

Peggy Ploem Interview

conducted by Chris Lynn June 2001

C: At what point did students become aware of the war in Vietnam?

P: Well they became aware when their older brothers were being drafted, and had to go. Then they were really worried.

C: Was there any noticeable student response to the war?

P: It was a mixed bag. On the one hand there were the students that were against it because they had heard a lot of rhetoric that way. On the other hand--my case for instance-- they said it was necessary, the war.

C: Were there any changes in the dress?

P: Yes, the hair became longer, but I don't know if that had anything to do with the Vietnam War. It had a lot to do with the Beatles.

C: What changes in school life do you think were caused by the war?

P: Well the seniors were drafted, so they tried to find colleges so they could try to find something important to study so they wouldn't be drafted.

C: What were some types of music that were popular?

P: Well the Beatles were popular, and I think the Rolling Stones, and some more of what we considered then to be rock music but is mellow compared to now.

C: Were there any differences between '64 and '73?

P: Definitely.

C: In what ways?

P: People would go to rock concerts that they had never been to before. Kids were freer. They were dressed in a more flurid style. They were not--my sons used to go in a nice shirt and pants, and now they would go to school in jeans and a t-shirt.

C: How were they teaching the subject of the Vietnam War?

P: I don't know because I wasn't sitting in the classes. But they were actually trying to recruit people. Especially the ROTC, where they were trying to recruit seniors to go into the Army to be trained for officers. And some of them did that instead of being drafted, because they thought it was the better thing to do. My sons in particular did not want to do that.

C: Was there any student reaction to the war or the draft?

P: Not that I was aware of in Hillsboro. Hillsboro is more... especially then, a more conservative town. There weren't ever any big things here... that I was aware of.

C: Any anti-war or pro-war demonstrations?

P: Not that I was aware of, but my kids certainly never did do anything like that. They figured that the United States had kind of promised to help them, and they had to keep up their promise at that time.

C: Did they do anything to complain about the war?

P: No, we were more concerned about becoming school valedictorian and having good grades. I think there were more college students in that, and there's no college in Hillsboro.

C: Were there any pro-war activities in Hillsboro?

P: I'm neither aware of neither pro nor con. It seemed to me that at that time, it was not evident in Hillsboro. The big thing then in Hillsboro schools was, 'Hey!' we're winning state championships all over the place in football and athletics, and that was the big thing. The war was too far removed from high school at that time (in the 60s)

C: How much do you know about the draft law?

P: I only knew that they had... they came in and they would... people would have to register, then they were seeing whether they were A1 or A2. I know my one son ^{did not} wanted to go to Vietnam at that time, and we were not Americans at that time, now he is an American, but he was a Dutch national then, and so he said that he could not swear allegiance to the American flag because he would swear allegiance to the queen of Holland, so he was considered not dependable to go to the war. So he was ~~of the~~ Y-4 of which he was inordinately proud, I didn't think of it as a good thing.. But that way he didn't have to be drafted; he was one of the last ones to be drafted. So it wasn't a protest, rather to tell you the truth ^{he was} to be scared.

C: How did the draft law affect Hillsboro?

P: They had these lotteries where numbers were drawn, and my sons--especially my senior son, because he was A1, ~~he~~ was afraid that his number would be drawn--so he was lucky because of the lottery, and he had friends ^{of friends} going.

C: Did it change over the time while the war was going on?

P: I think so, I think after they heard more of people getting killed and riots elsewhere, that the sentiment became more anti-war, not that they were protesting, but just talking with people.

C: Do you know of any men who resisted the draft or who ran away from it?

P: I personally don't know anybody who ran away from the draft, I heard of people that did it. But once when we were crossing the border into Canada, visiting friends one time, there was a guy trying to run over the border, and one guy at customs grabbed him, and kind rolled him over the grass. They got him before he got over the border, so he must have been a draft evader.

C: At what point did men start volunteering for the job?

P: I think in the beginning they did that. I think later on not. Because in the beginning it was a patriotic duty, but later on that feeling vanished, I'm sure.

C: When people knew about the men who were drafted and coming back, how were they treated?

P: They felt scared, I think most of them. One friend of mine had three friends go in, and she was just scared, but they were all in the Air Force, so they all came back.

C: when they returned how were they treated?

P: When they returned, they were good friends of ours, so we were happy that they were back, but the treatment I heard of other people, I have not myself witnessed, so I have no opinion on that.

C: Were there any programs set up to help the returning veterans reintegrate?

P: I really have no experience of that. You see as they came back, they had jobs when the came back because they were flying, so they got jobs with huge air corporations and they

were fine. They had no trouble finding jobs, but that was because they were officers in the air force. One became a commercial pilot, and things were cool with that. These are the only people that I actually know that have experience with this. They were a very patriotic family, they was never a doubt that they were going. They actually volunteered.

C: What was your first reaction when you found about US involvement in the war?

P: My first reaction was that they should have listened to General MacArthur: never start a land war in Asia, because it's hopeless. Because there's too many Asians, and too few of us. He was right.

C: How did general life change in Hillsboro from the beginning of the war, to the end of the war?

P: It changed, but I don't think the war had anything to do with that. WE got more people here, more industry and businesses, the streets got wider, we got waterways, they made the two-lane tv highway into a four lane, but I don't know that that had anything to do with the war, just general growth.

C: Was there more cultural integration?

P: That came later I think. AT that time there weren't that many other cultured people here, they were mostly migrant workers and they were considered temporary inhabitants.

C: How did people react to the migrant workers?

P: Not in the 60s, later maybe. In the 60s there weren't that many and there weren't any laws against child labor. My kids worked in the fields, to make money and the worked along side the Mexicans and there were kind of always trying to be better, but not that there was any disturbance. I think only much more migrant workers came in when children under 12 couldn't be in the fields anymore. It was kind of a mutual respect because the migrant workers were good workers good pickers. But generally in Hillsboro, they were considered temporary, and they were just a migrant cast, and nothing much was said about it.

C: Public opinion of the war?

P: It went back and forth, there was anti-sentiment, pro-sentiment, but most of us thought it was a stupid war at the end. We were really sorry about all the things that happened in the war, but it was so far removed from our own town.

C: Any economic changes?

P: Things got more expensive, but that's just general inflation. Bigger changes came after 1973.

C: Major or minor economic change?

P: I don't know if the war had that much influence here.

C: war bonds, liberty bonds?

P: no, not like WWII

C: Do you know to what point did the war affect life in Hillsboro?

P: I think people go more aware of disabled people, because disabled veterans came back, and medical research that way, and there was more acknowledgement of disabled people and you get curbed side walks and it sparked knowledge. And I think medical procedures became better because of it. And there were also a lot of medics that came back from the Vietnam War that became EMTs. I think the Vietnam War actually increased the knowledge of all

kinds of medicine, because of the war, and I had a doctor that was a surgeon, doing the war in the field, and all the skills he got from that he brought back with him to the hospital here.

C: Where were the main businesses in town?

P: Oh Main Street was really the hub, Main Street was what is now the mall, because it had two theatres, and penny's, sears, and Montgomery wards, and the fountain, the Hillsboro Pharmacy, the banks, and young people hung out there by the theatres and after the theatres, and main street was really alive and it was always a fun place to be. You'd always say, 'I'm going down town' and you meant main street because there were no shopping malls around, that was the place to be.

C: Is there anything that you know of that I haven't asked you?

P: The dress code relaxed a lot. That was number one, and that happened from other influences, not necessarily the war. I think before that we were really naïve in Hillsboro, everybody knew everybody more or less. When we came here there were only 6,000 people or so. And the chief of police knew everybody and knew everybody's car, and when a so-called stranger would come through town, he was watched. And after that, that sort of thing vanished, there were so many other people coming in town, and you couldn't know everybody.

C: How did you feel about that?

P: I kind of feel sad, because it used to be a small town feeling, and it's not a small town feeling anymore. We used to be able to not lock our house and not lock our cars, but that sort of vanished. Now we have to lock our houses and our cars definitely.

C: But they were good times right?

P: Right, in a way yeah. And gas was only 22 cents a gallon and you would a glass every time you filled up your tank. But Hillsboro, still has some advantages, it's still a very nice town.