



Jean Fernelius

Civilian

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Eccles Broadcast Center, Salt Lake City, UT

Interviewer:
Rick Randle

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Rick: Jean will you say your name and spell it for us?

Jean: Jean, J-E-A-N Fernelius F-E-R-N-E-L-I-U-S.

Rick: We're really pleased that you guys came in today. Can you tell us a little about your early life and where you were born and raised and what it was like prior to December 7th.

Jean: Well, I was born and raised in Ogden. My father was with the Wingright Lumber Company, my maiden name was Wingright. I went to Madison Elementary, Central Junior High, Ogden High School, Weber College and graduated from Utah State after the war had started, I graduated in '42.

Rick: I understand that you were married prior to December 7th 1941.

Jean: Well, I met Byrne at Weber College, he was a sophomore and I was a freshman and he was on the swimming team and so we started dating at that time and we continued to date once I got up to Utah State; he was already there. We were going together the summer of '44 but his number was one of the first 50 drawn out of the fishbowl and so he was going to be drafted in July and he had a fellowship to go back and work on his Masters at Utah State. There was no war and so we felt (this was in '41) and there was no war and so what we did, we decided to get married. We got married in a hurry because one of the gentlemen had told my father that he would not be drafted if he was married. But all that changed in December.

Rick: All right, tell us about what you recall about that Sunday December 7th, 1941.

Jean: Well, we'd come down from Logan and we were sitting at my parent's table eating and my brother's friend Lawrence Jansen called on the phone and asked if we had heard that the bomb had been dropped. No, but immediately Byrne looked at me and I looked at him and we knew our lives had changed.

Rick: Right then. And did you feel that...did you make your minds up right then that he was going to eventually enlist and go into the service?

Jean: Yes, we knew he'd have to or he would be drafted.

Rick: What about your friends that you had, did you have friends that were in similar circumstances?

Jean: No, most of the fellows were single.

Rick: You were married then, was it September?

Jean: July.

Rick: July of '41 and then in January did you go with him to Denver?

Jean: No, I was in school. I was taking classes so he went on his own.

Rick: Then tell us about what happened in his various areas and what it was like being naval wife while he was in basic and going through these various schools.

Jean: Well, the first problem was that my parents wouldn't let me stay in the apartment. They wanted me back on campus living if I was going to be alone. So I applied to go back in the dorm where I had been before I was married. But they were hesitant about taking me because I was a married woman. But eventually they did take me in so I lived in the dorm until graduation and in the meantime he was in Norfolk and he came to San Diego and when I graduated in June I joined him in San Diego and we had a very nice apartment right near the Naval Base. So as was accustomed with most navy wives, they were getting jobs and so I applied at Consolidated Aircraft and I was going to school to be, I guess you'd call it "*Rosy the Riveter*," but anyway, to work on the radios in B24 bombers. But he got transferred before I finished my schooling. So he went on up to Farragut and my brother came down from Ogden. My parents were watching over me and my brother came down from Ogden to help me get back to Ogden. So I went back to Ogden and stayed until he was settled up there.

Rick: Did the rationing that occurred during the war affect you very much? Tell us some of the hardships that you remember at that time.

Jean: I don't remember that the rationing was a hardship except I loved shoes. It was a little difficult sometimes to get the shoes I wanted, and gas rationing really didn't affect that much. I don't remember...of course I lived with my parent's when he was overseas and I don't recall sugar and anything like that really being a hardship.

Rick: After Farragut did you go to...

Jean: After Farragut he received his Commission and we went to Tucson Arizona. We went down by bus from Ogden and we were only there six weeks. So instead of getting a job, I'd join the other Navy wives and we'd go up to Bearden up on the University of Arizona campus and watch the fellows going through their drills and so forth and toured around the town a little bit.

Rick: So it was called '*Bearden Gymnasium*' even in those days huh?

Jean: Yes.

Rick: Then where did you go from Tucson?

Jean: We came back home and then took the train to New York City because he was transferred to Fort Skyler and as we got off the train in New York we were dumfounded to see the size of the town and everything. You know after all, we were only 21 and 22 and getting out of Utah was really something to see the world like that. So the nearest place we could find was a room in a lady's house so we took it and it was...and they had a doorman and he...Byrne would go out

on the base and was out there for the week so I was alone and the doorman kept his eye on me. Whenever I left the building to go someplace, he wanted to know where I was going and when I would be back which was very nice.

Rick: Was this right in Manhattan?

Jean: Yes.

Rick: So you were staying with a family?

Jean: No, we had a room in an apartment where a single lady lived. But we didn't stay there long because Byrne decided it would be better if he was closer to Fort Skyler. So when we were able to find a room...that was mainly what you had when you were out like this if you didn't have children, you just took a room in a house with a family. So we found a room out there and so that's where I spent probably four out of the six weeks.

Rick: Tell us a little about New York City and Manhattan and I guess this was 1942?

Jean: Yes and it was large. It was different than Ogden.

Rick: Were the Broadway shows going on?

Jean: Oh yes and we went to the Hit Parade and it was...I can't remember what we saw all the time...but anyway, we went to the Hit Parade all the time and we went to shows and I loved to go to the museums and to Bloomingdale's just really was something and then I went to Lord and Taylor's. I was fascinated by all of everything in the big city and at that time, I think when I was there, it was probably a little different than it was later on in the war. That was right in the beginning.

Rick: I think they closed some of those Broadway shows during the middle of the war and they cancelled the baseball season and stuff. Well, then after New York what happened after that?

Jean: Well, we had a month off, so we took a tour of the New York area. So we saw quite a few states and quite a few scenic places and then his assignment was to Melville to the PT School and so we lived in Newport Rhode Island and when we were stationed there, I got a job at the Naval Officer's University or I mean the Naval Officer's (I've forgotten what it's called) but anyway, it was a Naval Officer's place and I got a job there. I worked at Farragut incidentally too. I worked in the insurance office in Farragut and we were there a year, not three years.

Rick: Tell us, then he was shipped to San Francisco?

Jean: Yes. Then we stopped off in Ogden again and you know we had friends that were also in the same school that went along with us and so when we got into San Francisco, there were quite a group of us that...the fellows were going with the PT boats out there in the same area. So we had to spend, as he said, we had to spend time there because of the ship, the break down. So the

group of us really enjoyed touring around and having our restaurant meals and so forth. We had quite a good time there and then when he shipped out, I went back to Ogden and taught school.

Rick: Tell us specifically, did you know way before hand when he was shipped out or was it an immediate thing?

Jean: You know, they told us one time that he was going to ship out and so we got all prepared and everything and we all decided...and then they even cancelled it before he even got on the ship. And so then the next time all of them went several days after that, maybe even a week, I don't know. We were in San Francisco a long time and maybe it was a week, I'm not even sure. But anyway, then he got orders again and this time he went but like he said, he had to come back because of problems with the ship and us wives were still there when they came back because they'd only been gone a day.

Rick: So you said goodbye to him thinking you're not going to see him again until the war was over and the next day he's back again?

Jean: That's right.

Rick: That had to be pretty tough on your emotions.

Jean: It was. It was very difficult to even think of him going out there. But he was so prepared to go and he really had his mind made up to go and if you know Byrne, when he makes up his mind, you go along with it.

Rick: So describe your feelings then the second time that you knew you were going to say goodbye to him. Was it as emotional as the first?

Jean: It was more. It was more because I was prepared to go back to Ogden after he went out the first time and then when I couldn't get a ticket to get out of there right away and so he caught me at my friend's house and I was shocked when he called and said he was back. And then that was a rough time!

Rick: So he came back for one day and then you had to say goodbye to him the next day. Did you go down to the ship or did you say goodbye in the apartment?

Jean: I don't recall.

Rick: I've heard that in those days, as the girls instead of having silk stockings, they had to paint seams on their legs. Did you ever experience anything like that?

Jean: No.

Rick: And so while you were traveling around, basically except for shoes was the only...

Jean: Oh, I had shoes but I just loved them. I wanted more.

Rick: You could only get so many a year because of that.

Jean: Yeah.

Rick: Tell us about the letters from him and how you communicated with him.

Jean: We had a code before he even left to go out. We had set up a code and so he was able to tell me quite a bit by using this code and so I knew pretty much where he was quite a bit of the time. So when I'd read the paper, I knew if it was affecting what was going on with him.

Rick: So they would censor his letters and then you would get V-mails, is that what you got or was it regular letters?

Jean: Regular letters.

Rick: He would say a word or two that would help you know where he was?

Jean: Yes

Rick: Do you remember what those signals were?

Jean: Nope. If I'd known this, I have all of that information at home. In fact, I have some of the letters.

Rick: And so when he was over in New Guinea and Leyte Bay did you...how often did you get letters?

Jean: I don't recall that either. But I got enough to make me feel comfortable that he was all right. The only time I really got upset was during the Lingyan Gulf because of the 88 air attacks and so forth. That it really quite worried me.

Rick: And were you following the war in the news?

Jean: Yes and the newspaper.

Rick: Tell us about where were you when VE Day occurred and VJ Day. Do you remember those?

Jean: I don't remember specifically. I was probably teaching school but I don't remember.

Rick: I imagine you were quite elated when VJ Day occurred.

Jean: I knew he'd be coming home.

Rick: Then tell us about him coming home in as much detail as you can, when you first saw him and...

Jean: Well I went to San Francisco and met him.

Rick: Did he wave onboard the ship?

Jean: Oh no, let's see, I can't be sure about that one either so I won't even...but anyway, it was great to see him. But it was kind of short lived because I had an illness and I was down for awhile and by the time I was better, why it was time for him to go to Newport, Rhode Island to be checked out and so I did get to go back there with him. But I don't remember whether I went to San Francisco then or not. I was teaching school and I had just signed a new contract and he came back in September and I had just signed the new contract so I had to go tell the Superintendent that I wasn't going to be teaching and he wasn't too happy.

Rick: So how long after he returned before he was discharged?

Jean: Almost immediately. He went back to Melville and he was only there several weeks and then he had to go to San Francisco again to check out. I guess he got his papers at Melville and San Francisco is where he checked out.

Rick: When he left he had dark black hair?

Jean: Oh, coal black.

Rick: And then when he returned tell us about that.

Jean: It was a shock to see his pretty white hair. Now it's pretty, but then I was shocked. I could see then when I saw his hair, I could see then what he had been under. You know it showed. The pressure he'd been under, the situations.

Elizabeth: I just want you to describe that whole thing about him going to war and what his hair was like the last time you saw him and then contrast to now.

Jean: When he left he had beautiful black hair and of course, it was kind of kinky back here and it was just beautiful. And when he came back and I saw him, he looked like he was a little older with that gray hair up in front where he'd had his pretty curl and he of course, he was older in his actions. You know, we were just kids to begin with. But that kind of changed with him going over seas then I guess we grew up.

**** End Interview ***