'd say, "What are you doin' over there?" [SG laughs.] So that's one of my secrets. (I remember telling my middle daughter this story. And she said, "Mummy, do you mean that's true?" I said, "Yes, that's true, honey.")

bc: After that story, this question is kind of beside the point, but, how do you keep busy?

SG: Well, just until recently I could read. And they have all kinds of things for us here—entertainment—and I go to what I can go to. [Before I came to Asbury Heights], I went to church every day. I never missed church in my whole life that I can remember.

AF: You bought a lottery ticket every day too didn't you?

SG: No, I think I bought it three times. I have a friend—when the lottery just started at Eagles in Carnegie, I didn't even know how to play it and Mary Catherine, this friend of mine, she was already a gambler. She told me, "This is this," and "You do it..." So, I went down and bought a ticket, a dollar ticket....