

1 Pauline St. Louis - Interview  
May 18, 1987

Interviewer  
Mary Kasamatsu

1927 Flood and Other Things

MK Tell me what you were doing, where you were at the time of the flood?

PS I was having a day off. I was a switch-board operator at the hospital and I would ordinarily have been in the hospital because it was my week to work afternoon shifts but I was having a day off. I was so happy in the morning because it was raining and I love to sleep when it is raining. I thought it was beautiful. So that is what I was doing when it started. Then I went upstreet later in the day, about 3:00 o'clock. A friend of mine that lived across the road had his little Ford and he said you better let me take you home because if you don't you are not going to get back. I couldn't figure what he was talking about. So it wasn't that bad yet. But, as we came down, I could see the water was really rising and this Main Street here and as I said, I lived at the hospital annex which is now known as Ladd Hall. That was a dormatory for the male attendants. My mother was matron and so I lived there with her, because I worked at the hospital too! About 5:00 o'clock, we began to notice that something really serious was happening and because the house was a brick house and large, the neighbors just felt as though they would be safer with us. So we ended up with 52 neighbors. The farm boss who lived next door, he had sent a young man who had worked on the farm. You see the hospital had a farm which was in Duxbury, across the river it is still there, but I guess it isn't used much. He had sent him over there to pick up some of the workers who happened to be patients at the hospital and were from the 12th Hall which at that time was the criminal ward. They don't have that anymore. He told him to go over and bring them back. He just about made it. He knew he couldn't get into the hospital to take his patients back, so he brought them to our place too! So there were four large men who were criminal patients. But as it has occurred to me so many times, no one had any thought of being nervous with them around, because you had something so much more serious to think about. This young man, his mother and his sister and his sister was a cripple, were living in the farm over in Duxbury, and he was of course beside himself, because he couldn't get home. There was very little said. It was a very quiet thing. When we realized that we had to go to the second floor. This was the case in so many instances. I had a beautiful piano and we had our pictures, our things that could not be replaced. No one thought to take a thing upstairs. I have been told by many many people in this town, that it was the same thing with them. They were so shocked and you just stood around and waited until the time to move upstairs, but you did not think to take those things that you thought so much of. We went to the second story and one of the men who was at our house with his wife lived across the street was the engineer at the hospital. So he took it upon himself to keep measuring the water constantly. Every time he would go down the stairs as far as he could walk to measure the water, it was a

horrible feeling because we would wait anxiously to hear has it risen, has it gone down. Well, it kept coming up and that night of course was the worst and we were quite far back from the Main Street. The firemen started out with rescue boats, but the current was so swift in front of our place that they couldn't get even in where we were. They did some rescuing. But down the street was a family and of course everybody knows about the Cutting family and what happened to them. It was just past our place where they were caught in the tree and were drowned. One of the men who was at our house called out to them to see who it was and he told us and he said "I am Harry Cutting and I have my family" and those were the last words of course and they were gone in no time. This young man who I told you about who came and brought the patients. They had the horses. Well, he didn't know what to do about the horses and he tied them which was natural to do, to the porch post. Of course, they were tied and they were drowning and it was horrible to listen to those animals. Finally, of course, there wasn't any more sound and we waited and watching out the windows and seeing very little and watched through the night and then of course the next day, it was a terrible terrible sight and the way the current came, it brought a lot of debris around and up against our garage so it was hard to see the garage and we just waited, nothing to eat. The women from Stowe sent down milk cans full of coffee and sandwiches and they couldn't get them into us because they couldn't get a boat in there. So we had nothing to eat for a couple of days. But that didn't seem important either. So we just waited it out. The next night it was a wonderful, wonderful thing when Mr. Turner said the water has stopped rising. Then in about a half hour, he said it is going down. It went down rather rapidly. We felt that we could sleep perhaps, get a little rest, because we hadn't had any sleep at all. All there were to sleep on were the half cots that the attendants had and of course there weren't enough so we had to double up. Some of the men slept on the floor. We had to double up. The most uncomfortable time of all, I think, was I slept in the middle with my mother who was short, quite stout lady on the front with chairs in front of her to keep her from falling out of bed. On the back side next to the wall, so she wouldn't fall out, was my very dear friend across the street, 8 1/2 months pregnant. I couldn't move, I couldn't wiggle all night long. It was terrible. I think that was the most uncomfortable time I had. So this night, we were all sleeping and all of a sudden we heard this young man who his family was across the river, I told you about. He was so upset about them. He raced up and down the hall saying the water is up again, the water is up again and we believed it. It was just panic. We looked out the window and it was strange and I can see it right now. What looked like water was the moon had come out and was shining on the mud and it looked for the all the world as though the water was way up to the second story windows. But of course, we didn't take to long to realize what it really was. It was a welcome

sight to think that the moon was out. Maybe things were changing. So in the morning, we went out and went downstairs and went out and you could hardly stand up in the mud. You can't believe it. Everything was of course in such shape, it was terrible. They came around with trucks, filling this big truck with pianos. I don't know how many they dumped into Butler's Pond at the other end of the town. It was a mammoth cleaning up job. Of course, the best thing that came out of the flood as far as I was concerned was that in a month, it took a month for me to get the letter that was mailed the last day of the flood, the 5th. It was mailed from Greensboro to me in Waterbury. It took me a month to get that letter. It was from a young man whom I had met and he lived in Greensboro and he worked at the hospital for the summer vacation knowing that he was going to join the army in the fall. He did and it was sometime since I had heard from him. He came home on leave on the last train that got into St. Johnsbury before the flood. He wrote to see how my mother and I had faired. That started relations again and I married him later. That was the best thing that ever came out of the flood as far as I was concerned. People from Stowe came down and helped us a lot. At Thanksgiving, of course, nobody was in any shape to make a Thanksgiving Dinner. People from Burlington, they sent trucks full of food. They came up through the Smugglers Notch and put on a dinner for us at the Congregational Church which was marvelous. It was the first good meal we had had. That was really nice. The Red Cross was very good and everybody had a chance to tell what you needed most and got it in most cases. But it was a very frightening thing to go through.

MK What happened to your friend that was 8 1/2 months pregnant? Was the baby born in the midst of the clean-up?

PS Not until about another 1/2 month was gone by. She had it, all naturally and everything was alright. Her brother-in-law (she is short like I am) and she lived across the street, her brother-in-law carried her over, because the water was too deep at that time. It was around 5:00 - 5:30 p.m. Another young couple who lived across the street, came over as fast as they could and she holding a kitten, so that it wouldn't be in the water you know. Many just got there in time. They wouldn't have made it if they had waited a few more minutes.

MK I understand that Waterbury didn't have any water supply.

PS Oh! no, no. Of course, it knocked everything out. With all our people there, 52 people. The toilet didn't work, no water, no nothing. No water to drink or anything. Your clothes you know, you lost most all your clothes except those that kept everything upstairs. But hardly anybody does that. They lost many many valuable things and the irreplaceable things, i.e. photographs and things like that. Records, of course we had

a victrola. They weren't stereos in that day. A lot of beautiful records and all such things that we wouldn't have given up for all the world if we had had our way about it. But it was Marion Kimball and her husband put a book together "When the Water came to Waterbury" was the title. It was good. Now at the top of the hill, of course, it was alright up there. A lot of people went to the schoolhouse. Up there it was alright. It was when you got just about half way down Bank Hill, what we call Bank Hill, just up the end of the street here, you know, that is where the water started. So North Main Street and South Main Street and all in between were in bad shape. But if you lived on Stowe Street or near the school you were okay. A lot of families that lived on Perry Hill in the highlands were very good about taking people in and keeping them for awhile because their homes weren't fit to live in.

MK How many people were made homeless?

PS I couldn't tell you that. I don't know. I think quite a few had no place at all if it hadn't been for the kindness of people that lived on the farms around that were high up. I know my landlady, she lives downstairs, she and her children were taken up to Perry Hill up to the Keefe farm and they were awfully good to them. That happened in a great many cases. But we just stayed right where we were and cleaned up and shoveled out the mud and of course I got back to work as soon as I could. Although of course, they had a lot of repairing to do. Our switchboard was on the ground floor. But most everybody just stayed right where they were and cleaned up. We had to.

MK It's incredible.

PS It was a mess. I remember trying to walk upstreet. I couldn't do it. You couldn't do it.

MK How many feet of mud would you say?

PS I wouldn't dare to tell you that, because I don't know. A lot of it. I guess that is the most vivid memories of the flood. It is like it was yesterday. Thank goodness I can still remember, but I find that things many years ago are easier for me to recall than what I did yesterday. Although, I know that I over ate.

MK You were living outside, <sup>at</sup> <sup>land</sup> hall, did you cook there or did you take your meals at the hospital?

PS No, we took our meals at the hospital.

MK How did the hospital handle the situation?

PS It was a very difficult thing. They had to move all those patients to the second floor and the food business, I don't really know how they coped with it because they had around 1,400 patients or something like that. They just got things cleaned up just as fast as they could so they could get back into locomotion. But those patients all had to be moved. Bed patients and all. That was a tremendous job. Of course, the nurses had been on duty during the daytime were caught right there and had to stay. They had families which they didn't know about. They didn't know what was happening to their own families. There was no communication. They just had to stay. But the thing was, you just got right into it and got things cleaned up just as fast as you could.

MK Were the roads in town paved before the flood?

PS No, that is another thing that I couldn't tell you. I don't think so. Well, I don't know, they must have been. That is something that I don't remember a thing about. I think, I'm sure they must have been.

MK I have read that the automobile really got a good foot hold in Vermont after the flood. Because so many roads had to be rebuilt with cars in mind.

PS After that, the Route 2 from Waterbury to Burlington which at that time was thought to have been the last word in roads. You know how crooked that is. That was a big thing when that road went into being.

MK That was after the flood?

PS It was the end of living end of roads. It was terribly laid out.

MK You're right, it does wander just a little bit.

PS It certainly does, it is narrow.

MK Do you remember hearing about looting or vandalism?

PS I am sure there was some, but not too much. I don't believe there could have been very much, because we didn't hear much about it. Everyone was just so busy, I don't think there was much of that.

MK Of the people who were at the hospital, was anyone injured?

PS No.

MK There must have been in terms of dealing with the patients. What an incredible job.

PS It had to be a tremendous job. Somebody went up into the attic of the third story and they found some canned tomatos and then in a day or two, somebody brought in some milk. One of the women made some cream of tomato soup. That was the first food that we had. But I don't remember and I have thought about it a lot of times, there was too much to think about, that was really serious, food wasn't ????. You just wanted to live. And we didn't see how we could.

MK Do you remember how long it was before they had communication.

PS It was sometime before things got back. Crews from other states and worked and left. Colds and things. The telephone people were quite awhile and the traveling from to and from Burlington of course as I said before you had to go through the notch for some time. Of course, I don't remember how long that was because the notch gets bad in the winter. But at Thanksgiving time they came through with the food and that sure did taste good. Everybody in town went.

MK I was talking with a woman, Mrs. Ryder who had been Mrs. Randall at the time of the flood and she was talking about how everyone wanted to get her out of town before that baby was born. That started both of us thinking about those people who did have small children. And having just finished with my younger son, who is just now out of the diaper stage, suddenly thinking my good heavens how do you cope with diapers and infants. No water, no way of washing anything. Eventually, your going to run out of clean diapers.

PS I don't know, you are given a sixth strength I guess. You do what you have to do. As my mother always said, your back is fitted to your burden and I guess it is. You do what you have to do somehow. If you have to do it, you do it.

MK Another thing that Mrs. Ryder mentioned that I wanted to ask you about. She said that for years after the flood when you would be talking with people, people would say when did such and such happen and the answer would always be either before the flood or after the flood.

PS True, we marked the time before and after the flood. That's true. It happened so fast it is a shock.

MK How old were you when the flood came?

PS Let's see, that is 1927 and I was born in 1906. 21 years old. Is that it, I don't figure in my head that well. Yes, I was 21. I was married when I was 25. That makes it about right. My husband used to like to tell people that, when they would talk about the flood he would say the 1927 flood was my Waterloo. That's my husband right up there.

MK When was that picture taken?

PS That was taken in 1942. We had been a few months into World War II. We were in Hawaii in Pearl Harbor Day. We went through that and that was. Knowing how people cope when they have to, we sure found out then too!

MK Where was your husband then?

PS We were in Hawaii.

MK When did he actually ???

PS Of course, it was Sunday morning and we were just getting up. The day off and just getting up. That is like yesterday. That was taken in 1942, that was December, 1941, just a few months after the war. You find out what you can do if you have to. Many people with little children. We had one daughter, she wasn't quite six. That is an interesting story too!

MK Were you there with other people from Vermont?

PS No, of course, we were on the biggest army post in the world. Scofield Barracks. But, all of our friends were from other places. No one knew who we knew. A lot of them were from the south, happened to be. I didn't know anybody from Vermont all the while we were there. We were in Hawaii almost five years. We liked it so well, we just kept extending and figured we would stay there and retire. We figured a lot of things which we didn't do. But that was terrible. We lived through it. That is another time that all you wanted to do is live. Nothing else is important.

MK You were just getting up, did you hear the bombs or did you hear news first?

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PS No, we heard the bombs. I was getting my little girl up and ready for Sunday school and Harold was reading the Sunday paper in bed and we heard the booms and you know, and I said "It is a funny time for maneuvers" and he said "There are no maneuvers on Sunday" ever and he was on his feet getting into his clothes and I said what is it? He said, well it has got to be some trouble and just at that time, we heard a plane going low over our house. See, we were adjacent to Wheeler Field which was one of the three objectives and he looked out and saw the plane with the red meatballs (as they called it) the red ball on the wing and he said we are being bombed. I said by whom? He said the Japanese. By that time, he was all ready to leave the house. He said goodbye to us. We didn't know if we would ever see him again and he told me to take Sally to headquarters. So I did and it soon became filled with other regimental people and we set there all day waiting for orders. He went out to his post which was out by one of the beaches and we set there all day. The cooks prepared a meal at noon and nobody would eat. We didn't even think about it you know. Then at night, after it was dark, they sent buses from Honolulu, which was about 25 miles from where we were up and filled the buses with the women and children and took us to Honolulu. They wanted to get us off from military installation because they were positive they were going to come back again. Everybody expected they would come back. They wanted to get us off their base and get us down in Honolulu. They put us up in different schools. They have a lot of nice schools in Honolulu. We were billeted at the Royal School which is on Punch Bowl Hill which is near the National Cemetery that you hear about and we stayed there for a week until they could build or dig air raid shelters in the lawns. It was just the dimensions of a grave. Our husbands didn't know where we were, but when they got us all settled, they put out a paper. The names and where we were and sent them out to the different posts, so the men could see where their families were and of course, then he called on the phone and found out where we were. That we were alright. So we came back at the end of the week and whenever there was an air raid alarm, which there were many, we would have to jump into that hole in the ground. If we didn't the guards would put us in. But, they did not come back which was a mistake that they made. Thankfully for us, they made the big mistake. The admiral who created the plan and put it through, which was an excellent plan. It was beautifully executed. He said the only thing we did was to awaken a sleeping giant. If they had come back, there would have been nothing left of us. There would have been absolutely nothing to build on. They would have had everything their own way. But I think that was God's work. He just wouldn't let them come back. We lived there until the 1st of April. There were blackouts at 7:30 at night and we were not suppose to leave our home for any length of time and food was getting a little low. Of course, most everything came in by boat to the comacery. We had to ration our food. Christmas Day we had spam and butterscotch



pudding for our dinner. We hadn't done much Christmas shopping and all the children couldn't quite understand why they didn't have much of a Christmas. We got through it and Harold would come in when he could possibly come and see us for a little while. It wasn't often. We lived like that until the end of April. Then see they couldn't get us out of there because the boats were being used to take the troops to the South Pacific. They had nothing for us. Finally, they took the Lerlene and knocked out partitions and made all the room that they could and an English liner and they came and took all of us. We went on the Lerlene and it came to San Francisco. I thought as long as we were there, we should stay awhile and see the place. Of course, my husband was enroute back to Ft. Monerth, NJ where he was going to Officers Candidate School. He was the master sergeant at the time the war broke out. He was communications chief of the 21st infantry. They told him that they wanted him to become an officer and he said if I can take my family back with me, I will do it. So they said okay, you can. So there were 2,500 women and children on that boat and one husband and that was mine. When we got to San Francisco, he went one way and I went the other. He went to New Jersey for three months. My mother was living with my sister in Montpelier. Of course, I was from Waterbury originally, I was born and brought up here. She was there, so I said I might as well go there. So we came to Montpelier. I found an apartment eventually and we lived there through the war. He got out of OCS and was sent to North Africa, Italy and Southern France. So it was a long time before I saw him. The trip to Honolulu that Sunday night. It was raining and they were told not to have their lights on. The only thing my little girl can remember, my daughter can remember, is seeing the ships burning. It showed up pretty good in the dark night. The trip down was terrible. There were children crying, some were sick they wanted to go to the bathroom. There were women who were in bad shape due to nerves you know. It was horrible. But, we finally made it. We slept on the floor of the school. It was a pretty hard floor. We had very little to eat, because they didn't understand. They could have ordered from the quarter master and got the food for us. They didn't understand that. Their cafeteria was less than nothing. So we didn't eat much for a week. Very, very little. We had one meal on a Wednesday noon. We had some beef stew. You can imagine how good it tasted. I never did find out what happened, but we had food poisoning. 150 people in one bathroom. But we got through that somehow. You do what you have to do. Did you happen to watch 60 minutes last night?

MK Just the tail end of it.

PS The coverage on Senator Daniel ~~Amoy~~. He talked about Pearl Harbor, how the regiment that the young Japanese formed went to Italy. They got more decorations than any other regiment in the whole World War II. That was right up my alley last night. Of course, it is a national organization. The Pearl Harbor Survivors Association and we have a Green Mountain Chapter. We meet four times in the summer and we had our first one yesterday. It is a very close knit little group. I think we have 15 eligible members in this state. Some of the men don't choose to belong. I can't understand it, but that is their business. But we meet and have a good time and talk about Pearl Harbor. It is always new. We each have our own story. That's nice.

MK Are you in touch with some of those people at other times in the year also.

PS All of our friends, a lot of my friends that I have, that I thought so much of in Hawaii have passed away. Some I just haven't any idea, but I kept up with a lot of them. There is only one lady living and she is very sick in a nursing home in Texas and I don't expect I will ever see her again. Now this group that I belong to, we are so much older than the rest of the group, most of the other men are just single fellows in Hawaii, so of course a lot of our friends just passed away. As I say, there is only one that I know of that I keep in touch with that is still alive. I will be 81 in September, so you see we were older than some. Of course, that is quite a long time ago. We kept in touch for quite awhile, but it is amazing to think of how many have gone. That's what happens in time. No way around it. I would like to find a way. But I guess you can't do it. I am very active in my church and I play for the Sunday school, I play for Senior Citizens and I play for the Rebekahs, I am a busy lady. I am going to go just as long as I can possibly do it.

MK You said earlier, that you went to some Chataqua?

PS The Chataqua was held down in back of the hospital. They would come every summer. It was something that we looked forward to. Because back in those days, no I do sound old, there weren't that many things to do as I have said so many times, growing up. It was a good time to grow up. We made our own fun. We made our own amusements. The Chataqua was really wonderful. A lady, I think she is still living in a nursing home in Morrisville, Kathleen Luce, she was Kathleen Labaron at the time. She went away and studied music and became a very fine singer. She was one of a trio "The Liberty Bells" and it was a big thing for all of us in Waterbury the year that the Liberty Bells were part of the Chataqua. They had a huge tent and wonderful, wonderful talent and it was really something that we looked forward to all year long.

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MK Other than the Liberty Bells, what are some of the other kinds of entertainment.

PS They had plays. There were dramatics. A lot of instrumentalists. Bell ringers, all sorts of entertainment, anything that anybody could do any talent they had. Piano, piano soloists and a lot of singing of course. Usually, it would be one night. It was a week and usually one day that would be devoted to a drama. Like a three act drama. It was really super. It was a big thing for us here. As it was I am sure for everyone. It was great.

MK Did you go everyday?

PS Get a season ticket. I can't remember. I am sure it was ridiculous low. I can't remember what we paid for them. We wouldn't miss that and sometimes they would be different in the afternoon than at night. It was a lot of entertainment in a week. It was great. There is a lot of space down there you know and some local groups would sell food. There would be food concessions if you wanted it. It was really a big thing in town. That and the annual minstrel show that was usually put on were the two big things as far as I was concerned. We had a lot of good talent in town.

MK Is the minstrel show local talent?

PS Oh! yes. It was wonderful. And then, most every year, there was a man and his wife. They were sponsored by the Odd Fellows Lodge here in Waterbury and they traveled around the country with their costumes and they would produce a play. A big show, I mean like they were doing on Broadway. It was marvelous. I was always in the Chorus and we had to learn several dances because they used the same Chorus girls for the whole thing and it was really beautiful and the first thing that after Kathleen came home, and decided to settle down and she married one of the Luce, Burton Luce, Luce family, she was in Lovenest. That is the one she was in. It was great. She was so good you know. She had a beautiful voice. She was my, I used to tell her every chance I got, she has been bad for some time, but when she could understand and enjoy it, she used to love to have me tell her about what an impression she made on me because she was the first big timer as far as I was concerned. She was really great.

MK How old were you when you went to the Chataqua?

PS I would have been around 12 years old,

MK So you hadn't ever had another kind of opportunity to do something like that?

PS And as I say we made our entertainment. It was a wonderful time to grow up. We had a lot of parties. But they were parties at different homes you know. We would have something nice for refreshments, play games. A great entertainment and amusement I should say when I was young was to stand around the piano and sing songs. We could do that for a whole evening you know. It doesn't sound to exciting, but it was at that time. We had a lot of fun and in the winter we had great sliding and skating parties. No one had any money to spend. We were all in the same boat you know. But we had a great time. We had a good time. It was good time to grow up. Of course, I want to live so badly, that I wish great many times that I hadn't been born quite so soon, but it doesn't make much difference. We had a lot going on in our church too! Sunday school they had a lot of things that were nice. They put on operettas and contadas and things like that. And I think of the women that gave so much of their time to us to rehearse. I think of it now when I am rehearsing with my church band and my church junior choir. I think of these women. I used to think that perhaps they would get tired of it, but you don't. You enjoy it so much and I know that they did too! They were a great help to us. I think that my lifetime has been the best of times for one reason or another. Harold and I were married lacking 5 days of being 50 years. Of course, he was in the regular army. He had been in the army a long time. We lived many places. I loved it. Had a good time. I don't think I would have done anything differently. I had a wonderful life... I am having a wonderful life!

MK How many years did the Chataqua come to Waterbury?

PS I remember three or four years and I don't know it just probably went out of existence because there wouldn't have been any other reason for it to cease. I guess it just went the way of all things.

MK Was it always the same group or company that would come?

PS No, different ones. It was wonderful. You really saw the best of everything. It was well attended. It was very successful.

MK The people who were performers that must have been an incredible experience to travel all over the place.

PS I am sure they must have enjoyed it. Going all over the country. We were fortunate to have had them come here. They didn't come to every town not by any means. I don't know who was responsible for it, but I am very grateful to whomever it was.

MK Thank you very much.

PS Your most welcome. I enjoyed it very much. I like to talk.