

Lucretia Jane Tucker

The Real Rosie the Riveter Project

Interview 9

Interview Conducted by

Anne de Mare

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Nashville, Tennessee

For The

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New York University

Interview: Lucretia Jane Tucker

Interviewers: Anne de Mare

Date: June 28, 2010

Place: Nashville, Tennessee

De Mare: So to begin, why don't you introduce yourself.

Tell me your name. Tell me where you were born and just tell me what you did in the Second World War.

Tucker: Jane Tucker and I was born in Lineville, Alabama. And during the war-- World War II, I was a welder in a shipbuilding corporation. And we built liberty ships that were cargo ships that carried supplies and men. So that's what I did.

De Mare: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood. Where you grew up and what your parents did and what the family life was like as a small girl?

Tucker: I grew up in the Depression. I remember it clearly. I was born in 1927 and my mother and father were divorced when I was two so we went back to my hometown, back to Lineville to live. It was a population of about a thousand people. We were like everyone else. My mother

worked and she had a history. She played piano at the silent movie (cough) then she had a job as what we called a Switchboard Operator. She worked for the telephone company. She made 25 dollars a month. So we struggled, of course for financial reason but I did not know that as a child. I think one thing that I gained for that is a strong sense, well I guess that's one reason I have such a strong sense of independence because I can remember thinking when I can make my own money I will never ask anybody for anything else. Because it was always such a problem for my mother to give us what we needed.

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De Mare: How many children were in the family?

Tucker: Two. I have an older sister. She was a Rosie the Riveter. And my mother. We went to Savannah together and we went to work together on the same day as the Eastern Shipyards. We all three were Rosies.

De Mare: Do you remember how you found out about the job?

Tucker: Yes I do. We didn't know anything about the posters and the National campaign to employ women but my mother because she was so desperate for money. She never paid all the grocery bill. We shopped at a grocery store, not a food store nor the clothing store. We just paid some every month. But she had cousin who lived in Savannah and she called and told my mother that if you come to Savannah all three of you can get jobs and work and make good money. When I was 14, I had job at a 5 and 10-cent store. The dollar store. I made 60 cents for half a day when I would go after school and when I worked all day on Saturday, I would make one dollar. And when I was interviewed for the job as a welder, they said you would be in training for 6 weeks and you will be making \$1.20 an hour to start with. Wow. I thought I'll have lots of money. And actually we were motivated to go because of the money- for the need of the money. My mother was motivated. I think of the courage she had to go to a city and she didn't know what she was getting into I'm sure. She didn't know we were going to be surrounded by armed forces, air forces and navy and forex in the army. It took her a lot of courage to do that but that was her determination. And she paid everything that she owed. She told people that she owed money- this was characteristic of that day. It's no longer

true, I find. She told them that I'm going to leave and go get a job, in a war, in a defense plant and I will pay you what I owe you. Every month I will send you some money. And she did. One of the men, the man you owned the clothing store said, "Mrs. Syris" That's what all they called her, "You don't need to pay me anything else. Just forget that because you've paid me enough." But she didn't she paid him. So that was part of the way I grew up.

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De Mare: Was it difficult? Can you talk a little bit about your mother being a single mother at that time?

Tucker: Oh it was difficult. She was totally devastated because nobody in her family had ever been divorced. Nobody in the hometown was divorced. She was totally just undone. And of course it came across in her raising of us. I mean she was really unhappy.

De Mare: And do you think that when you went Savannah and got the jobs and you were earning as money as you were earning. Can you talk a little bit about what it was like to feel that independence and see your mother feel that

independence from the burdens- the financial burdens? Can you talk a little about that?

Tucker: Yes I can. It was a wonderful feeling to know- and we help, we helped pay. We gave money to help pay was she owed. And then of course we helped pay for our living expenses. We all lived together in a new little duplex that they had built for defense workers. So we all helped. And there was a get sense (of responsibility) but I save the money that I made in the five and dime store to buy clothes with. That's just been my nature I guess but it was a great feeling of independence. I know longer had to ask anybody, for money. And I started smoking, which was not a good thing but women did that. Until then- this is a piece of history- "ladies" would not smoke in public. They would not do that. And we said well, I can remember and I was 16 and we said, well we are doing men's work so we can smoke if we want to, where we want to. (laughs) But I would never smoke until I had the money to buy my own cigarettes was the point in part answer to your question. Plus we were urged to buy war bonds that was the only way the war could be won also. So we bought a war bond- a 25 dollar Amateur, it was 1875, they would just automatically take it out of your paycheck. I think I bought one every

month... we got paid every two weeks. Yeah but anyway, it was great sense of independence. And freedom- to know that I could be responsible for myself.

07:13:19-----

De Mare: Can you talk a little bit more about the kinds of things, like the smoking of the cigarettes, the kinds of things that you as a young woman felt were open to you that may not have been open to you before you starting working and had that kind of independence. You know you said that women didn't smoke and I know women didn't wear pants. Can you talk a little bit about what that shift was like?

Tucker: Well we were shunned by the local people. We were shunned by the men in the factories. But we were shunned by the local people because we did wear pants. We didn't wear pants in public, but, uh, we wore them on the street because we rode the public transportation. There were no cars. We didn't have cars during the war. But, I- I felt very, and maybe because it was suggested, you know, that I felt (pause) Well, I felt shunned is the best word, by the local people. We did have the freedom to wear pants. I

never really wore pants. I never stopped wearing dresses until the, in 60s, years later.

Reaches for water

08:32:11 -----

Tucker: And, hum, we did have a sense of- well it was a sense of freedom to have a whole new world open up to you. And the social was great. (Laughs)

De Mare: Well I want to get to that.

Tucker: The social life was great. The Hunter Airbase was there and it was our patriotic duty to entertain the troops. For 15-16, 17 year old that was a pretty important thing. And I remember that more than a lot of other things.

De Mare: Let's go back, because I want to talk more about that. But I want to go back to what you said you felt that the men in the factory shunned you.

Tucker: Oh yea, they did not want women to work. They did not want women- And I didn't feel that maybe because I was so young. But I felt protected by the men and you had- There were of course who were kept on the job and that was, they were deferred from listing in the service because they were necessary to train us and to help do the work. And uh, I never remembered that but if you listen to some other Rosies' stories, you will hear some really mean, hateful tricks that they played on the women to make it difficult on them. They said that we do not want to women to work because women are too emotional. They are not strong enough physically. They will be a distraction to the men and they will be sick all the time. You know...so, I didn't really sense that but like I said a lot of women did.

10:15:10-----

De Mare: But you also said that when you went to and from work in your uniforms that you felt that the local people kind of looked down a little bit.

Tucker: They did, but Savannah was a very closed city if you weren't a native of Savannah. And in those days you were either a blue blood or you weren't whatever that

means. It wouldn't mean anything much to your generation but that, that...So you didn't feel a part of it but it didn't matter because we had our own community and all of the young women, and most of them in their twenties, some of them older, came from small towns, just like I did, in Georgia or South Carolina and we had a community and we bonded. We worked together and we socialized together. And some of them, two of them who were my friends all throughout were married already but...

De Mare: Did they have any children?

Tucker: No. The ones I knew did not.

De Mare: Because I've always been curious what the young mothers did. If they were able to go into work or not because I know there wasn't much in terms of childcare available.

Tucker: No. No childcare. That was a ...

De Mare: Where- Can you talk a little bit about, you said that you lived in worker's housing. That there was housing

that was made for the workers. Can you talk little bit about that? What it was like?

Tucker: Well that was a whole switch. I will tell you another piece of history but this was because of the Depression. I-I grew up in a small town. We weren't in the country. We were in the town but we did not have inside, running water. We had well and we had outside convenience. It wasn't very convenient. But when we moved to Savannah, of course the house was new. We didn't have a refrigerator. It had a wonderful refrigerator. It had central heat, I guess, I don't remember about the heat but I do know it had running water. And a bathtub, which we had and that was a real luxury. The-the, I remember the landscaping was poor. They just built these, and they were pretty nice, they were small, two bedrooms, very small and a living room and then the kitchen and dining area. A lot of people, other places in the country had terrible living conditions and those duplexes are still in Savannah 60 years later. So they weren't just-I don't know who lives in them now but I've seen them in the last 50 years anyway.

12:47:23-----

Tucker: But living, but I mentioned no transportation. I can't remember how we got to work. I'm sure we had to transfer, go downtown and get on another bus, but a bit of humor. You want a bit of humor about our transportation? We had to find a neighbor who drove, who had a car, an old Ford convertible. And the top of the convertible would leak when it rained very hard. My sister and I sat in the backseat and open an umbrella and giggle all the way to work. But the funny thing was my sister was a lot more, a lot bolder than I was. But the man, the owner of the car, whose name I can't remember, called one morning and said he couldn't go to work because he was ill. And if you missed a day of work you didn't get overtime when you worked. And we worked overtime when all the time. You had to put in your 40 hours to get overtime. He said 'one of you girls can drive,' and I knew that my sister didn't know how to drive and I wasn't about to try and my sister said, 'I'll do it.' And so she drove. I think she may have driven some- maybe her boyfriend's car.

13:57:21-----

De Mare: Can you talk a little bit, because you lit up so much when you start to talk about when you were a young

girl with all the men and servicemen around. And what your social life was like, it seems from the outside, so many women traveled to work. And so as you said you have all these women from small towns all these young girls. Can you talk a little bit about the freedom of that social life and what that felt like to you?

Tucker: It felt great. IT was wonderful and the first experience- the first thing we experienced was we took a train from my hometown in Alabama to Savannah. I didn't know anything about troop trains. I didn't know much about the war. What I knew was basically what we saw on the newsreel because I didn't have any close people, any family members in the war. But we got on the train, and I had travelled on the train all my life, that was our mode of transpirations from visiting aunts and uncles and grandparents. But when we got on the train in Heflin, Alabama, the small town where we got on the train. It was packed. It was a troop train and it was packed with servicemen in uniform. And there were no seats. So we sat on our suitcases, for well, it took about 18 hours. We changed in Atlanta. Same thing in Atlanta. I can remember how impressed I was with some of the young men. My mother was in her 40s, early 40s, and they would offer, they would

get up and say 'you can have my seat for a while.' And I just remember being awe-struck. And then another, as soon as we started working, 10 hours a day, hot, heavy clothes, in the sunshine, sweating all day but we- we were about to go out by 7 o'clock in the evening when got home. Of course we went to work early and got off at probably around 4.

But if we didn't, and I sensed, and I-I tokenly say we were doing our patriotic duty because we were having a wonderful time meeting all these guys and they were wonderful guys. And I say frequently when I'm talking to 5th graders about World War II history, that I was never intimidated and they were always just as-ah I can't find the world. Well they treated us like ladies in every sense. And they were eager to just enjoy themselves. Most of the guys we painted-dated were from Hunter Air Base. It was a jumping off point for Europe and they were there 6 weeks. And we knew that they were going to be gone. Well, when you're a teenager you can pretty much develop a (relationship), and during the war you know some people got married after knowing someone for two days. I did not do that, even after 6 weeks. I think if I had done that, and I am still single. But you-u just wanted to do everything to make them happy.

And this is a funny experience and you said how did it make me feel? I made the mistake, shortly after I got to Savannah of going downtown by myself to shop. And I was walking down the street and suddenly I was surrounded by 6 or 8 Navy guys. And they said, 'Oh, where did you come from?' 'Oh, look at this beautiful... young thing.' And I'm like- And I'm sure my eyes were as large as they could get. And they were just having a good time. I wasn't frightened. I mean I was. It embarrassed, you know, very embarrassed more than frightened. But that was a thing I still remember and they were just enjoying themselves. No harm meant.

17:47:09-----

De Mare: Can you talk a little bit about the work itself? What you physically did and what it was like to do that kind of work? How you learned it and-

Tucker: Well in the beginning, like I said we were in a 6 weeks training class and we just worked and I did the rod welding which the eclectic welding. And you had a lot of- of course you had a lot of fire fall so you wore boots up to- mid-calf and heavy pants and long sleeve shirts and

heavy suede-type gloves in school that's what we wore- and the shield, the welder's shield. And I can't remember any of it being difficult. I'm sure it was. The greatest challenge was keeping the temperature on your machine set to the proper control because if it was cold the metal wouldn't melt and if it were too hot it would just run off the seams. But that was the real challenge when you were working on the yard. Yes it was heavy work. You had to pull that line where you were going. We didn't have to do any heavy lifting that I recall. And it was extremely hot, of course in Savannah, and muggy. I don't remember the winter times. I just remember the summer heat. They-and this is something else that came from World War II era. We worked long hours and because of that they started giving you 15-minute break in the morning in all factories. They were required to do that, and a 15-minute break in the afternoon. And we had a salt tablet dispenser in our area so if we started feeling weak we could go have a tablet of salt because you lost so much sodium in your sweating.

19:45:02-----

Tucker: But it was...but it was dangerous work. My sister almost lost her fingers. She was working up on the way.

They had two areas of work. We put the- built the rooms and put the walls and everything together, welded on the, they were called the slabs. It was like built up platforms from the ground. And then they were carried by these cranes up to the ways where the ship was assembled. And that was more dangerous. And at the end of the war when they, and this was the hardest thing you had to do. They were not allowed to put women in the inter-bottoms of the ship. That's where the pipes all go, like manhole size areas and you had to slide through those holes, crawl through those holes to get to the area where you were going to weld. I'd carry a light. It was like going into a coal mine, I guess. And they had but- they did have at the end of the war because they were not starting new ships they used the women that were still there to go into the inter-bottoms. And we heard these stories about how you'd be sexual abused. And the worst thing, the most dangerous thing that happened was the first day, to me the whole time I worked in the shipyard was this one of my coworkers just up a distance from me, maybe 50 yards. And the acetylene welder was welding on the top on the deck and they were supposed to clear the space underneath. He failed to do that and it burned through and it poured down on her ankle. If it had been on her back or her head, it could have been,

it could have been fatal. And I don't know if she ever- she never came back to work because it really was such a bad burn. And, and you couldn't breath and that why it was such a difficult thing getting your temperature setting on the machine because you'd have to climb out come outta, and it would be a distance longer than this room sometimes, but we didn't do that for long.

21:59:19-----

Tucker: And another interesting thing, and I didn't remember this. My sister was not happy. She didn't want to keep working there. She never liked it. So she went to the office to resign and they said, 'well we are sorry but you've signed a defense contract. You are not free to resign.' But soon as the war started tapering down, she did quit. She had already...

De Mare: Can you talk a little bit about in the factory, because you said something very interesting about the sexual assault in the factory. Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between the men and the women? Did you directly with the men? And how many men? How many

women? Like how would you say the relationships were in the factory that you experienced?

Tucker: They were good mostly. And well we only had- we only had two supervisors over the area that I worked in, the slab. They were numbered by slabs. We had, they called them a lederman and a quarterman. The lederman was the one who worked most directly with us. He was a wonderful man, great. I remember his name. I don't remember too many names. Pippen was his last name. And then the other guy over him, the quarterman, I was very uneasy. He had a girlfriend and I would have never had known this, I was too innocent coming from a small town. But she was much older woman and she sat outside his shack, his office. But the older women talked about it see so I-I became informed about what went on in the world around me. So but the relationship as I said, where I was, was good. It was not that way in lots of factories. Many factories.

23:39:08-----

De Mare: So were there any...you worked directly with men on the floor, like you were welding, you were working and there were men working right next to you?

Tucker: No, no. Not in my case. Now my mother had a man who was just a welder in her group and there would be 8 or 10 of us in each group.

De Mare: But your group was all women?

Tucker: All women- except the supervisors. And they just came to help us. I can remember this too, I guess this something else I can... I thought, I was annoyed once I got into the fact that we were doing something important to help win a war. The guys wou- but I felt like this about work, I guess it's kind of always been my work ethic. He, my lederman would come by and say 'you're working too hard. Go sit down in the shade over there. Get cool I think.' Sit down? I'm getting paid to do this. So you know, we had the breaks. I did take those. But I thought, and it's odd how you remember something like that is seemingly unimportant but we did work and long hours.

De Mare: Now was there any kind of labor union where you worked?

Tucker: Yes. I can talk about that.

De Mare: Please do.

24:50:21-----

Tucker: Went through my mind just a few minutes ago because I was thinking about how taking the break bothered me and it was getting, this was probably in 1944, I had been there about a year and we were required to join the union.

De Mare: And which union was it?

Tucker: I don't remember, sorry.

De Mare: That's ok, that's ok.

Tucker: And uh, about midway through the, see I went to work in 1943 and it was 1944, towards the end of that. We went on strike. We were required to go out on strike. We couldn't go in, I mean it was just like a strike today for money. We were making ships to take supplies to the men who were fighting and dying for us and I have never, I remember making a statement that I would never work for another company where I had to be a part of a union. But

it lasted 2 or 3 days and we got the raise. I wish I knew exactly how much the top pay was. I didn't keep anything. I'm not a collector of things. And I didn't know it was history but I think it was \$2.40/50 because that comes to mind when I think about the strike.

26:06:20

De Mare: And did you and the women make the same wage as the men?

Tucker: No.

De Mare: Ok, can you talk about that?

Tucker: I did not know it. I didn't even know it. It didn't occur to me that men would be paid more. But history, the stories I read about the other they were not paid equal salaries. And there was no Feminist Movement at all. I mean, you know...(laughs) we weren't thinking about if we were being treated equally.

De Mare: Do you think- let's move forward in just your perspective in your life, how do you think that time

changed women the Women's Rights Movement did happen? When women started to have more of a voice or more um- when they started to stand up a little more for themselves in society. Do you think your time then affected how you looked at that? Can you talk about yourself in the way?

Tucker: You know, I've never really been conscious of that. I have just not been conscious of that.

De Mare: Well, when you look at your niece and you see the opportunities that are open to her now and you think about being a young woman. Can you just talk about, because you have this great perspective of history coming from where you came from? Can you talk a little about that?

Tucker: I can and I just attended my niece's, JC's graduation from the University of Georgia and I was speaking to another parent, relative of another child and she said, 'Who is your graduate? What school is your graduate attending?' and I said, 'well, she just graduated from, um, in the school of animal science from the university and she's been accepted, she is going onto vet school. And this lady who was from Nashville said that her sister applied to go to vet school at the University of

Georgia in 1951 and she could not even be given an application because she was a female. So you know, so I can, but I didn't sense any of that early on. I realized that more later in and now feel, in fact I'm embarrassed to tell this. The committee at my church to call a new minister and this was 30 years ago and we had two names and one was a female and one was a male with a family. And they said well, we'll have to pay him more than we pay her. And I said, I don't think that's fair. You know, that's the first time I remember consciously computing something like that in my mind. And I know it was because I had read and heard a lot of things. I've just never really thought that much about it. But I am so grateful that we had a part in helping women to be able to have independence. I know it has created a problem in families. I think it has with mothers working all the time and not being home and yet at the same time, I know women lived in terrible marriages and circumstances because they had no freedom to go work or do anything else. So you know it's a good... (balance)

29:27:08-----

De Mare: Now you yourself seem to have been independent your whole life it sounds. And what did you go on to do after the war?

Tucker: I went on to, well I stayed out of high school for two years to work. Then I went back to graduate from high school and then I went back to study dental hygiene so that's what I did for 55 years. And I love it because I enjoyed working with people. I can remember at the 5 and 10 cent store how much I enjoyed those people and seeing how interesting different people are and I don't think I knew it then but I say it often now to young people now, it doesn't matter if you're sweeping floors or what you're doing. Just do the best you can. Make it the best you can. Work is work. I had a black lady tell me that once, an Afro-American. She said, work is work, hun, do it the best you can. And don't think that you're too good and I had, as a dental hygienist because we had college training and in the school there was always that sense that we were better than the dental assistants, ya know because we were educated. But I could swipe...Well I did to a sense, but it wasn't...but it wasn't. I can't remember some of the things that I didn't think...it was like cleaning floors in a dental office, dust, take out the garbage. I thought, I didn't go

to school to learn how to do this and that's when I heard that saying work is work and I thought, get over it, Jane. (laughs) None of this is beneath...

31:16:15-----

De Mare: You touched on something I wanted to ask you about, because you worked in Savannah. Were there any African-Americans working in the shipyard with you?

Tucker: No.

De Mare: None?

Tucker: But this was the beginning. This was the first time in history of this country that...you can never say never. It was the first time black, Afro-American women were about to get out of white women's homes to work. They could not- My aunt for instance, when to work in New York in the 20s to work as a stenographer, that's what they call secretaries. But-but that that secretarial work, office work, nurses, and school teachers those were women's jobs. And that's all I thought I'd be able to do. I had no idea I would have the opportunity to go to college. Even when I was going back to high school my last year. But it's

wonderful to see, to look back and to see, I think God helps you even when you're not asking for help to find your place. And we all have a place. And we are all gifted. I certainly don't feel like I've ever done anything big but because of my love of people, I certainly feel that I've contributed to people's-well to their health first of all and then to their well-being because some people need a councilor wherever they are on that particular moment of the day. My work has been a great joy.

32:43:21-----

De Mare: Do you have an anecdote or story or an experience about being in the shipyards that you would like to tell? More of like an anecdote, a funny thing, a sad thing, I mean the story about the woman who was burned is the sort of thing I'm talking about. Any other event that made an impression on you as a young woman? Maybe what it was like to see your mother working that hard? Or I don't know, anything you think...when you were thinking back?

Mimi: Tell us why your sister went to work in the most dangerous place in the ship?

Tucker: Oh ok. They make women you weren't required to go up on the way to work because it was more dangerous. So my sister volunteered. And one of our close friends, and I had forgotten this. But I visit with this friend, many times, several times, after the war in recent years. And she said 'do you remember why Betty went up on the way?' I said, 'No I don't remember why?' It's because she thought there would be a lot of cute boys up there. And we called them boys. When I was writing my story, I thought, well I can't call these guys soldiers. Well we called them boys. And they were boys, they were boys. It breaks your heart to hear the veterans tell their stories. 18 year olds, 17 year olds so they were like me. They were young. But one of them, and this is related of course to social life- romance- because that's just a normal thing for teenagers but I- you couldn't, you had to grab your scarf and tie it around your head to keep your hair out of, so it wouldn't catch on fire. And I must have had a very special evening planned after work so anyway, I decided I would do my hair up in curlers, pin curlers and then wear- I would have to wear my scarf tied around my neck but I wasn't going to weld above my head that day. I mean- I can remember thinking that. I don't know why I thought I could get away with not welding up above my head. But anyway I was welding and sure enough

the sparks flew down into that scarf and caught on fire. I'm sure I had planned or thought about it so instead of jerking it this way (back), I jerked it the right direction (forward) got it off before getting hurt. I was burned once but not—and this is an interesting story as a welder. You have that shield to wear and you can't allow any of the rays to get into your eyes. If you do, you get what they call a burn, a ray burn. Very painful. So I had never had that and you could get exposed to it from somebody else's welding if you weren't careful. Or else you could have a tiny leak. So one night I had a date with this guy and we went downtown to the theatre, the movie. On the bus. And we're in the movie and it's a comedy. And all of a sudden, the tears, and this is the first symptom that you have a flash burn. The tears just started pouring down my cheeks. And I thought, oh my goodness, and then I could tell that something was wrong with my eyes. All the way home on the bus, he had to sit with me with tears pouring (laughs) down my face and everyone looking at him like what kind of guy are you and what have you done to that poor little girl. So and it was painful. I could not work for a day. And it was interesting. The treatment today is still the same because I asked a patient of mine who is a welder what they did if they got a flash burn. He said we grate potatoes.

You just pack them on your eyes with your eyes closed and that gives you some relief. But that was a painful thing and that only happened to me once. And I just don't remember the dangers. Now I have read and this again is a statistic, by 1944, 37,000 defense workers in plants had died in the country. And that's in a book about it called Rosie the Riveter.

37:10:12-----

And this reminds me to tell a story and this is not what we are talking about. But the reason I thought is that book as a picture of the first Rosie the Riveter that was painted by Norman Rockwell. You know big muscular girl with dirt on her face. And ya know, she looks very- well, like a male instead of female, no femininity. So anyway, the woman who worked in defense plants did not like that at all. So this Alvin Miller did this icon and you see it was well accepted. And you can see she had make-up on, eyelashes. And we did not want to be treated differently because we were still ladies underneath even though we were working and we were tough. Ya know, I think I had too much pride about that for a long time when I was telling my story about what we did. If you think about history, there

were young women, my age, 16 year olds who carried guns in the Revolutionary War and in the Civil War, they did the same; they fought. And women crossed this country in covered wagons and worked like men and gave birth to babies. And took care of babies and buried their children so we were not the first women to do—But we did something special at a special time. And this was a peoples' war. I've heard. I heard one. He's a historian and has written some books about World War II but he was only 9 years old during the war. But he said, 'I had a part in winning the war. We collected cans for the salvage center to make bullets with; we collected grease; we- and foil we would peak the foil off of gum wrappers and cigarette wrappers and make big balls out of it. He said my mother would put all that in my little red wagon and I would take it to the salvage center. And they trained young people, boys, young girls I guess to identify foreign planes, enemy planes. And so they were sky watchers. They were civil patrol people and they could identify all of them, German and Japanese planes. At the time I had no idea that there were German submarines off the coast of Savannah, all the way up and down the coast. They were prowling of course. And we would get alerted and we would have to black the (windows) and we would have blackouts. And another thing that I

think is just a part of my nature is that it didn't seem real to me so it didn't upset me.

40:06:09-----

De Mare: Can I ask you a personal question?

Tucker: Sure.

De Mare: I'm just curious, to go back to what that work did to you and your family. Your mother being a single mother and how you think that affected you because you said that you never married. Can you talk about, about that? About your experience and how you look at the world in that way?

Tucker: I think that one of the things that I remember clearly was meeting all these wonderful guys and knowing that they were going to be gone and you were not going to hear from them again- probably. And the thing I regret most about that is and I tell young people when I'm talking to them, write people. I could find some of those guys now with the uh, comp, the Internet that I don't know how to work. But JC could do it for me but I thought I would never forget 'em. But anyway I think that had some affect on me

ya know kind of build a shell up. You know, I'm not really going to get serious about this guy because he's gonna be gone. And but for the uh, the other thing it did for me...It opened up a whole new world for my mother. She had some freedom that I didn't understand and we didn't talk about. It's too bad you don't communicate with your moms more but I know it was a sense of freedom that she really enjoyed to know that she could make her own way and survive. But one of the things I gained from the experiences of meeting these different guys was- I had no idea was going to go to school in Chicago. And my grandmother was born in 83, 18- I mean 1863 when the Civil War started and my grandfather remembered it even more because he was 7 years older. And he talked about it and he did not like damn Yankees. That was his, he did not like. My grandmother liked everybody. I would have been afraid. I never met anyone from north of um, not many people out of Alabama actually. But having that experience with people from all over the country and finding out that people are the same wherever they come from. Basically, we are all carrying and the same kind of people. And when I said that I was going to school in Chicago everyone said oh boy you are really going to have a hard time making friends. Oh it's terrible to go to a Yankee school, a northern school whatever. And so I did

not have that fear because I had known these wonderful guys and it was just such a, um, well it was just such a broadening experience of course to meet other people and get away from the small town pettiness. I think the thing I dislike most about small towns and my mother's family, my mother, again my grandma I never got a sense learning this from her. But my mother's theme song was 'What are the Smith's going to say?' (laughs) 'What are they going to think about you if you do that?' So I was never- I was talking to one of the other Rosies this morning and she was talking about going back to her hometown and finding her roots. I said I have never wanted to go back to my hometown. I'm sorry. But it was during the Depression. There was nothing and the people weren't- and the teachers. We had terrible education. That was another thing I had to struggle with when I went to college. We didn't have good te- I never- One year we had enough money operate the school to the first of February at least the public schools. I think was in the 4th or 5th grade and there was a great debate about whether to promote us and they decided that they would go ahead and do that because there was no- and every year the term was shortened, usually 7 months or 8 months but um. We had, when World War II started, the teachers moved away instantly. They were probably making

\$25 a month working in my school in my hometown and they could move a larger town and make more money. So um, When you are young and I did not remember. I have done one recording for the Library of Congress when they were doing those in '05 and I didn't remember anything much (laughs). He said that ok we're going to have an interviewer. He will ask you questions but I just didn't remember a lot because I hadn't thought about it. And I have taught to one friend, I just have a habit now since I've gotten so interested in the last ten years, I said, where, did you work during World War II? And she said, well yes I did. She was a supervisor over several plants that made shells, ammunition; I don't know exactly what kind in Atlanta making. And she travelled all around and she talked to me about it for 30/40 minutes. And she said, 'ya know, I have never told anyone about that. Been over 50 years. Even my son, even my son doesn't know that story. And I couldn't get her interested in joining the American Rosie the Riveter Association. And she's no longer able to, she had a stroke. That's why I want to do this. Because there are not many people who are able to do it even now. So..But I got a young start (laugh) I may not be able to do it next year but I'm glad you asked me to do it.

De Mare: Well thank you so much. This has been so wonderful.

46:15:14-----

Tucker: I just want to tell you some things good that came out of World War II and then I'll do that story. But women, um, well, disabled people had never been able to work in public. They were hired. Blind people were able to do certain jobs. Deaf people could do other jobs. So disabled people were hired as a result of the need. There had never been any daycare; we mentioned that. There were no-and and when the war started you would have friends and families that would work different shifts. Mother's would-and they would babysit. The Kaiser shipbuilding corporation in Richmond, California, the largest one of all, opened the first daycare center before World War II ended. Antibiotics had not been developed. They, I'm sure they were being worked on and being ya know, being developed but because of the need that stepped up immensely, they became used constantly, which was a great step. Had to be on the battlefield. They needed something. And it saved a lot of lives to be able to use the antibiotics and to use them, to go ahead and use them.

There had never been women hired to play in a symphony. The male conductors would not hire women. There were no women baseball teams. She's (JC) a baseball player. But they had- have you seen the movie A League of Their Own. Ok. So It opened up a lot of doors and answered- and developed a lot of good things. Those are just a few.

48:03:12-----

Tucker: And the story that she is referring to about my mother worked in, it was really a women's store in downtown Atlanta on Peach Street before malls were discovered and there was a lady there who was an elevator operator. Her name was Jutinita. I'm going to go home and see if I can find a newspaper article I saved when she retired. She would be a Rosie the Riveter. She was an Afro-American and she took a man's job. We didn't think about it- I hadn't thought about it until today, earlier today I was thinking about Jutinita. She was one the most gracious ladies I've known. My mother loved her. And she was just precious. She really was and the Atlanta Journal wrote up the story of her working at JP Alan's for all those years as the elevator operator. And said she was the last female, the last elevator operator. I thought it was in the country,

but it must just be in Atlanta because we were talking about it and they still do have operators in some the buildings in larger cities. But she was so gracious and would just make your day to see her and she was precious person. I think the greatest thing to me is, one of the greatest things is to have the Afro-American's be able to work...and even at the graduation of JC from the University of Georgia, it occurred to me that 30 years ago there would be no black graduates. I mean, there wouldn't be.

De Mare: It's actually amazing how—

Tucker: Um, I- That's an embarrassing part of our history.

De Mare: Yes.

Tucker: Very worst than embarrassed.

De Mare: Just one more thing. What happened for you when the war was over?

Tucker: I knew exactly what I was going to do when the war was over. I was going immediately back to high school. Of course the adults in the family when I stayed out of school

said 'you'll never go back.' And I said 'Oh yes I will.'

And I had no idea then that I would have the opportunity to go to college. I mean there was no money. I remember teachers saying 'you better do well in that class because when you get to college you're going to need to know that.'

And I'm like 'I'm not going to college.' But you know I still wanted to do well. (cough) My father's oldest sister talked to him. She was a dental assistant in Birmingham, Alabama and she talked to my father and she called me and said 'would you consider going to school to be a dental hygienist? Your father will pay for your education.' See I paid for my last year of high school. I lived with my aunt but I paid for my clothes, such a good feeling. I helped some with my education. I used the war bonds, money that I saved. And that was a great lesson to learn, that I did gain, how to save and the importance of having some extra money. And I'd like to be able to get over the fear now of not having enough. You know, I've never accumulated a lot. And that's just a fear older people have and I want to be sure that you have this saying. Maybe someone else has given it to you. It sounds more like the Great Depression, but I have read that it came from World War II. And the saying is 'Use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without.' And I say that all the time. One mother who came

with her 5th class to the museum in Rome to hear our talk said 'would you please let me write that down.' I saw her again sometime later and she said 'that's up on my refrigerator.' But I still do that. It's very difficult for me to walk into a shop and buy two dresses of the same. You know-I (shrug) It didn't have that effect on my sister so it's a difference in personalities. We don't all react the same.

De Mare: One last question, because it just occurred to me. What did your mother do after the war? Because she didn't-

Tucker: No she worked in a department store in Savannah that's no longer there. It was Adler's. It was a classic store owned by a Jewish family. That's where she worked first and then in Atlanta, we moved... Yes she always worked. And it was interesting; my mother thought work was a curse because women didn't work. They were supposed to stay home and take care of their families and be supported. She really did not like- I don't know how I got my attitude, maybe, I don't know I just have always loved work because I liked the work that I was doing. But it was also interesting, it's not important but when she knew she could

retire and draw her social security, she started liking the work. She enjoyed it all; it was funny how that works. But she was a hard worker and she was courageous. She really was.

De Mare: Sounds like it...

Tucker: And she worked 12 hours a day 6 or 7 days a week and no pay sometimes. If people didn't have money to pay their telephone bill, the owner of the company didn't have money to pay the operators. They had a bed in the room where the equipment was. I used to work there too some so she could go home for an hour as long as Mr. Fain, the owner didn't know it.

De Mare: Well thank you so much. This has been delightful. It was a privilege to meet you.