Biography

Born on June 10, 1921, in Pascagoula, Mississippi, Mrs. Anne Lea Petty was one of four children of Edward A. Colle and Anne Fitzenreiter Colle who grew up on and around the waters near Pascagoula, Mississippi, including the Gulf of Mexico; she and her family enjoyed sailing, skiing, crabbing, fishing, and swimming. She was the third generation of her family to live on the Coast, and has lived there most of her life, although she did spend some time living in North Carolina, Mobile, La Jolla, San Francisco, Seattle, and Montana. During World War II, Mrs. Petty attended dances for the soldiers training at Keesler Air Force Base and for Navy sailors. Her parents fed and entertained the young men who spent time in Pascagoula before being deployed to World War II battles. Mrs. Petty earned a BS in home economics at Louisiana State Normal College, and she taught biology in high school and in junior high school for many years. She is the mother of two children, a daughter and a son.
# Table of Contents

Family background ........................................................................................................ 2, 26
Kaiser’s Army .................................................................................................................... 2
Grandfather’s tugboat .................................................................................................... 2
Great-grandmother and Union soldiers ........................................................................ 2
Wild coffee bean bushes ............................................................................................... 3
Attachment to Mississippi Gulf Coast .......................................................................... 4
Growing up in Pascagoula ............................................................................................. 4
Homemade water skis ................................................................................................... 4
Ingalls Shipyard ........................................................................................................... 5, 12
Neighborhood before Hurricane Katrina ................................................................... 5
Hearing about Katrina .................................................................................................... 5
Damage to Pemco Manufacturing Company, Pascagoula .............................................. 6
Hurricane of 1916 ......................................................................................................... 6
Damage to family home from Katrina .......................................................................... 7, 20
Hurricane Camille ......................................................................................................... 8
The 1947 hurricane ......................................................................................................... 9
Mardi Gras ...................................................................................................................... 10
High school high jinks, circa 1938 ............................................................................... 10
World War II ................................................................................................................ 11, 15, 27
Keesler Field, Biloxi, Mississippi .................................................................................. 12
Civil Air Patrol ............................................................................................................... 13
WAVES ........................................................................................................................ 14
Problems and strengths of Pascagoula ......................................................................... 15
Housing shortage after Katrina ..................................................................................... 15
Childhood memory of alcoholic mayor ........................................................................ 16
Moonshine ...................................................................................................................... 16
Pascagoula ferry prior to 1927 ...................................................................................... 16
Pascagoula toll bridges ................................................................................................ 17
Childhood memory of armed robbery and John Dillinger ........................................... 17
Childhood memory of alligator in river ......................................................................... 18
Childhood memory of bicycle encountering car ......................................................... 18
Pascagoula after Katrina ............................................................................................... 19
Sharing after Katrina .................................................................................................... 21
FEMA ............................................................................................................................ 22
German grandfathers .................................................................................................... 22
Hopes for rebuilding ...................................................................................................... 22
Scranton’s Restaurant .................................................................................................. 23
Preserving strengths of community .............................................................................. 24
Casinos on the Mississippi Gulf Coast ......................................................................... 24
Father invents electric ice-cream freezer ....................................................................... 26
Washing clothes by hand .............................................................................................. 28
Childhood ....................................................................................................................... 29
AN ORAL HISTORY

with

ANNE LEA PETTY

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Anne Lea Petty and is taking place on February 22, 2007. The interviewers are Johanna Stork and Chrystal Bowen Swan.

Stork: This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi, Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project, done in conjunction with The University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The interview is with Mrs. Anne Lea Petty and is taking place on February 22, 2007, at 10:30 am in Pascagoula—oh, excuse me, in Moss Point, Mississippi, at the Moss Point library. And the interviewers are Johanna Stork and Chrystal Bowen Swan. And first of all, I’d like to thank you, Mrs. Petty, for taking the time to come and talk with us today, to speak with us. And I’d like to get some background information about you, which is usually what we do in our oral history interviews. So I’m going to ask you, for the record, could you please state your name?

Petty: My name is Anne Petty, Anne Lea Petty.

Stork: Thank you.

Swan: And for the record, in case all the labels are lost or damaged, how do you spell your name?


Stork: And when were you born?

Petty: I was born June 10, 1921.

Stork: And where were you born?

Petty: Pascagoula, Mississippi.

Stork: And for the record, what was your father’s name?

Petty: My father was Edward A. Colle, C-O-L-L-E.

Stork: Thank you. And what was your mother’s maiden name?
Petty: My mother’s maiden [name] was Anne Fitzenreiter, F-I-T-Z-E-N-R-E-I-T-E-R.

Stork: And where did you grow up?

Petty: I grew up in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

Swan: And how long have you lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

Petty: I’ve lived here most of my life. After I married, I moved to North Carolina, then back to Pascagoula, to Mobile, Alabama; La Jolla, California; San Francisco, California; Seattle, Washington, then back to the Gulf Coast.

Swan: Wow.

Petty: And also four years in Montana.

Stork: Oh, wow, that’s amazing. How many generations in your family have lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

Petty: Well, both my grandfathers were born in Germany. And so they came over. My Grandfather Colle came over in the 1800s in order to prevent going into the Kaiser’s Army because in those days the young men had to go in the Kaiser’s Army after they were fifteen years of age. So he and a friend got a job on a ship and sailed to New Orleans, and when they got to New Orleans they jumped ship and got a job on the waterfront. Well, they saved their money and ended up buying a sailing vessel, and they used this sailing vessel to trade all the way from Louisiana through Mississippi and on up into Alabama. And then in 1868 they went up to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and they bought—had two tugboats built. One was made of iron and one was wood. And his friend took his to New Orleans, and my grandfather came here and operated the first tugboats in this part of the country. And some of the family is still operating them.

Stork: What were they trading in the beginning?

Petty: Pardon me?

Stork: What were they trading along the Coast there?

Petty: Well, they were trading lumber, mainly, and anything else they could. In fact, one of the stories, during the war between the States, one of my great-grandmothers was on the sailing vessel, and it had been beached in a hurricane, and some Union soldiers came along. And she and her children had been hungry and had run out of food. They had been more or less isolated. My grandfather had gotten caught in New Orleans, so he was over there and couldn’t get home to them. So the Union soldiers came along and told them that they had some meat, that if she would cook it for them...
that they would share it with them. Well, they ate the meat and found out they were eating their own billy goat. But she said that they made salt by taking the water from the Gulf and getting salt from it. And back in those days, in fact, up until recently, you go along the marshes around here, and they have what they [call] coffee bean bushes grow wild.

Stork: What bushes?

Petty: Coffee bean bushes.

Stork: Um-hm.

Petty: And they would grind that and use it for coffee. Well, anyway, these Union soldiers told them—are you interested in this?

Stork: Of course.

Swan: Oh, yeah.

Petty: The Union soldiers told them that could she get the boat, could she sail the boat. Well, she said, if we could get it off she could because she knew winter was coming and that she had to find someplace to get the children food and everything because they were isolated on the beach over there in Biloxi. So the men got the boat off the beach, and my grandfather was in New Orleans, and he said somebody came and told him, said, “Your ship is coming up the river.” And he said, “Oh, it can’t be. It’s on the beach in Biloxi.” And he looked, and sure enough it was there. And then the Union soldiers got close to the city; they got off the boat so that they wouldn’t get captured, and she took the boat on into New Orleans.

Stork: Do you know what her name was?

Petty: The name of the boat?

Stork: No, the name of your—this is your great-grandmother?

Petty: Yes, one of my great-grandmothers.

Stork: Yeah, your great-grandmother’s name.

Petty: Um-hm, um-hm.

Stork: Do you know?

Petty: Her last name was Tarkel, T-A-R-K-E-L, um-hm. And her mother had come across from Germany on a boat and landed in New Orleans. And in those days they didn’t have any conveniences on the ships and everything, so they had to bring their
cooking utensils and food and everything to cook on the docks. And she came over to New Orleans and stayed with friends, and that’s where she met her husband.

**Stork:** Wow.

**Swan:** Describe your attachment to the regions of the Gulf Coast.

**Petty:** Pardon me?

**Swan:** Can you please describe your attachment to the region, to the Gulf Coast and what it means to you?

**Petty:** Well, everyone in Seattle couldn’t believe that I would come back down here after thirty-five years, but my mother had been in a nursing home for eight years, and my daughter was a flight attendant with Continental [Airlines] for fifteen years, so I had passes. So I would be here two or three weeks and up there two or three weeks over a period of almost ten years; so I never got away from it. In fact, I never even stayed away long enough to lose my accent. (laughter) I would help my husband in his office at times with expediting, and I would call the shipyards and introduce myself, and they’d say, “Anne, you don’t have to tell us who you are.” (laughter) So I never lost my accent after all the years. And back in those days, growing up in Pascagoula was like Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn type of days. We could sail our boats out to Round Island and a group of girls camp out, and go up the river and flip our boats over and come up underneath them and come down. Someone would call my father and say, “Your boat’s coming down the river; the girls are not there.” He would laugh because he knew where we were. We’d come up under the boat and get in the air pocket.

**Swan:** Did you just have little wooden rowboats?

**Petty:** Yes, these were wooden rowboats, um-hm. I’ll tell you a little story. My father gave us our first outboard motorboat, and I had an uncle who was a carpenter, so he made—we didn’t have water skis in those days. So he made us what we called an “aquaplane,” and it was hollow in the middle and had ropes, ski ropes just like you do with water skis. So my brother and I got on the boat, and my brother started the engine, and he said, “Well, you jump overboard and ride, and I’ll operate the boat first.” So we did. So finally he stopped the boat and said, “Well, I’ll show you how to operate the boat now, and you operate it so that I can ride the water skis.” So we did. He jumped on the board, got on the boat, and we started the boat up, and went up and down the river. And he motioned that he was tired; he needed to get off the boat. Well, he had forgotten to show me how to stop it. (laughter) So finally he let loose, and the boat went underwater so I could pass over. And I had to go up from the mouth of the river, on up the river until I ran out of gas. (laughter) But Pascagoula was a wonderful place to grow up, and Moss Point. Everybody was either related to somebody in town, or else you knew them very well. And before World War II, Pascagoula had a population of approximately forty-five hundred people, and when
Ingalls Shipyard came here in 1937—and the shipyard didn’t begin operating till about 1939 because it took them about two years to build it—it increased in population to almost sixty thousand people. And so people were having to open up their homes and all because there was nowhere for people to live. And so I taught school after my first year of college in Pascagoula, and we had to go on shifts to teach school. We would begin teaching at seven o’clock in the morning, and you’d get off at noon. And then I would ride my bicycle over to Fourteenth Street to the public housing authority, and we would—I’d have charge of recreational programs for the young people whose parents were working at the shipyard or in the service. So I did that for a year. And after that year, I thought I never wanted to see another child for a while. (laughter) So I went to work for the L and N [Louisville and Nashville Railroad] freight office as a freight-rate clerk for a year before I went back to teaching. (laughter)

Stork: So describe your neighborhood here right before Hurricane Katrina.

Petty: Well, the neighborhood that I grew up in is right where the new bridge is in Pascagoula, just south of it. And the old family Colle home was right on the riverfront. And my grandmother had ten children, and in two years time she lost her husband; her oldest child, who was a son, died at sixteen with typhoid fever, and her baby, who was a little girl, died at twenty-two months with pneumonia. So she said she had to roll up her apron and go down the hill, which was just a short distance to the boat dock in front. And as her children got married, she built homes for them. So that at one time there was the old place and two homes right on the riverfront; all three of those are gone now. And then there’s one on Live Oak Street, which is still there; one on the corner of Live Oak and Frederick Street, which is still there. And then there were two on Frederick Street, and my home was the second one from the corner on Frederick Street, and it’s still standing. So there’s four of the houses still standing. Um-hm. It’s one of the oldest neighborhoods left in the Pascagoula area. There are four other homes on that street, and then on Orange Street, there are three or four homes that are original homes for that neighborhood.

Stork: So just to talk a little bit about Katrina. You were not in the area when Katrina hit, correct?

Petty: No. I was in the hospital in Kirkland, Washington.

Stork: Kirkland, Washington?

Petty: Um-hm. But when I got back, my sister had been in the house, and my son and my husband were all living in the house at the time when the hurricane came along. And they went by—my son had a motor home, so they got in the motor home and went up to Theodore, Alabama, just south of Mobile, and stayed there until they came back down after the hurricane.

Swan: So when did you first hear about Hurricane Katrina?
Petty: Well, I heard about it—my sister called and told me it was coming into Pascagoula, and we thought it was coming into Pascagoula; so I was in personal contact with them all along, all during the hurricane, too, because they had a telephone, cell phone with them. And as I say, I watched it on television all night; so I really saw more of what was happening than any of them did. In fact, while I was watching it, this man that’s, let’s see, Cooper is his last name; I can’t remember his first name [Anderson], his (inaudible) on. He was broadcasting, and he was broadcasting across from Hometown Lumber Company, which is owned by my cousin. So I knew that building was still standing, at least. Um-hm. But when I did get home—I didn’t get home for a few weeks after that, but when my sister went back to the house, they had to stop about a block away from the house and pick up the tin and all that was off of the building which was across the street, Pemco Manufacturing Company. It’s been built in there.

Swan: What is it?

Petty: Pemco.

Swan: What do they do there? I don’t know that place.

Petty: Pardon me?

Swan: What do they do there?

Petty: Well, they manufacture heavy machinery.

Swan: Oh, OK.

Petty: Um-hm. But their roof had blown off and part of the tin off the building. And in the old home there was a hole in the roof in the living room and dining room area, which was about twenty-five by twenty-five feet, and they had almost seven—six or seven feet of water inside the house. So the interior of the house is just almost devastated.

Swan: And that’s right by your house or your sister’s house?

Petty: From my—from the house, the old home. Um-hm. No one is living in it now. We’re still working with FEMA, and I think we’re going to have to raise it even further. When my mother and father married, they married July 6, 1916, and they got married during a hurricane at the old home, which was right on the riverfront, and they couldn’t go anywhere. They were supposed to go to New Orleans on their honeymoon. Of course, they couldn’t leave the area, and so my aunt took a rowboat and a lantern, and took them from that house down the street and around the corner to their new home.

Swan: In a boat?
Petty: In the rowboat. And when Hurricane Georges came in—

Stork: When was that?

Petty: Well, that was four years before Katrina.

Stork: OK.

Petty: The water came up to the exact tide that it did in 1916. But in Hurricane Katrina, it came up even deeper, because we just had a little water in the house, inside the house in Hurricane Georges. Most of the damage was from up above, from the rain coming in. It rained in the house for three days and three nights with half the roof gone. But during this last storm, there was six or seven feet of water inside the house, so it buckled it. The house was made of longleaf yellow pine, and the wood in it is very good, and all the exterior of the house looks fairly good. We’ve got the windows all boarded up. And the two houses, one on each side of us, they’re under repair right now. The one on Live Oak Street didn’t get hardly any damage, but it was built up higher off the ground.

Stork: So when would you have first heard about the damage to your house? You were in Washington, and you would’ve been talking to your sister a couple of times a day?

Petty: Oh, yes, I was talking to them constantly. And my family wasn’t able to get back over to the house for about four days after the hurricane.

Stork: So it might’ve been Friday or something like that before you heard about the damage?

Petty: Well, there was still some water standing, um-hm.

Stork: Um-hm.

Swan: And what was that like for you?

Petty: Pardon me?

Swan: What was that like for you? What did your sister say?

Petty: It was really devastating. It still is, because we don’t know whether we’ll be able to repair the house, whether it would be feasible. The neighborhood has become commercial and industrial now, even though there’s still a number of families living in the area. But I have a cousin living in the one house on Live Oak Street, and other than that, there are no original neighbors left living in that area.
Stork: What did your sister tell you on the phone when she found out about your neighborhood?

Petty: Well, she was devastated, of course, because she has never married, and she’s lived in that house all of her life. So it’s still devastating to all of us because we still don’t know whether we’ll be able to redo the house or ever live in it again. And we hate to demolish it; in fact, it’s on the historical list, so we really cannot demolish it, but we have to do the work on it according to their rules and regulations.

Stork: Do you have to—

Petty: And it might not be feasible to put the type of money that it would cost to get it repaired.

Swan: If it’s on the government’s historical list, do you still have to pay to repair it privately?

Petty: Well, we’re trying to get some grants. There are some grants available, but we don’t know yet. And, too, there has been controversy about how much we’ll have to raise the house. The house is on a hill, and the back of the house was almost on the ground, but the front of it was about eight feet above. So if we have to raise it, it’s controversy about whether you measure from the back or from the front. Plus, they’re going to make a walkway, historical walkway right in front of the house, and they might take part of the front yard. And if they do, the front yard is not very deep, so whether it’ll be feasible to Ella to live in it again as a home, we don’t know.

Stork: So were you here at all during when Camille hit, Hurricane Camille?

Petty: When what hit?

Stork: Hurricane Camille, I think it was in 1969.

Petty: Well, I was living in Covington, Louisiana, at the time, and I was in contact with my family the whole time. And when I was growing up, my father was the weatherman for the weather service in Pascagoula, and they had a flagpole, which is close to where the railroad bridge is now. There was one little hill in Pascagoula, and that’s where the flagpole was. And we would go with him to put up the flags. And that’s the way the fishermen and everyone knew what the weather was going to be like because you didn’t have radio communications the way that they have now. So it was a very exciting time for us, because everybody thought that—all the widows in town thought because of our home, and my father was the weatherman, that our house would be safe, so we kids had a wonderful time going and pulling up the boats off the beach, and prepare them for the storm. So it was an exciting time for us. We never got afraid.

Stork: And you didn’t—you weren’t—your house wasn’t damaged?
Petty: Pardon me?

Stork: Was your house damaged during Camille?

Swan: She wasn’t here during Camille.

Stork: Oh, in Louisiana.

Petty: Uh-huh. But the only communication for the fishermen was through the flags and all flying.

Stork: OK, right. Um-hm.

Petty: Um-hm. And when Hurricane Camille came they thought that it was—the man in Mobile who was in charge of the weather bureau for the Gulf Coast was a Mr. Cole, and my father’s name was Mr. Colle. So Mr. Cole called my father and said, “Mr. Colle, this storm is coming right into Pascagoula.” And they thought that it was until it got just a few miles offshore, and it took a turn, and it went—said the eye of it went through Pass Christian, Mississippi. But while I was in Covington we would go out in the yard, and I could hear this rumbling, and it sounded like a dozen freight trains just rumbling through, and that continued for two or three hours.

Stork: But no storm, maybe, just—

Petty: No, well, in Covington, Louisiana, they didn’t have very much damage, but the Gulf Coast got severe damage. Not as much as it did with Katrina but they got a lot of damage then. And in 1947, we had a bad storm then, but they never did—they weren’t naming the storms then.

Swan: Yeah, I just learned that fact the other day that they didn’t—before, they never used to name the storms; that it is sort of a new phenomenon.

Petty: Well, when I was growing up, you had so many what we called southeastern or southwestern storms, and it would have a hurricane about every twenty to twenty-five years, and they’ve just been increasing more and more all the time. I remember in 1947 when we had the storm; water came up pretty high down there. My father had a little commercial fishing business right along the riverfront, and I went down with him to try to get some of the equipment out, and the water came up to our neck. And we had to get out real quick, but it didn’t come up into the town or the city like it did with Hurricane Katrina. But we had a friend that also had a shrimping boat, and he lived along the riverfront close to my father’s little establishment. Well, his boat was missing. He had gone shrimping by himself. So for about two weeks he was missing, and they even had a service for him and everything, and then he showed up. His boat had sunk in that storm, and he saw an old empty oil drum floating by, and he grabbed the oil drum, and he rode it into the marshes of Louisiana and waded through for miles.
until he came to a little town. And he lived on picking up the live fish and crabs and all.

Stork: Oh, my goodness, that’s a story.

Petty: But he survived.

Swan: How long was he gone for?

Petty: That was in 1947.

Swan: OK. And how long was he—

Petty: It was about two weeks after the storm when he showed up in this little town.

Swan: Wow.

Petty: Um-hm.

Swan: That must’ve been really incredible for him.

Stork: What traditions were carried on when you were young in your community? For example, Mardi Gras or St. Patrick’s Day or parades, those kind of things.

Petty: Well, we celebrated Mardi Gras, but it was trick or treat, (laughter) and there weren’t many treats given out. It was mainly tricks. (laughter)

Stork: Oh, that’s funny.

Petty: And I remember the high school, not the one I graduated from, but the old one which is, Trent Lott Middle School is there now. That was the older high school. The day after Mardi Gras, there was an old outhouse sitting by the front steps. But kids would do things like that, pull pranks and all, but nobody ever gave us treats. (laughter)

Stork: What else kind of pranks would you play? Like someone moved an outhouse you said.

Petty: Pardon me?

Stork: Did you say someone moved an outhouse; that was a prank?

Petty: The old outhouse from a farm or something that they swiped somewhere.

Stork: OK. I’m just curious. Like what other kind of tricks did you play? You don’t do that anymore, do you?
Petty: No. I remember once, too, that where the railroad station is, where the Navy has their warehouse along the railroad tracks, that was a freight office along there, and they had a railroad track that was stopped with a little hill. Well, they put the railroad trains, freight cars back up against that and then picked them up after they were unloaded. Well, a carload of shrimp (laughter) had been in that, and I guess when the storm had come along or something, anyway, it had been sitting there for a couple of weeks. And the boys went in and swiped the cans of shrimp out of that and put it in people’s automobiles. (laughter) Those were the type of pranks that they would pull.

Stork: Canned shrimp?

Petty: Yeah.

Stork: Oh, OK.

Petty: Dead shrimp.

Stork: Would kids of all ages do that kind of thing?

Petty: Yes.

Stork: Right up through high school?

Petty: Yeah. And I remember watermelons used to be raised a lot around Grand Bay and Moss Point and Pascagoula and all, and the boys would get in cars. I didn’t say I was in them. (laughter) Maybe sometimes I was, and sometimes I wasn’t. But they would pull up in back of a truck, and the trucks didn’t have windows or mirrors on them inside, and they’d pull up beside these watermelon trucks. And one boy would get on the running board, one would get on the hood of the car, and one would jump up in the back of the watermelon truck, hand a couple of watermelons down; then you’d back up, pass, and blow your horn, and wave to the people driving the truck, and go to Jackson Creek or Franklin Creek and have a watermelon cut. (laughter) It was about as bad a trick as you could pull and get away with it. (laughter)

Stork: Were there any other traditions or celebrations that happened in Pascagoula?

Petty: Well, during World War II when the shipyard came here and all, they were afraid of people doing damage at the shipyards and all, and there was a scare. There was a man going around cutting women’s hair. The girls in those days wore long hair. And he would break into homes and cut half of your hair off.

Stork: Weird.
Petty: And then leave. Well, everybody was so afraid. And what he was doing, it ended up that he was from Germany and trying to keep the men from going to work at the shipyard building the ships.

Stork: He was trying to—pardon? I don’t understand. He’s trying to keep the men from going to the shipyards?

Petty: Yeah, to work, because they would be afraid to leave home.

Stork: Oh, I see. OK.

Petty: The wives didn’t want them to leave them at night.

Stork: And why didn’t he want them to go to work?

Petty: Well, because it would make the ships that were under construction be late getting constructed. See, we built ships for England, for France, and for the United States during World War II here.

Stork: Oh, for the war, OK.

Petty: Yes, for the war.

Stork: OK. Now, I understand.

Petty: And we had, down at the end, the west end of the beach, they had these big Quonset huts there that when they were building ships for the French Navy and for the British Navy, the boys that were going to go on the ships would come there to be based on the ship, and they would be there and live there. And I remember on Sundays in the summertime, you’d go to church, and they would wear short pants and knee-high socks, and they’d all have a flyswatter, usually, (laughter) in their socks.

Stork: Why is that?

Petty: Because of the bugs in the South and all the mosquitoes. And we had dances two or three times a week for the servicemen here. And it was a sad time and an exciting time, both the same, because at Keesler Field, they had this band that was headed by an Indian, and they had their own theme song. And once a month we had a formal dance, and they would play. And then every Saturday night we had a dance over at the community house. And then on Friday nights the Elks Club—we had a young women’s organization; we called ourselves the Young Women’s Business Club—and the Elks Club would furnish the beverages and the food, and we would have a dance and a party for the servicemen on Friday nights. And out at the islands they had a chemical warfare station, and sometimes they’d send a ship in and get the girls and take us out to the island, and we’d have dinner and a dance out there. So it was, as I said, a happy time and a sad time, both at the same time.
Stork: What was the sad part about it?

Petty: What was what?

Stork: What was the sad part? Was everybody leaving?

Petty: Well, you knew that these boys, you’d never see most of them ever again, um-hm.

Stork: Um-hm, and was your husband one of the soldiers?

Petty: No. I met him towards the end of the war. He came here. He had been in the Navy. In fact, he was a Pearl Harbor survivor. And when he came to Ingalls [Shipyard] and worked, that was his first civilian job, and that’s where I met him. But that was later.

Swan: Um-hm. After the war?

Petty: Yes. And I attended—I graduated in Pascagoula, but I went to Perkinston Junior College for one year. Then I transferred to school in Natchitoches, Louisiana. It was called Louisiana State Normal College at the time. It was mainly a teachers’ college then.

Swan: OK. And were you studying to be a teacher?

Petty: Yes, I started out majoring in history and physical ed[ucation], and I ended up getting a bachelor of science degree in home economics. And I taught home ec for just a year, and after that I taught biology in high school and junior high.

Swan: And then what did you do after that?

Petty: Well, I married in the meantime.

Swan: Oh, OK. And did you have any children?

Petty: Yes, I have two children; I have a daughter who still lives in the Seattle area, and I have a son that lives in Pascagoula. And I have two grandchildren. And my granddaughter is in the process of getting her flying license in Florida, and she will be flying commercial planes. When I was in college, my boyfriend and I decided that we would join the Civil Air Patrol because they were having a little airport right next to the college; so I persuaded him that we’d take flying lessons. Well, back in those days a so-called nice girl just didn’t do certain things. So when my father and my boyfriend’s other friend, that was overseas, brother found out about it, I had to quit. So he went ahead and flew; so when he got his first wings, he sent me our first pair of wings. So I had flying in my background all my life. So when my daughter went to
college she started out studying to be a vet; she had horses. And when she found out that it was so difficult to get in vet school, she had gone flying and liked flying, so she ended up taking flying in college.

Stork: Oh, that must’ve made you proud.

Petty: And she’s one of the—she’s in this class now in Sanford, Florida, just out of Orlando, and she’s the only woman in a class of nineteen men.

Stork: Oh, wow.

Petty: And she’ll have her commercial license in just about four weeks now.

Swan: Well, I guess you’ve really seen how times have changed from when you were—when you wanted to fly—

Petty: Oh, yes.

Swan: —and then once was not considered proper, and now you really respect a woman that can fly.

Petty: Yes. And while I was in college at Natchitoches, I belonged to the Aquatic Club, and I attended two nights of aquatic schools up there. So I became friends with this man, Oliver Allen, who was the head of the Red Cross. So when he found out that I was graduating he offered me a job to go to France and operate a canteen. But there again, my brother—

Stork: What’s a canteen?

Petty: You would’ve thought I was joining the French Foreign Legion (laughter), so I didn’t get to go, so. But then girls just didn’t do certain things. And then I joined the WAVES [Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service] when I graduated. This one girl and I—

Stork: What’s a WAVE?

Petty: The women’s, it’s the women’s branch of the Navy. And I did everything except being sworn in, and my brother and my friend decided that I couldn’t do that. (laughter) So now I’m reliving my dreams through my granddaughter.

Stork: Wow, that’s something.

Petty: In fact, when I was up there two years ago, she had her private license there; so she took me flying all up in the San Juan Islands. When we lived in Seattle we had a boat, and we cruised all up in the San Juan Islands and up into British Columbia. We
bought an old Coast Guard boat that had been converted, and I actually lived on it for about, off and on, for about five years.

Stork: How nice.

Swan: What were your community’s problems and strengths prior to Hurricane Katrina?

Petty: What was what?

Swan: Your community’s problems and strengths prior to Hurricane Katrina.

Petty: Well, we’ve had a problem in Pascagoula for many years because Pascagoula is almost landlocked, as you noticed. We have the beachfront and the river, and then the lake and the bayous on the other side; so we’re almost landlocked. We cannot grow, really, very much anymore. And when my husband and I first married, we lived on the beachfront over in Gautier, and Gautier now has become almost what you call the bedroom community of Pascagoula.

Stork: What does that mean?

Petty: Because there are no houses available, especially after Katrina. And that’s why we had to move to Moss Point. And when I was growing up, if he would’ve ever said I would live in Moss Point, those were fighting words. (laughter) They were rivals so much that it got to the point that they couldn’t play football because the—it wasn’t the teams that would fight so much; it was the parents and so forth. They would literally get in fights at the games. And for about ten years, Pascagoula and Moss Point weren’t allowed to play football together. (laughter) Now they get along fine, I suppose. I haven’t been to a game in a long time. But when World War II came along, the Navy had to come in, and they built a number of houses, which most of them are still standing. Some of them were lost in Hurricane Katrina, but they were very well built because they were small houses, but they were built in a hurry because it wasn’t anywhere for the people to live to work at the shipyard. With gasoline rationed and automobile tires rationed, people couldn’t live way out of town and drive back and forth to work. So Pascagoula has always had a problem with property, residential areas, and all.

Swan: What would you say is some of the strengths of Pascagoula?

Petty: What’s what?

Swan: Some of the strengths, the better points about Pascagoula.

Petty: Well, as my father said, “If you came to Pascagoula and ate mullet, and went in the water and got in the Mississippi mud, you always had to come back.” (laughter) And I think that’s true. So many people that were here during World War II, a lot of
the servicemen after they left the service, they came back to this area to live. And even after Katrina, so many people that I have spoken with that have come here to work are coming back, and some of them are planning to move back down here to the Gulf Coast area. They like the climate, and the fishing is terrific here.

**Stork:** What was your opinion of local, state, and federal politicians before Hurricane Katrina?

**Petty:** Well, I was really away from this area for many, many years, but years ago, as I said, people around Pascagoula and Moss Point, you were either related to them or you knew them so well that politics was almost a joke. For instance, there was a—I won’t call names—but there was a certain man that would run for public office.

**Stork:** You can say who he was. (laughter) This could be interesting.

**Petty:** And he was a real alcoholic, and he would make all kinds of promises. In fact, my father grew up with him. And he’d get into office, he would get elected, and the next thing you knew he was pulling all kinds of crazy things and not doing his job at all. But then he’d run for election again; he’d make all promises, “I’m never going to drink again.” And he’d go through the same thing. And I would ask my daddy; I said, “Well, why in the world do you keep voting for Mr. Frank?” I’ll call him Frank. He said, “Well, I grew up with him, and I know that deep down he’s a good man.” (laughter) But he never changed. And I remember back in World War II we had a Christmas party once, and one of the girls that worked for my husband, her husband worked for the sheriff’s department. So we had some salespeople from—my husband was in the procurement part of Ingalls and had companies from up East that came down. And we had invited some of them to the party, and one of these men said, “I want some moonshine.” (laughter) So my husband went to the telephone, and he called the sheriff, and the next thing you know the sheriff’s car came streaming down the road with a brown paper bag. (laughter) Things like that don’t go on anymore, I’m sure.

**Stork:** Well, times have changed.

**Swan:** It’s interesting to hear. Like for me, it’s really interesting to hear what your childhood was like because I don’t feel like—a lot of this stuff you don’t learn in school, or you don’t learn in the history books. So that’s the only way that you’re going to know is to speak with someone that lived through that. Right?

**Petty:** Well, Pascagoula, the first bridge was built here in 1927, and before that we had a ferry that operated across the river. In fact, my father operated the ferry for a while, and we’d just go back and forth across the river on the ferry. And then in 1929, they built, between ’27 and ’29, they built the seawall down here. They built the first bridge, and they built the hospital, first hospital, which is the Chateau DeVille Nursing Home now. But that was built in [19]27 and ’29. And then in, I guess it was in the [19]30s or the ’50s, they built the second bridge. And these first two bridges were toll
bridges, and they were owned and operated by the county. Well, the State came along and said, “Well, you cannot operate.” So the State took over the bridge. Said, “You have to free it.” Well, they didn’t have it very long before they put the toll back on it; then it was a State bridge.

**Stork:** That was sneaky.

**Petty:** And so there was a lot of confusion around the area, with the State coming in and taking the bridge, and so forth. But when my father was operating the bridge, this was back in the days of prohibition.

**Stork:** Prohibition of what?

**Petty:** Prohibition, that’s when whiskey was illegal.

**Stork:** Oh, OK, prohibition of alcohol.

**Petty:** And so Al Capone—you’ve heard of Al Capone?

**Stork:** A little bit.

**Petty:** The gangster.

**Stork:** The gangster, yeah.

**Petty:** And John Dillinger. They were both gangsters during that time.

**Stork:** Um-hm.

**Petty:** Well, Al Capone had a home over on the bayou by Ocean Springs, and after that period of time, it was turned into a nightclub for a while. And it’s controversy now; they’re trying to save it as a historical place, and the people that own it want to tear it down.

**Stork:** Oh, no.

**Petty:** But anyway, my father was on the bridge one evening, and the toll was fifty cents. And he was sitting there reading a magazine or something, and it had a little ledge on it, and they always kept a loaded pistol on the ledge. And he said this man came up to the window and asked him how far it was to Mobile, and he told him. And the man started to walk away, and then he came back and put a pistol in my father’s face and said, “Stick ’em up.” And my father reached down and got the pistol down there and put it in the man’s face, and he said, “You, too.” (laughter) And they started shooting at each other.

**Stork:** Why?
**Petty:** And my father ended up, he had a little grazed place right by his head where they just missed him. And the man ran down to the end of the bridge on the opposite side of the river there, and they saw that he—my father said he didn’t aim for the man’s head; he aimed for his legs. And he undoubtedly shot him in the lower part of the body because there was blood leading down. And they think that it was probably John Dillinger because he was operating in that area during that period of time.

**Stork:** And like why did he pull a gun on him, just to rob him?

**Petty:** To rob him, um-hm.

**Stork:** Oh.

**Petty:** There was a fifty-cent toll, then, on the bridge. And another time he got acquainted [with] people coming across the bridge all the time and all, so he always carried the—he also had charge of taking the money from the bridge at night after the shifts were over and taking it to the bank the next morning. So he kept them in a brown paper bag. So some lady came across the bridge, lived in Gautier, and she gave my father a bag of eggs, and he said to himself, “Well, if somebody tries to hold me up today, I’ll just give them a bag of eggs.” Well, sure enough, when he got to the end of the bridge there was a little abandoned shed by the bridge, this man came out with a bandana across his face and tried to hold him up. Well, he saw a car coming towards them, so he said something to the man, which I won’t repeat (laughter) and kept walking. And the car got close enough that my father ran to the car and got on the running board and the man ran away, and my father always said he knew the man’s voice, knew who it was, but he could never swear that it was the man. So until he died, he wouldn’t even tell his family who he thought it was, but he said he was positive he knew who it was that was trying to rob him. Um-hm. But there’s always something happening. And one time he killed an alligator in the river that was fourteen feet, eleven inches long. And he lassoed it with a rope. He was staying at the towing company, so he got in a little boat, went out, and he lassoed it and pulled it up on the riverbank. And there was a big oak tree by the riverbank, and they tied it there. And for about four or five days the alligator wouldn’t die. They did everything. They shot it, I don’t know how many times. Finally, they got a man to come with an ax and chop its head off.

**Stork:** Oh, my goodness.

**Petty:** And I always was a tomboy, so I wanted a bicycle. Well, my father wouldn’t give me one. I guess he thought I’d get killed or something, because in those days the highway went right alongside the road over there. So my cousin had gotten a bicycle for Christmas. Well, when they killed the alligator, the man skinned it, and they got the alligator teeth, so he gave me three, four alligator teeth. (laughter) So I traded my cousin for two alligator teeth to let me have his bicycle for a week. (laughter) Well, the first day I had it, I came down Frederick Street, and here’s Live Oak Street with
the cars coming, and the sign board was here. Well, I saw that I couldn’t stop; I was coming so fast. So I thought, “Well, I’ll hit the sign board so the [car] won’t hit me. Well, the man thought he would do the same thing, so we hit each other and the sign board. It knocked me out for a minute, and I woke up. And a [tire] was right by my head, but I wasn’t really hurt. So I jumped up and ran to the neighbor’s house and hid in her closet because I knew I was in trouble. (laughter) My father came and found me, checked me to see I was all right, and then I did get in trouble. (laughter)

**Stork:** So did the storm change the way that you think about your community at all?

**Petty:** In Pascagoula?

**Stork:** Yeah, or here in Moss Point.

**Petty:** Um-hm. Well, you know, the Lord works in mysterious ways, and Pascagoula and Moss Point, both, had a lot of trashy—I call them trashy—areas around and things that you just couldn’t get people to tear down or anything. And it’s really made a clean sweep. Same thing happened after Hurricane Camille. Before Camille there were a lot of places along the Gulf Coast that were really shacks, and they just couldn’t get people to clean the places up and all. And after Camille, it really cleaned out a lot of things. And the Gulf Coast started really growing then, and people started building better homes and keeping their property up better, and so forth. And I’d say that the same thing has happened after this storm, both in Moss Point and in Pascagoula. (A brief exchange between interviewers, unrelated to the oral history, has not been transcribed.) I had charge, for a while, of the job registry over in Pascagoula for the senior citizens, and I worked over there for two years. And they had a very good program over there, and still do, for the senior citizens. And they can place people; if they’re interested in working, they can help place them in jobs. But they have a lot of social activity over there, too, and a lot of people from Moss Point, Gautier, Pascagoula, and all, go. About once a month they take a trip by bus and go to various places.

**Swan:** That’s good.

**Petty:** Um-hm. You might be interested in talking to Melanie Caver over there. She’s head of the senior program over in Pascagoula.

**Swan:** Oh, OK. I’ll check that.

**Petty:** And as I said—

**Swan:** How do you spell her last name?

**Petty:** —a lot of people from Moss Point belong to it over there, too. Melanie Caver, C-A-V-E-R.
Swan: And she’s in charge of the seniors’ program in Moss Point?

Petty: Um-hm.

Swan: What was I going to say? Do you plan on moving back to Pascagoula from Moss Point ever?

Petty: Pardon me?

Swan: Do you plan on going back to Pascagoula, to your house, if they can fix it up?

Petty: Well, if we can get the house fixed up, we might move back down there. Um-hm. We like the area we’re in over here, and we’re not in an area that gets flooded. Now, we get stranded in there sometimes, because if the river road gets flooded, you can’t get out. (laughter)

Swan: Right.

Petty: I don’t know why when they built that area they didn’t build a rear entrance to it because it would go on Magnolia Street, and Magnolia Street doesn’t get flooded. But they didn’t; so you can possibly get stranded in there for days. But we have never had any problem with water getting up. But my son has a house down at the end, and the water got right up to the front porch, but it didn’t come in the house.

Stork: So your son lives here in Moss Point, too?

Petty: Yes, uh-huh.

Stork: OK. And is it—for your family, is it just you and your son here in Moss Point?

Petty: Pardon me?

Stork: Is it just you and your son here in Moss Point, or do you have—

Petty: Well, my sister lives with me, too.

Stork: Oh, and your sister, also.

Petty: Um-hm.

Swan: Did you have any—

Petty: And I have another sister who has Alzheimer’s, and she lives in the recovery center over in Ocean Springs.
Swan: Did you have any friends or family or any close neighbors who were injured during the hurricane?

Petty: No. But I have a lot of my relatives lost their homes in Pascagoula. And I have a cousin that we grew up together, and our backyard joined, and we were inseparable all of our life. In fact, we even went to college together and roomed together, and so she came since we were living in Moss Point here. By the time I got home from Seattle, she was living there; my other sister was living there. So all of us were living there in one house.

Swan: How many of you?

Petty: Well, my husband, me, and my son, and my two sisters, and my cousin; six of us.

Swan: How was that? How long did you live together?

Petty: Well, my husband got sick and had to go to the hospital, and so my cousin had to go over to live with another cousin whose house didn’t get damaged. She lost her house. Her house had to be demolished. So she and I were close enough, we’re the same size and everything, that I had to share my wardrobe with her. Didn’t have to, but I did. And so she still comes back and stays with me some. In fact, next weekend I think I’m going to have she and my other sister come over for a weekend and go to church with us. I belong to the little Lutheran church in Pascagoula that my grandmother helped found that church in 1888. And my sister and I are the only two of the family that’s still around to go there. Well, my son’s going there now, too.

Swan: Well, that’s good.

Petty: But all of the Colles used to be there, but they’re scattered. So now there are not any of them. We’re the only ones left here, um-hm. But everybody—I had, let’s see, two cousins that lived right on the beachfront in Pascagoula on my mother’s side of the family, the Fitzenreiter side, that they lost their homes and everything. And then one that lived close to the small craft harbor, they’ve been able to repair theirs. And then another one that is repairing their home, too. But so many in my family and so many of my very close friends lost everything they had. In fact, I have one friend that lives up in Moss Point that’s down the street from us that we all grew up together, and she lost her home and everything. And so she’s bought a house up in Moss Point, and she’ll probably stay up here, um-hm.

Stork: Have you had—you should ask.

Swan: Well, government.

Stork: Oh, we still have a whole page. Was the government question on this page? (brief interruption)
Stork: Have you had any experiences with emergency response people or government people or FEMA?

Petty: With the FEMA and so forth?

Stork: Yeah.

Petty: Well, after Hurricane Georges we had one FEMA man that came and worked with us, and we were just about ready to make a settlement and all with everything, and he had an emergency—he was from California—and had to stop. And so we had to start all over, and so my son’s handling all of that now for my sister, my sister that never married after my mother died. The rest of us put our interests in the house over to her, and so that house actually belongs to her and to my son because he’s looking after her now. And we’ve had to start over with the FEMA people on that and never did really get that all concluded when Katrina came along, um-hm. So then we’ve had trouble with the neighbors that live next door that my father used to own that house, and he had got it from one of his brothers that moved away, and we ended up selling it to a friend just to keep them as neighbors, which was a mistake. And those people died, and their children lived out of the state, so they just sold to just anybody, and we’ve had a lot of trouble with the people living there. And that’s one thing that’s held us back from moving in. (laughter) But back in those days, they built the houses close together because it was families. And people, a lot of people didn’t even have any automobiles then, and so they didn’t think anything about building the houses close together. But then when they got older and people had automobiles and all, that can be a problem. (laughter)

Stork: Is there anything else that you wanted to ask her now?

Swan: I don’t think so. We can just go on with—

Petty: Both my grandfathers were born in Germany. My Grandfather Colle was born around Bremen, and the other grandfather was born in Munich. And when he was two years old, his family went to New Orleans to visit relatives in New Orleans, and they both died in the yellow fever epidemic. It was in, oh, 1865, or something like that in New Orleans. So he never got back to the old country, and he was an only child. And my Grandfather Colle, with his business dealings and all with the shipping and all was in with the Dantzler Lumber Company, too. They were all in business together. And my Grandfather Fitzenreiter also worked with the Dantzler Lumber Company, and he had charge of what they called the planing mill, which was down at the end of Griffin Street in Moss Point, up until he died. So the two families were very close, personally and businesswise for many, many years, um-hm. And Mr. Al Dantzler lost his home on the beach, and he and his wife both died not too long after the hurricane, um-hm.

Swan: So is there anything in specific that you’d like to see happen in the rebuilding of Pascagoula?
Petty: Well, I’m very much interested in what’s going on now, and I’m friends with the Cumbass(?) family, who Mr. Roy Cumbass is the president of the M and M Bank, that beautiful new bank. Have you seen that new [bank]?

Swan: No, I haven’t seen it.

Petty: Well, if you’re going to Pascagoula and go across the railroad track on Pascagoula Street, on the left hand side is this big brick—it’s sort of a French type of architecture—beautiful building. They haven’t had the grand opening yet.

Swan: Oh, OK.

Petty: Um-hm. And Pascagoula has never looked as good as it looks now. They have done wonders with reviving the city and trying to bring it back. And you’ll have to go to the little drugstore in downtown Pascagoula on Delmas Avenue and have breakfast one morning. They serve beignets.

Stork: Oh, I’ve had those, yeah.

Petty: And other things. And they’ve got it decorated like it used to be many, many years ago with murals on the floor and on the bar, and they have the Blues Brothers. They have the big statues of the Blues Brothers in the window there, and it’s really a cute place. It’s a gathering place in Pascagoula now. And the old city hall has been bought out, and one of our cousins and his friend have a restaurant there called Scranton’s. Pascagoula, at one time, [there] was Pascagoula, and part of the town was called Scranton. And now it’s all Pascagoula. But this was the Scranton Fire Department was down below, and they had this little restaurant there. They’ve got a lot of paraphernalia in there and different things from old times in there; very interesting, um-hm. It even has a little jail cell at the back, one little jail cell. (laughter) But they are really trying to revive that now, and they’ve got a wonderful group of people working on it and trying to get the city going and make it more interesting, very much like Ocean Springs is doing now.

Stork: How do we preserve the strengths of our communities while addressing the challenges?

Petty: Pardon me?

Stork: How do we preserve the strengths of our communities while addressing the challenges?

Petty: How do we preserve them?

Stork: Um-hm.
Petty: Well, number one is that people have got to cooperate with one another, and they’ve got to learn that—well, just like with the old high school building, nobody can decide. In fact, I think this city made a terrible mistake selling that property because Pascagoula, when I was working at the job registry and at the senior center, people would come in looking for a certain City building. Well, the City buildings were scattered all over town. And they kept moving from place to place. If they had listened to me, they would’ve taken that whole area there and put all of the City offices and communication, everything there in one area, and had—it was large enough for sufficient parking and everything, instead of just dividing it up and having it going in every which direction. It’s getting better now. They’re trying to bring things in and consolidate them more. But that’s been one big problem in Pascagoula; it’s been so scattered for so long. And the beautification groups have done a beautiful job planting and all. In downtown Pascagoula, they’ve had the little benches painted black, and the garbage can covers and everything are black and the hanging baskets. And it’s really coming together very nicely. And Moss Point’s doing the same thing. They’ve got a long way to go, but they’re getting there. And Pascagoula has a lot of river frontage, which especially since the storm, it is just in shambles, and they are really trying to get it so that they can really do something with that waterfront. There’s so many possibilities that they could do with Pascagoula from the mouth of the river on up towards Lake Avenue. Beautiful property along there, but it’s in terrible shape right now. And I’m hoping that they will really be very strict in what they allow going in and getting the people to tear down the dilapidated buildings and really doing massive cleanup.

Swan: So is there any other hopes or fears that you have for the future?

Petty: Well, we need more income in both the areas. Moss Point, the old paper mill property is still sitting there, and they need to encourage more. We don’t need a lot more heavy industry around Pascagoula because as I said, we have so little space there that we’re going to lose a lot of our residential areas if they allow too much heavy industry to come in. And they’re, right now, they’re fighting over trying to get casinos in the area.

Swan: No.

Petty: And I don’t know if I’m for it or against it. (laughter) The property where the Navy base was, that’s a very valuable piece of property, if they’ll be very careful what they do with it. But I don’t know what’s going to happen. Some people want a casino to come there. But Biloxi has had—it’s been a lifesaver, really, in many ways especially for the schools, but it’s also brought a lot of crime and a lot of element that you don’t really like.

Swan: What has brought a lot of crime?

Petty: A lot of crime in the area.
Swan: What brought that crime?

Petty: The casinos.

Swan: Oh, the casinos.

Petty: Um-hm.

Swan: Yeah, right.

Petty: You know that certain element of people that follow things like that, and crime has increased over there. Just like New Orleans. New Orleans will never, ever be the same again.

Stork: Is there anything else that you would like to add today to your interview?

Petty: I can’t think. I’ve rambled on all over the place.

Stork: Oh, thank you very much. It’s been very interesting to talk with you.

Petty: If I can help you in any way, I’ll be glad to.

Swan: Yeah, you have so much to share. I wouldn’t be surprised if they contact you.

Petty: See, I’m going to write a book. I have a friend in Seattle that when I left up there he presented me with a notebook. He wants me to write some of the little stories that I have—

Swan: You should.

Petty: —when we were growing up and things like that.

Stork: You should definitely document it.

Petty: I’ve got to do that.

Stork: (Inaudible) with somebody for sure.

Petty: But someday I’m going to do it.

Stork: Yeah.

Petty: If I live long enough.

Swan: Can you think of any stories, maybe from your early childhood, maybe how life was at home?
Petty: Um-hm.

Swan: If you had any.

Petty: Well, I could write a book on that alone. (laughter) My father’s name was Ed Colle, and he was the youngest in their family after his baby sister died. And so he had two older sisters. Well, he had three older sisters, but two that were close to his age, and as long as he lived, he was their baby brother. And we all went to the Lutheran church, and on Saturday evening the telephone would ring; it was Aunt (inaudible) and Aunt Louise, “Eddie, have you been to the barber shop today? Did you polish your shoes?” (laughter) And he would fuss about it, but he loved it; he loved the attention. And in the Colle homes on a Sunday you could go to any Colle home, and you would have fried chicken, potato salad, and some vegetables, and homemade ice cream. And my father was a frustrated engineer. He really wanted to go to engineering college. Well, his family decided that he was going to be the banker of the family, so they sent him to business college in Mobile, which he hated. He wanted to be on the boats and all that, but they didn’t want him to be. And so, anyway, he had this little commercial—when I was growing up, he worked at the towing company part time. He was the superintendent of the bridges, took care of the money and everything for the bridges. He sold outboard motors, and they’d come in a box about the size of this table, back in those days. And when it would rain on Frederick Street, that street would always flood; so we’d get one of those boxes and a paddle, and paddle. (laughter) And as I said, he sold life insurance. He had the fishing business; he owned about four boats and the business. Well, he worked it on shares. He got a share for himself [and] a share for the nets. He owned all the nets and the boat and the equipment, and then he had the men. So they got a third, and he got two-thirds. And he shipped most of his fish to New York. And a few years ago they were going through their old files, and they came across my father’s name, and they called. And how they got us on the telephone I don’t know, but they did reach my sister by telephone and wanted to know if he was still in business. (laughter) Of course, he’s been dead since, he died in 1970. So he was a jack-of-all-trades. Well, he went down to his fish business—and as I said, we loved homemade ice cream. So he got so tired of cranking that ice cream freezer. So we had a little ice cream factory in Pascagoula on Krebs Avenue, and the man went out of business. So Daddy bought one of the two-and-a-half-gallon cans that came for the ice cream. And he had a brother-in-law that was a carpenter; he got him to make him the little container for it, the bucket to put the freezer in. And he went down to his fish business, and he got all these pulleys and wheels and everything, and this contraption went all the way around the backyard, and he had the first electric ice cream freezer.

Stork and Swan: Oh, wow.

Petty: And all the kids in the neighborhood knew when he was getting (inaudible). And he made this ice cream with just pure cream and fresh fruit, and it was delicious.
Stork: Wow.

Swan: Oh, that would be.

Petty: But Daddy called our house Grand Central Station because there were four children in our family. There were three girls, and then my brother was the baby, and this year we’re eighty-three, eighty-five, eighty-seven, and eighty-nine.

Stork: Oh, wow.

Petty: And we’re all still living. But when World War II came along, with three girls in the house and all, we had some activity going on all the time. And on Sunday, Mother would always fry three chickens, and she’d have a crockery bowl like this with potato salad, and Daddy would make ice cream. And if we didn’t have dates or something, or had some boys there, Daddy would get in the car after church, and he’d go ride around town and look for the loneliest-looking soldier or sailor and bring them for Sunday dinner. So Sundays we sat down to about eighteen people at the table almost every Sunday.

Swan: Oh, wow.

Petty: So Daddy called the house Grand Central Station. (laughter) And then, as I said, they didn’t have hotels and motels around here, and there was a lady called Bessie Seely(?) who was in charge of the recreation for the USO [United Service Organizations] here. And she would call my mother and say, “I’ve got these soldiers from Camp Shelby,” or from Gulfport or something. “Could you put them up for the night?” Well, with all of us in our family, Mother had to—we had three bedrooms, and we had two double beds in the girls’ room, and then a double bed in the other two bedrooms. And the dining room was a real long room. We had a sofa in there that opened up and made a double bed, and a daybed on the sun porch, and a glider on the front porch and a swing. And you’d see soldiers and sailors (laughter) all over the house somewhere spending the night. And as I said, you’d have dances and so forth. But my father was a very strict German. We nicknamed him DD for Damn Dutchman. And if he said no—the word “maybe” was not in his vocabulary; it was either yes or no. And so I remember my sister, older sister and her boyfriend and another couple went sailing once down at the beach. Well, we were supposed to be home about ten o’clock at night. Well, 10:30 came, and Bonnie wasn’t home, and almost eleven o’clock. So my father got out of bed and got dressed and started down the street. Well, we were supposed to be home about ten o’clock at night. Well, 10:30 came, and Bonnie wasn’t home, and almost eleven o’clock. So my father got out of bed and got dressed and started down the street. Well, here they come walking up the street in their swimsuits, and they got the tiller, had the tiller to the boat [and] carried it with them. They had gotten—the wind had died down down on the beach, and they couldn’t get up the river. So my father said, “Boys, that’s no excuse; you can all swim.” (laughter) So she got grounded for about two weeks. But all the young people were crazy about my father, but they were scared to death of him. And Daddy would say, “All right girls, if a boy comes to the house there and stops in the front and blows the horn, I’m going to go out and ask him if his legs have been cut off.” (laughter) And we knew that he would,
too. But if your date came to pick you up and if they didn’t say anything about when you would be in, he’d give them a chance, and before we left, he’d say, “Well, boys, what time do you plan to be home?” If they said, “Oh, 10:30 or eleven o’clock,” he’d say, “Well, let’s be home at 10:30.” Well, they’d have us home by 10:15. (laughter)

Swan: And what about when you were a young girl, did you have chores at home?

Petty: Did we have what?

Swan: Chores to do at home?

Petty: Oh, yes. I hated Saturday, and to this day I don’t ever do housecleaning on Saturday because in those days, before you had a washing machine and everything, you had to wash clothes by hand. And Mother had a scrub board and P and G [Procter & Gamble] soap. And I’ll tell you about that P and G soap. We’d have to take turns, the kids, scrubbing the clothes, and then Mother would rinse everything at least twice, and in the summertime she’d change the bed linens every single day on every bed in the house, and washed and starched the pillowcases and ironed them.

Stork: Every day?

Petty: Every single day in the summertime. And if you’d try to sleep, she could some way or another come in your bedroom, and she could pull that sheet up off the bed with you still in it (laughter) with the flick of a wrist. But on Saturday you had chores; you had to help clean the house. And my father, everybody in town said, “Anne Colle was either the dirtiest person in town or the cleanest because she did what everybody else did spring cleaning once a year.” And Daddy would even take the mattress off the bed and air them once a week. And so there was a laundry across the street on the corner run by a man named Mr. Stokes(?). And my mother loved cats; they weren’t housecats but they’d come—they had to stay outside. So anyway, they had kittens come along, and Mother would put an ad in the paper, “Cats for sale.” Well, she’d interview the people, and if they didn’t pass the interview, they didn’t get a cat. So we ended up at one time with twenty-seven cats in the backyard. Well, that’s when my father had the fish business, and he had this old man that worked down there, and Mr. Jack would fillet fish twice a day and come down the lane, which was a couple of doors down from the house that went all the way to the river. And he’d have these twenty-seven cats following him to get their fish. (laughter) And my aunt from Texas would come, and she said she never saw us fight over but two things; that was bobby pins and hose. But my mother and my two sisters—

Stork: Panty hose?

Petty: Hose.

Stork: Yeah, panty hose.
Petty: Stockings.

Stork: OK, stockings.

Petty: But we had a community drawer because we all wore the same size. (laughter) But we did; we had a wonderful childhood. And in the summertime we would go camping, and we had a cousin and his friend that had a houseboat, and some of the boys that we went around with, they'd have little motorboats. Well, they'd pull the houseboat over to Gautier, and they took the exit to the mouth of Merry Walker Bayou and take a rope and tie it to a tree because there weren't any houses there then. And we'd stay on that houseboat a week or two at a time. And we'd crab to get food and so forth. And every day we'd walk up to the railroad track to see if we had any mail. Now, I don't know who we thought would be writing us. (laughter) And this houseboat had a little leak in it, so the boys told us, said, “Now, you've got to pump it out every night before you go to bed.” So we'd put a mattress on top, and we'd sleep up there at night. So one night we forgot to pump it out, and woke up the next morning, and it was on the ground. The bayou wasn't very deep there. And we all rolled overboard into the water. (laughter) And we'd camp out and go to Round Island and then camp out. And I remember once we wouldn't take any food; we were going to live on the land. We took a floundering torch and the gigs and a crab net, and I've forgotten what else. Well, at night the flounders weren’t around. I think we caught two crabs, maybe. We didn't get a flounder. By the next day Daddy came up with one of the boats, and he and Mother showed up with their potato salad and fried chicken and ice cream, and we were so happy to see them; we were starving. But back then the lighthouse was on Round Island, and it’s gone now, but there was a steel stairway that you could climb and go all the way to the top of that. And they had a little house there that was abandoned, which used to be the light-keeper’s house, but that burned. One summer somebody came in and set a fire and burned it. But all of that’s gone now with the storms. And we used to—one of the men that lived in our neighborhood on the snapper schooner, and it was called The Snapper King. It was a big two-masted schooner painted black, and he would fish for snapper off the coast of Mexico, but when he was in town, we all lived in the same neighborhood. And Captain Mike would tell us, say, “Well, all right kids, we’ll go out to the island and spend the day; everybody bring a quarter.” So that if the wind wasn’t up to sail in, he could operate the boat. So we would all go out, and one of the last times that we went, one of the boys that we was running around with—there were ten of us; five girls and five boys, that we just called ourselves The Gang. And one of the boys’ sisters was in the Coast Guard. They had come here, and so the boys borrowed sailor uniforms, and they went out that weekend all dressed as sailors. And a few years later they were all in sailor uniforms; World War II came along. And three of the boys didn’t come back. So it was a really sad time, too. But it was, it was such a wonderful place to grow up in back in those days. The kids from Lake Avenue called themselves The Mudslingers because of the swimming beach there was muddy. Pascagoula, we were the River Rats, and the beach kids were the Beachcombers. (laughter) In World War II, I remember we were sailing our boat out there one day, and this little soldier came along. He’d never been in a sailboat, and he begged us to let him go sailing with us.
So we said, “Well, we’ll let you go if you fill up the centerboard.” So we gave him a can, and (laughter) all afternoon he was dipping it and was trying to fill up the centerboard. I don’t know if you know anything about sailing. Well, you have this, it’s what they called a little catboat, and it has a shaft that goes underneath the centerboard that goes, keeps the boat from turning over. And, of course, it goes right into the water, so there’s no way you can fill it up. And we never did tell him any different. (laughter) Every time he’d go sailing with us, he would be filling up the centerboard. (laughter) But, as I said, it was a wonderful, wonderful time to grow up.

**Stork:** It really sounds like it was.

**Petty:** Any other questions, or have I talked too much?

**Stork:** No, I think that our time is pretty much—

**Petty:** No, I wouldn’t take anything in the world for growing in Pascagoula. And I’m so happy to see what’s happening to it now and to Moss Point, um-hm.

**Stork:** Well, thank you, Mrs. Petty, for letting us do this interview with you today.

**Petty:** Well, thank you so much, and I’ve enjoyed being here and talking with you.

(End of interview)