

Frederick A. Bryan , Manhattan Project, Oak Ridge, TN during WWII

Recollections by his son Roger Bryan as given to his granddaughter March 2018.

Where was your family living when the war started?

I was five years old when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 – my grandmother Bryan’s birthday. We were living in Rochester in the house on Elmwood Avenue. I remember my parents and my dad’s parents and me huddled around a radio in the kitchen listening to a newscaster announce the Japanese attack and that the United States was now involved in World War II.

How soon after the war started did you relocate to Oak Ridge? How long were you there? Was it strange to live in a secret city? How was it different than Rochester?

When the war started there was no Oak Ridge. Construction started in late 1942 and housing became available in 1943. For a while, in 1943, my mother, dad and I relocated from Rochester to Knoxville, TN. When a house became available in early 1944 we moved to Oak Ridge. We stayed there until shortly after the end of the war in August 1945. I don’t remember Oak Ridge being much different than Rochester except that it was a lot smaller and you had to enter it through guarded gates. The town center was much like any other town with stores, theaters and the like. Schools seemed the same with school buses to take you to/from them. The “secretness” of the place really didn’t filter down to me as an 8 year-old.

What were you/your parents doing during the war? What were their jobs? Did you know the “secret” about your dad’s job?

I was going to grammar school (3rd grade?). My dad was in the army and went to work in uniform. I learned later that he worked as a radiological safety officer. My mother worked in a procurement office as a purchasing agent. Once again, I had no idea about my dad’s job – he went to work in the morning and came home in the evening. When we were in Rochester, my dad was a doctor, and I had some idea of what that entailed, so in Oak Ridge I figured he was doing the same thing.

What was the war like for all of you? What hardships were there for you and your family? Did you have enough food/necessities? Was it hard to be apart from your parents? What was the hardship that was the most difficult?

My family comprised three major parts: me and my parents, my father’s parents who lived with us in Rochester, and my mother’s parents who lived close by in Rochester. The war moved my parents and grandparents apart and I was quite happy shuttling between Rochester and Oak Ridge living with my dad’s parents in Rochester or with my parents in Knoxville and then Oak Ridge. There was rationing but mostly of things like gasoline and tires and families were allotted ration stamps to get the restricted items. Some food items became unavailable (strangely, I remember ketchup being in short supply). Most everyday foodstuffs, however, remained in supply. I don’t recall any real hardships – in fact, Oak Ridge had the best ice cream I’d ever eaten. It was not a tough life.

How did you/your parents feel about what happened to them during the war? Did it have any long term impacts on them?

The war had little, if any, impact on me – life went on. Propaganda did filter into all our lives – Hitler, Hirohito and Mussolini were the bad guys and were ridiculed in posters and the like. A pastime of mine would be to draw pictures of Japanese aircraft being shot down by U.S. planes. The impact on my dad was having to end a growing medical practice to serve in the army. My mom simply continued doing office work.

What did you/your parents think about what the government told them about the war? Did it match what they saw?

We all believed what the government and news outlets told us about the war in Europe and in the Pacific. The continental United States was nowhere under attack. Japanese, whether US citizens or not, were placed in internment camps – there was no time to sort to the good from the bad (e.g., undercover agents along the west coast readying for an invasion) so this imprisonment was accepted as necessary. We knew that we were engaged in a war that we had to win. Worldwide people were suffering and dying but we felt secure in the US – bad things were not happening around us.

What were you/your parents thoughts when the war ended?

Thank God it's over and we won!

What did you/your parents do after the war ended? How did your lives change because of the war?

My mom and dad moved back to Rochester and then to Berkeley, CA so my dad could ship out to witness the Bikini Atoll A-Bomb tests. When the bomb test were completed they moved the Los Angeles area where my dad managed the Atomic Energy Project Office on the UCLA campus. My grandparents all moved, too, but now lived separately from us. This was an interim position while the UCLA Medical School was being built where my Dad was to become a Professor of Medicine specializing in occupational health and safety. As before, my mom held an office position within the AE Project Office. When my dad assumed the role of Professor my mom simply stayed home and mommed.