Interview with Dorothy Stafford
Date: March 10, 1999
Interviewer: Judy Ehrlich, Rick Tejada-Flores
Camera Rolls: 62
Sound Rolls:

Interview gathered as part of "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors." Produced by Paradigm Productions. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Interview with Dorothy Stafford, conducted by Paradigm Productions on March 10, 1999 for "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors." Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in bold italics was used in the final version of "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors."

00:00:11:00—00:00:42:00

Dorothy Stafford:

Alright.

Interviewer #1:

Because we—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Rolling.

Interviewer #1:

—we finally are rolling?

Interviewer #2:

OK, we're ready to go now.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Don't look at me. Just look at Judy.

Interviewer #2:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

OK, OK.

Dorothy Stafford:

My name is William Staff— [laughs] start again, please.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs] We'll do that.

Dorothy Stafford:

My name is Dorothy Stafford, and I was married to William Stafford for almost fifty years. He was a loving man, a funny man, a remarkable man, but I never quite understood him. I think he put himself into the poems, but they, too, are mysterious.

00:00:43:00—00:02:58:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk about meeting him.

Dorothy Stafford:

We had a, an interesting meeting. My father was a minister in the Church of the Brethren, one of the three sponsoring peace churches for the camps. And one Sunday I was home from my job in Riverside—teaching—and my father was to preach at the camp. And he said, Dorothy, would you like to go along? And I liked my father and we had good talks, so I said, sure, that would be fun. And we went. He gave his sermon in the truth. And in the evening, Bill asked me to go for a walk with him. And it was a full moon, which was very fine. And we walked over a dry creek bed. California in the summer has many dry creek beds. And the sand was powdery. And I said, this reminds me of Willa Cather's story “Obscure Destinies,” where the moon and, and the night are blended together. And he said, oh, do you know Willa Cather? I said, of course, she's one of ours. I'm from Nebraska. And he said, well, he said, my parents really loved Willa Cather, and we went to the library once a week; my father moved often in his job, but when we got to a little town, we knew we had friends, all those books on the shelves. And so I told him about my parents reading Tennyson and Browning to each other, and, and then he s-, told me about—what was the next thing... anyway, the gist of all this was, we had a very fine evening. And the second time I was with him—'cause I lived 100 miles away from the camp—he said, what was it always going to be like, Dorothy? And

I said, just like this. And he s-, I said, but you don't know if I can cook. And he said, well, that doesn't matter. You don't know if I can bring anything home to cook. So we gambled, and it worked. [laughs]

00:02:59:00—00:03:11:00

Interviewer #1:

That's great.

Dorothy Stafford:

That was the meeting.

Interviewer #1:

So you grew up in the Church of the Brethren.

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

So, what, were you—

Interviewer #2:

Talk a little bit about what that means.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, and, and what, and—

Camera Crew Member #2:

—plug the charger, to change it—

Interviewer #2:

Just, just don't—

Interviewer #1:

Can you explain a little about the p-—

[cut]

00:03:12:00—00:04:00:00

Interviewer #2:

—talk about growing up in, in the Brethren church and religion. What that meant.

Camera Crew Member #1:

We're on.

Interviewer #1:

Rolling. Go ahead.

Dorothy Stafford:

The Church of the Brethren is one of the three historic peace churches, and I lived in a little town in California, La Verne, and, where most of the people belonged to the Church of the Brethren. So it just seemed like the world to me. And we didn't have many discussions about it, because everyone assumed that we all believed the same thing. So it was a normal childhood, I think. They have no creed in the Church of the Brethren, and you interpret religion in your own way. I guess that's the gist of it. But peace was prominent.

00:04:01:00—00:04:47:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk a little, we were talking before about quietism and the cre-, and the—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—the pacifism, and the—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes, and I think the pacifist position was that of the Church of the Brethren because most of the people believed that you didn't confront, you persuaded, and there's a great difference. And I think the war's always a confrontation, instead of a persuasion. So, you don't un-see what you see. I grew up seeing that position, so when the war came along, I couldn't un-see it. I thought of the people on the other side, the families, who had nothing to do with the

conflict, really. So it was, it was a real part of me.

00:04:48:00—00:05:38:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk about the, the, you had dated a, a military officer—

Dorothy Stafford:

At the time I met Bill, I was going with a captain in the Army, and we'd gone to the coast the night before, Saturday night. And he was telling me all about the great accomplishments of his time in the war. And I said, very innocently, do you ever think about the people on the other side? And he said, well, you can't when you're in war; you have a job to do, and you do it. Well, then I met Bill, whose whole life was a straight arrow toward the other goal of, of living your life and letting other people live their lives according to the way they saw it. So it was quite a conversion. [laughs]

00:05:39:00—00:05:44:00

[plane overhead]

Interviewer #1:

Can we stop for a second.

Dorothy Stafford:

I...

Camera Crew Member #2:

Airplane.

Interviewer #1:

I, she got through that, though—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah—

Interviewer #2:

—right?

Interviewer #2:

—the, yeah, we got through—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah? So—

[cut]

00:05:45:00—00:06:02:00

Interviewer #1:

—about—

Camera Crew Member #1:

For now it is...

Interviewer #1:

—quiet of the land. You said—

Interviewer #2:

Quiet of the earth.

Interviewer #1:

—that—quiet of the earth? Quiet of the land.

Dorothy Stafford:

Quiet of the land.

Interviewer #2:

What's—

Interviewer #1:

Quiet of the land.

Interviewer #2:

—what's that? Tell us—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—tell us that phrase, and tell us what it means to you.

Interviewer #1:

And—

Dorothy Stafford:

Well, I guess I... just a minute [reaches to her face]

Interviewer #1:

Are we OK? Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

Don't record for a minute.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Dorothy Stafford:

I guess I—

[cut]

00:06:03:00—00:06:50:00

Dorothy Stafford:

—it's persuading.

Interviewer #1:

Right.

Interviewer #2:

But say, say—

Dorothy Stafford:

But maybe I could talk a little more—

Interviewer #2:

—say that phrase, the quiet of the—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—earth.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah, all right.

Interviewer #1:

'Cause Bill uses it, too—

Interviewer #2:

The Brethren—

Interviewer #1:

—but it's—

Interviewer #2:

—are the quiet of the earth.

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #2:

Tell us something like that.

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes. The Brethren are called the quiet of the land, and I think it's because there is a feeling within the church, and the people who believe what they go for, that we won't win, and the meek shall inherit the earth hasn't happened yet—

[thud]

Dorothy Stafford:

—but we always hope it will, and you think if you treat other people the way you want to be treated. That is the golden rule. Things will... I don't know, turn out right, but you'll be a part of what you think is right.

00:06:51:00—00:10:24:00

Interviewer #1:

Hmm. What was it like being a pacifist during the war? Especially a war like World War II, as massive as that was.

Dorothy Stafford:

Well, when we were married in April—I had met Bill in August—and then we had, he had a week off and we had a honeymoon in the mountains, California. And then I went back to teaching, and he went back to Santa Barbara, to the camp. And, I know, where I was teaching, it was a small school, and there were three teachers and six grades out by March Field—good setting for a pacifist. So, the people there, I discussed it, but I could tell they were far from understanding it. And you can't change people's minds, instantly, or even over a long time. So I didn't talk much about it. And then, that summer I went to Belden, where they had moved the camp from Santa Barbara, and lived in a house with a friend of mine who was a teacher in another town. I hadn't known her. And the address on the key was, house across from the bar, and on Saturday night we knew exactly where we lived. [laughs] But that was a good summer. It was about two miles from the camp, and, so our husbands could come home once in a while. But we had apple box bookcases, and all those things that you had in those days. We were very poor, since Bill made two dollars and a half a month in,

as a CO—

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

—and I had saved a little money. They were encouraged in the camp, by the way, to put in all their money.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

So Bill put in the $600 that he was using for graduate school. And of course, they never got it, any of that back, so when the war was over, started with really nothing.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

In fact, he didn't have a suit to wear, so when we were married he borrowed my cousin's suit and said he'd have to watch Harold's weight so he could keep on [laughs] with his benefactor. But the two discriminations I felt, and it's very small, for that experience, were when we lived in Elgin, Illinois, where the headquarters of the Brethren part of the camp was. Bill was education secretary there for six months. And I taught, and the superintendant said he would, yes, he'd hire me, but since my husband wasn't a soldier, he would, I would get $300 less. Well, now I can't imagine taking that attitude, but we had to have the money. And it was very gratifying when I finished that semester. He said, oh I made a mistake. I'll give it to you if you'll keep teaching. Well, we moved, so... and then the other time, we had an apartment in Elgin. And it was kind of a dramatic house, because the first floor, the woman had a bloodhound, and you could hear him walk along on the floor with all his claws. And we had Japanese friends there, which we invited up to our house, our apartment. And the woman finally said, I don't want them Japs in my house, I wish you'd move. So we moved to a much better place, above the garage where the landlord lived, miles away. [laughs]

00:10:25:00—00:11:24:00

Interviewer #1:

Did you—were you, did you wanna say something? Go ahead.

Interviewer #2:

I just want to jump in a little bit.

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes?

Interviewer #2:

Back the whole religious teaching of—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #2:

—of bearing witness and doing what's, you, what's right, [pause] do people in, in your faith feel isolated? Do they feel unconnected from the rest of the world that's going in a different way? How does that feel when your religion tells you, gives you one set of values, and you look around society and, and so many other things are happening?

Dorothy Stafford:

Well, there are many discussions. I think—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Can you talk to Judy?

Dorothy Stafford:

—the church—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, yeah.

Dorothy Stafford:

I think the church is more worldly now. It started out with, my father didn't wear a necktie, so I had this picture in the album of no necktie, so I can remember, as a little girl, I took a pencil and drew in a necktie. [laughs] I think now they're much like, oh, Methodists, or, well, let's see, what else... well, certainly Quakers and Mennonites.

00:11:25:00—00:12:20:00

Interviewer #2:

I'm just trying to get a sense of whether, both through your religion and also through your pacifism, whether, where you got a sense of feeling isolated? That, that, that there were people who believed like you did, and then the rest of the world was different, and you...

Dorothy Stafford:

Well, I've thought about this. I think, temperamentally, I'm a very sociable person, and I have learned from a long time ago, and I think during that time, I'd try to separate people and interact with the things I admire and like about them, and if I can put in a word now and then, wonderful, and I try to do that. But I don't really proclaim, and so I think I've felt a part of the world. And I guess I keep this little secret place where I know who I am and what I believe.

00:12:21:00—00:13:32:00

Interviewer #1:

Hmm. You said to me, when we talked on the phone, something about always feeling like you went your own way—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes—

Interviewer #1:

—that—can you—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes—

Interviewer #1:

—is that, can you just expound on that a little bit?

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes. I think, I feel like an independent person, and I think both Bill and I could sort of go this way [gestures zigzagging]. And I, in my teaching I could do that with children. Accept what was promising, and try to work on what wasn't.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

But it really worked. And I can remember saying, first of the year, you can be any way you want to be. You can be as mean as you want to be, you're, that's what's wonderful about living. You can be yourself. You can't act anyway you want to be, however, feel like, but—and that made them feel—and I can't make you be good, follow the rules, learn. You do all those things. But I can help you. And I guess I feel, any place I can put in a little, little word. And I feel with some of my friends, maybe they're getting the light.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm. Talk—

Dorothy Stafford:

I don't know.

00:13:33:00—00:14:12:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk about conscientious objection. What does that mean to you, and what did it mean during World War II, to be part of that? And did you feel—

Dorothy Stafford:

That you're—yes, that you're conscience—we were brought up by our parents to think that our conscience was really important, and that you didn't follow what other people wanted you to do if you didn't believe it. And during those college years, the Thirty-is [sic], Thirties, I remember signing an oath that I would ne-, never take part in war. Bill did that, too, and many, many people did. But then it dissolved when the war came along.

00:14:13:00—00:15:05:00

Interviewer #1:

He talks in the, in one of the poems about, or, it's in "Down In The Heart," about being a foreigner, feeling like a foreigner in his own land—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes, yes.

Interviewer #1:

—and then that changing again, having felt—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—like there was this upsurge in the Thirties, and then—talk about—

Dorothy Stafford:

I think—

Interviewer #1:

—that—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—transition.

Dorothy Stafford:

I think I'd have felt different if I'd been in camp. They were so isolated. All those years I was in the world, and went ahead with my teaching, and I—now I feel alone, many times, because there aren't people of my persuasion—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

—around, and, but I just think that's the way it is, and I'm going to be happy in spite of all those things. It's hard not to be happy, I find.

00:15:06:00—00:16:30:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk a little about being, though, what that was like to be a pacifist at a time when everyone, when the majori-, you know, the vast majority of people around you—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—agreed that this was a great war—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—and, you know—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—we're all together in it, and you weren't, so—

Dorothy Stafford:

Well—

Interviewer #1:

—what was—

Dorothy Stafford:

—I think it was very hard to answer this war, more s-, much more so than World War I, or the Vietnam War, because the Hitler regime was terrible. And when people would ask the COs—I heard this answer several times—what would you do, what would you, would you have done to make this go away? And one of the answers was, if you're standing on the dock and you see a great ocean liner heading toward you, you look around frantically and think, what could I do? You can't do anything, it's too late. And I think with most of the COs—the intellectual COs, anyway—thought about the, the First World War and how the seeds of the

Second were planted right there very obviously. So I think we all came out feeling, well, when the war's over, we're going to do what we can to avoid the next catastrophe.

00:16:31:00—00:17:35:00

Interviewer #1:

Did you—

Interviewer #2:

But—

Interviewer #1:

—go ahead.

Interviewer #2:

Dorothy, I mean, it's clear for anyone who lived through it that it was a, an incredible tragedy, and yet why do you think that experience has come to be known as, the good war?

Dorothy Stafford:

That's what bothers me.

Interviewer #2:

Say—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—talk about the phrase, the good war. Use that in a sentence.

Dorothy Stafford:

The good war... I can see why people say it, but I think of the Holocaust victims, which is the worst thought you can have, but at the same time, I think of the civilians, and their families and their children, who were—and the Japanese especially. It just didn't seem necessary to be so extreme in everything, for one thing.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

And that's, I think that was the hardest thing for me, to think that people never thought of anyone but Americans—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

—at that time.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

'course the Germans, but it wasn't, wasn't the quiet of the land that got any notoriety.

Interviewer #1:

Talk about how—

Interviewer #2:

[coughing] Excuse me for a minute.

[cut]

00:17:38:00—00:18:45:00

Interviewer #1:

—we, it's, this story's being lost in a lot of ways, about the COs of World—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—War II—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—and how Bill Stafford's poetry is part of keeping that story alive.

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes. It's so interesting to me, even now—and he's been gone for five years.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

I get letters all the time from people whose lives he touched in many ways. And once we were taking recycling down to the recycling place—

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

—down here and there was a fellow dumping his plastic bottles in a, in a case, and he said, are you William Stafford? And Bill said, yes. Said, I've carried around a poem in my pocket since the Vietnam War. Interesting.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

And then we were in a restaurant at the coast, and the, the, one of the cooks came out and said, are you William Stafford? [laughs] And he said, I have the poem, "What the River Says," in my pocket. That happens all the time.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

And, Anne Morrow Lindbergh carried a poem of Bill's in her purse—

[cut]

[switch tape]

00:18:46:00—00:20:08:00

Interviewer #1:

—please.

Camera Crew Member #1:

We are rolling.

Dorothy Stafford:

I'm amazed at how far Bill's poems went. Really were ripples on the, from a pebble, because they get responses from everywhere. And one of them was in a book by Charles Kuralt, his last book, I think, called, Crossing America. And he was way up north, above the border, I'm sure. And the person who was with him said, I have a poem here that just suits this occasion. And it was called, "At The Un-National Monument along the Canadian Border." [reads] "This is the field where the battle did not happen, where the unknown soldier did not die. This is the field where grass joined hands, where no monument stands, and the only heroic thing is the sky. Birds fly here without any sound, unfolding their wings across the open. No people killed—or were killed—on this ground hallowed by neglect and an air so tame that people celebrate it by forgetting its name."

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

I can see them up in the stillness of the north, and the borders didn't mean anything.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

To a canoe.

00:20:09:00—00:20:24:00

Interviewer #1:

What, what's your favorite poem?

Dorothy Stafford:

Oh...

Interviewer #1:

Do you have one?

Dorothy Stafford:

That's hard.

I know, that's like my son asking me—

Interviewer #2:

You know—

Interviewer #1:

—what was best—

Interviewer #2:

—before you go on—

Interviewer #1

—day of my life—yeah?

Interviewer #2:

Vicente, could, could we shoot the poem one more time—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Yeah, I'd like to.

Interviewer #2:

—and get a closeup?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

Could you—

[sound cuts to one channel]

Dorothy Stafford:

Well—

Interviewer #2:

—read the poem, before you told me—

[cut]

00:20:25:00—00:21:13:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, rolling.

Interviewer #2:

Go ahead.

Dorothy Stafford:

This poem is called—

Camera Crew Member #2:

No, w-, wait a minute.

Interviewer #2:

Are you not ready? OK, tell us when you're ready.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Go ahead.

Dorothy Stafford:

This poem is called, "At The Un-National Monument along the Canadian Border" [reads]: "This is the field where the battle did not happen, where the unknown soldier did not die. This is the field where grass joined hands, where no monument stands, and the only heroic thing is the sky. Birds fly here without any sound, unfolding their wings across the open. No people killed—or were killed—on this ground hallowed by neglect and an air so tame that people celebrate it by forgetting its name."

00:21:14:00—00:21:35:00

Interviewer #1:

That's a wonderful poem. For some reason, I had, heard the words to "Imagine"—

Interviewer #2:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

—floating in there. There's just—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

—there's some resonance with the words to that...

Dorothy Stafford:

I can just hear Bill reading—

Interviewer #1:

Yes.

Dorothy Stafford:

—these poems.

Interviewer #1:

Well, you read them beautifully—

Dorothy Stafford:

—you know, it's wonderful.

Interviewer #1:

—yourself.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Oh. Go and get that book.

Dorothy Stafford:

That when he died, he was going to give a reading of, for—

Interviewer #2:

Do you want the other book? He'll get it for you.

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

Tell him where it is.

Dorothy Stafford:

Well, it's not a book—

[cut]

00:21:36:00—00:22:42:00

Dorothy Stafford:

I'm thinking about, all the poems I loved, and I can remember at readings, someone would ask, quite often, what's your favorite poem, Mr. Stafford? And he'd say, I love all my children. [laughs] So I guess I love all his children, too, but this one is personal. It's called "Our Story" [reads]: "Remind me again—together we trace our strange journey, find each other, come on laughing. Some time we'll cross where life ends." [voice cracks] I, I don't think I can read it. "We'll both look back as far as forever, that first day. I'll touch you—" I can't. Read it, it's too good. Somebody else—

Interviewer #1:

I can't read it.

Dorothy Stafford:

—oughtta read it.

Interviewer #1:

You know I can't. [laughs]

Interviewer #2:

No, no, we can't—

Dorothy Stafford:

I should do better than that.

Interviewer #1:

I cry more easily than you do.

Interviewer #2:

Take a deep breath—

Dorothy Stafford:

I'll try again. Should I try again?

Interviewer #1:

I think you're doing really well. It's OK.

Interviewer #2:

OK, let's, let's—

Interviewer #1:

Let's all—

Interviewer #2:

—let's come—

Interviewer #1:

—take a deep breath.

Interviewer #2:

—back to it in a minute, let's come back to it in a minute, OK?

Interviewer #1:

I do, too.

Dorothy Stafford:

All right.

Interviewer #2:

Let's, I, I think emotionally we'll,—

Dorothy Stafford:

I don't know why I...

Interviewer #2:

—we'll be able to handle it.

Camera Crew Member #3:

You don't know why you're touched? You're touched—

Dorothy Stafford:

You'd think I'd be over it [laughs].

Camera Crew Member #3:

—for the same reason you were touched the first time!

Dorothy Stafford:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

You're doing great.

00:22:41:00—00:23:41:00

Interviewer #2:

When, when we were talking to Kim, he, he made a very dramatic statement on—you're not as dramatic as your son in some ways, but, but talk to me, what you and, and Bill thought about when you heard that the war was over, what, what that meant to you—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah—

Interviewer #2:

—personally—

Dorothy Stafford:

—yeah—

Interviewer #2:

—personally—

Dorothy Stafford:

—yeah—

Interviewer #2:

—as well as for the world—

Dorothy Stafford:

Uh-huh.

Interviewer #2:

—and, you know, for your ideas.

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah. Loved to think about the family. It was really our joy. [pause] Ready?

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Dorothy Stafford:

This poem is called "Our Story" [reads]: "Remind me again—together we trace our strange journey, find each other, come on laughing. Some time we'll cross where life ends. We'll both look back as far as forever, that first day. I'll touch you—a new world then. Stars will move a different way. We'll both end. We'll both begin. Remind me again." Very nice, isn't it?

00:23:42:00—00:24:11:00

Interviewer #1:

It's pretty.

Interviewer #2:

Lovely.

Interviewer #1:

I cried more than you did that time. [laughs]

Dorothy Stafford:

I could try it again.

Interviewer #2:

No, no.

Dorothy Stafford:

I can get to the end this time. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

Oh, you did great. It's a beautiful poem.

Dorothy Stafford:

These people are divorced, by the way.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

Oh, oh I see.

Dorothy Stafford:

Awful.

Interviewer #2:

And we thought it was autobiography.

Camera Crew Member #3:

The end. You just saw the end of a lifetime.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Oh, that was a wonderful end [laughs].

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, I saw that over a Las Vegas wedding party.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs] I hope you were rolling.

Dorothy Stafford:

[laughs] That would be good.

Interviewer #1:

I feel better, now I can laugh.

Dorothy Stafford:

Ah...

00:24:12:00—00:26:25:00

Interviewer #1:

[stutters] Do you wanna, but, the, how about the, what Rick was just asking about, what it was like when the war ended. Actually, I, you know, I'd love to hear you s-, talk about the day the war started. What was that—

Interviewer #2:

Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer #1:

—like—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah and [unintelligible].

Interviewer #1:

—to be a pacifist the day of Pearl Harbor?

Dorothy Stafford:

I can remember where I was. I had visited my sister, in Pasadena, and I had the radio on. And it was a beautiful evening, you know. Some of those evenings were just so beautiful, it hurt, and that was one.

Camera Crew Member #2:

You can't touch the microphone, I'm sorry.

Dorothy Stafford:

I know I can't and—

Camera Crew Member #2:

It's all right.

Dorothy Stafford:

—I touched it.

Interviewer #2:

[unintelligible]

Interviewer #1:

It was lovely—

Dorothy Stafford:

With the radio—

Interviewer #1:

—say that again.

Dorothy Stafford:

You want to do it again?

Interviewer #1:

Do that part again.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, you have to do it again.

Dorothy Stafford:

Where shall I start?

Interviewer #1:

Just, you know...

Dorothy Stafford:

Oh. I was visiting my sister in La Cañada, and I was on the way home, and it was evening. One of those perfect evenings where you just feel terribly sad—that was before I met Bill. And I heard on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, and what was going to happen. I stopped the car, sat there a while and thought, what does this mean? Thought a long time. And I thought of my brother, who was a doctor, and I thought of friends I had, I, who weren't of my persuasion. It was very frightening. And then I thought, well, you just go ahead, you do what you have to do, and you help if you can, and maybe things'll be all right. But I know Bill said, when he was in the camp, they just thought the war would go on forever. I mean, that was the terrible part of it, because they weren't getting anywhere in their lives, and they were promised, of course, to do work of national importance when they went into the camps. And then apparently the government thought it would be too public, and the idea might spread, and you can't do that in a war. So they kept them in these camps, where they would do things, like fight fires, that wouldn't cause any publicity...

00:26:26:00—00:27:25:00

Interviewer #1:

You'd said he wa— he had trained to go overseas. Was that part of that whole—

Dorothy Stafford:

At one point, yes, he went to China—I mean, didn't go to China, but the project was in China. And he went to a little town in North Manchester, Indiana, where there was a group, I think, of about fifty men from different camps. And they were to learn how to do many things, but especially deliver babies.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

And they were showed how to cut the cord with a hoe, and they were eager to do something that they thought would make a difference to human beings. But then at the last minute it was cancelled, so they all came back to the camps. And I think that was a really despondent time.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

Because they could see that nothing was ever going to happen—

Interviewer #1:

Why—

Dorothy Stafford:

—really.

00:27:26:00—00:27:33:00

Interviewer #1:

—why do you think it was cancelled?

Dorothy Stafford:

I think the government was afraid of publicity—that if they were out there helping, doing constructive things, that the public relations would be difficult, for promoting the war.

00:27:34:00—00:28:40:00

Interviewer #1:

So, do you think the CPS system worked for the government, and how do you think it worked for the people who were in it?

Dorothy Stafford:

I think it...

Interviewer #1:

Can you say, CPS?

Dorothy Stafford:

CPS, Civilian Public Service camps... I think it alienated many people who went in as idealists, and they were frustrated, and four years out of your life when you're very young. You think of what you could be doing. And they all had plans, when they went in, for their lives. Suddenly it was cut short, and I think the frustration made many of them bitter. And, so they went to jail, some of them, because they couldn't stand it anymore. They had to do something dramatic. And some of them just lived till it was over.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

But I can see why they felt alien to society, because the world went on without them. And they thought they were doing something—well, they were doing something they felt they had to do, most of them, and they didn't know the end.

00:28:41:00—00:30:27:00

Interviewer #1:

Hmm. Some peop-—

Interviewer #2:

I want—

Interviewer #1:

Go ahead.

Interviewer #2:

—Dorothy, what you're saying about them being very eager to have an opportunity like the relief work—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #2:

—because, you know, you, the public perception when we show this, regardless of how great these people are, is—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—well, how hard could they have had it when they weren't getting killed?

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #2:

You know, that is to say—

Dorothy Stafford:

That's right.

Interviewer #2:

—were they really—

Dorothy Stafford:

That's right. Well, most of—

Interviewer #2:

—were they—

Dorothy Stafford:

—the—

Interviewer #2:

—willing to commit to—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—something if they felt it was positive?

Dorothy Stafford:

The people I knew were, were wonderful people who had great plans for improving the world in their lifetimes. So, one thing that did produce a respect was the units they had in mental hospitals. And, you weren't sent there unless you wanted to go. But they had experiments like the, the cold room. They would put them in a room and get the temperature so low to see what would happen to your personality and your actions. And then they had the hot room, and various things like that. And then, one thing that was very, it was really

positive about that experience—and I don't remember, I think it was in Maryland—a unit, a mental hospital where the practices of the caretakers toward the patients really changed, because these men made great, a to-do, really, about how these patients were treated—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

—not as human beings. And so the state policy changed.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

Which was one absolute kind of action. And I think many of them wanted to do something like that, but were prohibited.

00:30:28:00—00:31:15:00

Interviewer #1:

Do you think that the—

Interviewer #2:

[clears throat]

Interviewer #1:

—the government, the government didn't do CPS again, after the, after—

Dorothy Stafford:

No, no.

Interviewer #1:

—World War II.

Dorothy Stafford:

No.

Interviewer #1:

Do you feel like the, I mean, from what you were saying, that they were, they did this system because it kept people out of the way—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—and it did that, it—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes, yes, it—

Interviewer #1:

—did successfully, right?

Dorothy Stafford:

—did.

Interviewer #1:

So why do you think they didn't do a system like that again, and why do you think...

Dorothy Stafford:

Well, the, it was, it was terribly expensive for the churches, 'cause they had to support the camps. And I suppose the government thought there'd be some case where they were expected to. I hadn't thought of this, but I think that might have been right.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

And then there was so much ferment a-, about this, and from some people, especially the ones who went to jail.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

I think they were just afraid it would backfire—

00:31:16:00—00:31:48:00

Interviewer #1:

What was the, talk about how—

Dorothy Stafford:

—possibly.

Interviewer #1:

I'm sorry. The—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—hardship on families of the, what was it like for wives and children?

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes. Well, many of the wives, if they didn't have children, went on working, as I did. And if they had children, some of them moved to the ca-, outside the camps, and did what the—some of them had families that would support them, parents. Some of them tried little projects of various kinds to make money. But it was very hard.

00:31:49:00—00:32:06:00

Interviewer #1:

Compare it, though, to, just a, to a GI's wife. They were, had, probably, what, how much was a, was a private in the Army making compared to a CO?

Dorothy Stafford:

I don't know. I'd—

Interviewer #1:

You know—

Dorothy Stafford:

—like to know.

Interviewer #1:

—I wonder, 'Cause two-fifty a month—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—it had to be a lot more than that, right?

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, sure.

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

So, the, I mean—

Interviewer #2:

So—

Interviewer #1:

Go ahead.

00:32:07:00—00:34:01:00

Interviewer #2:

—the, I want to sort of, back off a little bit, now, because this is fifty years after the end of

the war—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—and it's a story that's really vivid to—

[zipper noise]

Interviewer #2:

—you and your family because you lived through it and it meant a lot to you. When you think about people seeing this or hearing about it for the first time, what, what do you want them to get, to understand about what these people—yourself and your husband, and all your other friends—went through? What, what's the important thing that you want people to know about it?

Dorothy Stafford:

Well, I guess I think of Shakespeare, "to thine own self be true." It's a, a cliche, but it's true. I think if you have a feeling that, if you have this feeling that you're a pacifist, and you can't act otherwise, there's something powerful in your life, and I suppose people who have no experience with this must wonder. It's a mystery. And I, being brought up this way, it was easier for me. Much easier.

Interviewer #1:

Mm.

But of course, a lot of men were married to women who weren't pacifists. Some of the marriages broke up—

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

—because of that. I don't know. It's so close to me, as you must understand.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

Of course, the Vietnam War brought a lot of this out, and there's a wonderful photograph of Bill downtown, when they were having a big protest, and he was reading poems from the podium. And he is way off, he's small, and the foreground of the picture is a great big policeman with his arms folded. It's really good. And then all these, the pacifists, it was a rally for pacifists.

00:34:02:00—00:34:17:00

Interviewer #1:

Uh-huh. Do you have a copy of that somewhere?

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

I want—

Dorothy Stafford:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—to see that.

Interviewer #2:

OK, if—

Dorothy Stafford:

But that's kind of the world and the pacifist. It's out there, clamoring and, with power, and we don't have anything but belief—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

—and hope.

00:34:18:00—00:34:30:00

Interviewer #1:

Could you read another poem? Are, either from there or from any—

Interviewer #2:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—of his—

Dorothy Stafford:

Let's see what shall we have?

Interviewer #1:

—more...

Dorothy Stafford:

Oh.

Interviewer #1:

And a few that I ran across.

Dorothy Stafford:

I don't know if this is related, but it seemed to me "A Ritual to Re-"—

[cut]

00:34:31:00—00:34:37:00

Dorothy Stafford:

—this, what's this index like? Is it...

Interviewer #1:

It is, they're all there.

Dorothy Stafford:

Do you want to find it fast? [exchanges book]

Interviewer #1:

Yep.

[cut]

00:34:38:00—00:36:26:00

Dorothy Stafford:

What—

Interviewer #1:

Yes.

Dorothy Stafford:

—were we talking about?

Interviewer #1:

Don't worry, you can—

Interviewer #2:

Just read it.

Dorothy Stafford:

All right.

Interviewer #1:

—just read it. That's alright.

Dorothy Stafford:

A poem I like very much, called "A Ritual to Read to Each Other." And we had friends on Guemes island in the San Juans, who taught high school in Anacortes. And she told me that

every fall, this was the first thing she did with her students. She said, if we really believe this, we'll have a wonderful year. "A Ritual to Read to Each Other" [reads]: "If you don't know the kind of person I am and I don't know the kind of person you are a pattern that others made may prevail in the world and following the wrong god home we may miss our star. For there is many a small betrayal in the mind, a shrug that lets the fragile sequence break sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood storming out to play through the broken dike. And as elephants parade holding each elephant's tail, but if one wanders the circus won't find the park, I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty to know what occurs but not recognize the fact. And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy, a remote important region in all who talk: though we could fool each other, we should consider—lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark. For it is important that we awake people be awake, or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep; the signals we give—yes or no, or maybe—should be clear: the darkness around us is deep."

Interviewer #1:

Hmm. [pause] Hmm.

00:36:27:00—00:36:34:00

Interviewer #2:

[pause] I think maybe we're done?

Interviewer #1:

I think we're done.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Let's get some room tone.

Interviewer #2:

Yes, we need to all have our—

Interviewer #1:

Do we, is there—

Interviewer #2:

—we have our—

Interviewer #1:

—any—

[cut]

00:36:35:00—00:36:42:00

Interviewer #1:

—what you learned from World War II, and, and the CO experience?

Dorothy Stafford:

[stutters] We're, not on tape, but—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah. They—

00:36:43:00—00:37:21:00

[cut]

Interviewer #2:

Oh. Where were we?

Dorothy Stafford:

[laughs] I forgot what I was gonna say now. It was important, too.

Interviewer #1:

I'm sure you, and we're waiting, we'll wait for a minute. We have nowhere to go.

Dorothy Stafford:

Turn it off and I'll tell you a good joke.

Interviewer #1:

OK. [laughs]

[general laughter]

Dorothy Stafford:

People my age, we forget—

Interviewer #2:

Turn it, turn it off.

Dorothy Stafford:

—things.

Interviewer #2:

Oh, it's off? It's off.

Interviewer #1:

No, I have to—

Dorothy Stafford:

—and—

Interviewer #1:

I forgot. Go ahead.

Dorothy Stafford:

And your face—

Interviewer #1:

Can you, can you—

Dorothy Stafford:

—looks so familiar. What's your name?

Interviewer #1:

Judy.

Dorothy Stafford:

You mean right now?

Interviewer #2:

Oh.

Dorothy Stafford:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

I'll tell ya—

Interviewer #1:

That reminds me—

Dorothy Stafford:

Tell me your name, that's the way it goes.

Interviewer #1:

—the, the other one was that, the, the b-, the best thing about Alzheimer's is you can buy your own Christmas presents. [laughs]

[general laughter]

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

[cut]

00:37:22:00—00:37:48:00

Interviewer #1:

But you could think of yourself as a conscientious objector also?

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

You did?

Dorothy Stafford:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

Do you now?

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes. Yes.

Interviewer #1:

Could you say that?

Dorothy Stafford:

Except it's spread to objecting to more things. [laughs] I have a friend who said, when she got to be an old lady she was never going around deploring things. But she said, I have one problem, everything is do deplorable. [laughs]

00:37:49:00—00:38:23:00

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

That is a problem.

Dorothy Stafford:

It is a problem, yes.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Or a perception.

Dorothy Stafford:

But I like, I feel lucky to have had that experience, and it's so different from anything else in your life. And I think of my parents and relate to them, that from a child they taught me there were better ways than to get angry and, and knock somebody down, and I think it's true. Lot

of people blame their parents for things they did to them, but I bless them for what they did to me in that way.

00:38:24:00—00:40:40:00

Interviewer #1:

Something that I've been thinking a lot about is the, the, this issue comes up at a time that's really pivotal in people's lives. You explained—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes, yes.

Interviewer #1:

—you know, four years at that age—

Dorothy Stafford:

That's right.

Interviewer #1:

—is a long time, you know—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—and whether, because conscription faces people at eighteen and, well, in this case—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes, yes.

Interviewer #1:

—considerably older for some people—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—but still most of them are at their, you know—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—an age where they're just developing—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—careers, figuring—

Dorothy Stafford:

That's right.

Interviewer #1:

—out what they're gonna do. Well, is that why this experience sort of has shaped people's lives so much, or—

Dorothy Stafford:

I think so.

Interviewer #1:

—or, could you talk about how it shaped people's lives?

Dorothy Stafford:

Yes, I think so, and I think of some friends of ours. The father's an economist, and—he's German. And when his son wanted to not register for the draft, he was alarmed. And so his son came over to talk to Bill, and I was sitting out in the dining room when they were talking. And Donald asked him many questions about war and how he could stay out of the good war, and all that. And I remember Bill saying, well Donald, I guess all I can say is, I can't kill anyone.

Interviewer #1:

Mm.

Dorothy Stafford:

And he, this boy, registered. But I'll, I can hear him say that.

Interviewer #1:

Mm.

Dorothy Stafford:

And I think when it comes down to that, that's the message of pacifism, maybe.

Interviewer #1:

Mm.

Dorothy Stafford:

With all its complications and [sighs] difficulties, you have to decide. And of course, pacifists are against capital punishment, which is an issue now. It has many, many tentacles into everything, I think, this idea that you don't conform when your country does something you don't think is right. And, you don't have the answers, but you have the questions, and I think that's the difference. That's the frightening thing to me, that, that people just don't think of the questions, and go by someone else's answers.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Dorothy Stafford:

It isn't the way to live.

00:40:41:00—00:40:45:00

Interviewer #1:

That was very nice. I'm afraid I forgot to ask you some—

[cut]

00:40:46:00—00:41:35:00

Dorothy Stafford:

That first meeting with Bill was a catch in my heart and mind, because words have always had great meaning for me. I think they're important, and they're beautiful, and they can do almost anything. And to meet someone who could take the old things you had taken for granted all your life—and it was the way my mother used to, when she washed the clothes, she'd pull the socks inside out. And I'd go on believing all these things that I'd believed all my life, and Bill would pull the sock the other way. [laughs] It was maddening, but it was educational, and, and delightful. And he could say things so beautifully. I loved it.

00:41:36:00—00:41:51:00

Interviewer #1:

Sweet. You told me two things that I wanted to ask you about, and I don't know if we need 'em on tape or not. One was about a military historian that used “Down In The Heart” in their curriculum, and—

Dorothy Stafford:

See, I don't know exactly.

Interviewer #1:

OK.

Dorothy Stafford:

It was, it was either West Point or—

Interviewer #2:

I just researched—

Dorothy Stafford:

—Annapolis—

Interviewer #1:

I'm researching it up.

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

The other one's the—

[cut]

00:41:52:00—00:42:38:00

Dorothy Stafford:

Well, you ought to, who, you could ask—

Interviewer #2:

Who told you that?

Dorothy Stafford:

—Charlie Davis, he might know—

Interviewer #2:

Was that, I mean—

Dorothy Stafford:

—about that.

Interviewer #2:

—was that, were people talking about it then, or is this—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah, the COs were talking about it.

Interviewer #2:

Well, what did they say?

Interviewer #1:

Just say it, 'cause we have to repeat—

Dorothy Stafford:

Well, they said that—

Interviewer #1:

—the take—

Dorothy Stafford:

—one—

Camera Crew Member #2:

[hushing]

Dorothy Stafford:

—of the sons—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Start—

Interviewer #2:

Start again.

Camera Crew Member #2:

—again.

Dorothy Stafford:

They said that one of the sons wanted to be a conscientious—

Interviewer #2:

Hang on a sec, Dorothy, you, you gotta tell us who we're talking about. They say that one of Franklin Roosevelt's—

Dorothy Stafford:

Yeah, they say that—in camp, there was a, a rumor that one of Franklin Roosevelt's sons wanted to be a conscientious objector, but the pressure was such that he wasn't allowed to do this. And I don't know what happened to him or how he felt, but that was, we took it for the truth.

00:42:39:00—00:42:47:00

Interviewer #1:

Do you know wh-—

Dorothy Stafford:

Interesting.

Interviewer #1:

You don't know which son?

Dorothy Stafford:

I don't know which son.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm. That's interesting. You, we, we hadn't heard—

[cut]

[end of tape]

00:42:48:00