

# TRANSCRIPT OF AUDIO FILE:

## INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT--YOLE SILLS.DOC

22 SEPTEMBER 2007

INTERVIEWERS: PETER SIMONSON AND NAOMI McCORMACK

TRANSCRIPTION'S TEXT: UNCORRECTED FOR SPELLING

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### BEGIN TRANSCRIPT:

INTERVIEWER: ...you grew up and where your parents came from; kind of early biography.

YOLE SILLS: Okay. Well, I was born in Greenwich Village. My parents were musicians: My mother, a cellist; my father, a violinist. And my grandmother was an opera singer and a graduate of the Italian conservatories of music, so she was my teacher. And I spoke Italian all my life because of that, and I'm eternally grateful to her and to my parents for having done that.

All of the children's literature which you normally are exposed to I read in Italian, so I was bilingual, which of course, during the war, was a great, great advantage for me, because I spent four years of the war in the Voice of America for - well, more than that. Five years I was with the Voice of America, in which I wrote propaganda broadcasts addressed to partisan units behind enemy lines in northern Italy. [0:01:26.7]

So the war was very much a very dramatic part of my memories of that particular time, and I was sure that at the end of the war that I would get a chance to be sent to Italy and was all primed for it. And when I was interviewed about what I was going to do after the war ended, I was sure they were going to send me to Italy. And they said, "I'm sorry, but we have - the post that you were thinking of has been eliminated so we won't be able to send you to Italy." And I was tremendously disappointed, but they said, "Would you like

to go to Japan instead?" So I said, "Japan? Yes." So off I went, and thereby comes the rest of my life. And I spent seven years - no, six years in Japan. And after a year and a half I met someone by the name of David Sills at an embassy cocktail party and that's it. [0:02:41.1]

INTERVIEWER: So if we could go back to before you started with the VOA.

YOLE SILLS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You grew up in Brooklyn and...

YOLE SILLS: I was born in Greenwich Village, but fundamentally my parents, yes, moved to Brooklyn. They were musicians and they used to - my father provided orchestras for movie houses; this was before the talking machines, as he called them. They used to have orchestras in movie houses, which he provided with the music and the program and so forth, so that's what he did for a long time. Well, that's part of that particular history, which was interesting for a while. [0:03:33.5]

INTERVIEWER: And so you grew up listening to musicians and going off to hear your father in the movie houses? Do you have memories of that -

YOLE SILLS: Oh yes. I used to go occasionally to see free movies because my father had an orchestra in that particular movie house, of course. No, it was an interesting part of my childhood, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And what were your aspirations as a girl? What did you want to grow up and do? [0:04:01.4]

YOLE SILLS: What did I want to grow up and do? Many things, but fundamentally, you know, it's a difficult question to answer you. In effect, I did what I really would have wanted to do. I was always interested in writing. I was always interested - I was bilingual, and lo and behold, for five-and-a-half, almost six years, I worked with Italian refugees and the Voice of America, writing broadcasts to partisan units behind enemy lines in Italy and literally did not speak English during that period; constant interaction with these refugees.

The refugees, most of them were Italian Jews who - from the north. Most of them hardly knew that they were Jewish. And as they explained it to me, they said, "We were graduate students and all of a sudden the dean called us and said, 'Señor Levy (sp?), (speaking foreign language).'" "And they say, 'What? I can't attend these courses?'" "No, (speaking foreign language). You're a Jew," so that was it. [0:05:30.1]

And my colleagues were - in the Voice of America they were about 15 Italian prisoners of war who had been brought over to a prisoner of war camp in Staten Island. And they used to send them over every day to New York where they were employed by us. And since I was the only American among the group of Italians, the Italian refugees who were my colleagues, they were responsible to me, and I was quite young and it was a very odd

kind of relationship. They were two colonels and a captain and a major and a lieutenant whose prize part of his life in America is that he had been a divorce lawyer for Joan Crawford, one of Joan Crawford's many divorces; landed in Italy. [0:06:38.5]

And so I had this contact with him all during the war, and they worked, presumably, under my direction, because I was the only American among this group of Italian Jewish refugees who were la Voce dell'America, one of many languages which we used to broadcast to Europe and during the entire period of the war. [0:07:06.0]

INTERVIEWER: So how would you write propaganda? What was the process that you would go through?

YOLE SILLS: Well, we would have weekly meetings with military and state department personnel in which the line, the propaganda line for the entire Voice, was laid out. And our responses were based on answers to intelligence reports which we got on a daily - sometimes dual broadcast during one day about what was going on in Europe; specifically for me, what was going on in Italy. So it was a very thrilling experience which I had.

I literally didn't speak English for that entire period, because I used to go very early in the morning and get back very late at night and I spent all day long interacting with these fellow - well, they were all refugees; of course I was not. But I spoke Italian all day long and I wrote broadcasts, propaganda broadcasts, all day long so... [0:08:24.3]

INTERVIEWER: Where there other women who worked at the Voice of America?

YOLE SILLS: Yes. Yes, all in - they had many languages; the French desk, for example, and the German desk was all completely - almost completely women when I was there, except for two or three, the directors of that particular section of the propaganda organization. It was a thrilling experience and it went on for quite a while. And I was sure that they were going to send me to Europe and I was told no, would I wanted to go to Japan instead, and immediately I said yes obviously. Wouldn't you? [0:09:05.5]

INTERVIEWER: And did you have any sense that you didn't get to go to Italy because you were a woman or that there were opportunities that weren't made available to you?

YOLE SILLS: Oh no, it had nothing whatsoever to do with that. It was simply that the number of people who were actually working on various jobs, intelligence, for example, being one of them, had been reduced completely, because there was no need for them; it was a completely different administration of authority.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember how you got hired at the Voice of America and how you became aware of that opportunity?

YOLE SILLS: Yes. I remember that somehow I had - I was going to - starting graduate school at Columbia and I wasn't sure what I was going to be doing. And someone said,

“You know, they’re hiring. They want people in languages at such-and-such an office.” Word got around and I went, and as soon as I arrived someone interviewed me in Italian and said, “Would you like to work for us,” and I said, “Yes.” And so there hence is the tale of Yole G. Sills, Yole Grenada (sp?). My name is Grenada (sp?), which is the Italian name for the City in Spain, Granada. [0:10:38.1]

INTERVIEWER: And so you had gone, went to study in college. And when did you graduate?

YOLE SILLS: Pardon?

INTERVIEWER: What did you study at Brooklyn College? What did you major in?

YOLE SILLS: Literature and languages, basically; French and - well, there was no Italian. I knew more Italian than the professors who were there because I had always spoken Italian all my life. But what Italian courses there were I took immediately, which I immediately dropped because they weren’t very good. [0:11:12.7]

I ended up by hiring two of my professors when I became part of the Voice of America, because we needed people who could read scripts in Italian. And these were two very charming Italian Americans who, for once, did not speak dialect, spoke decent Italian, and we hired them immediately. I hired one of them. So it was fun.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little bit more about the work that you all did. Did you read, did you broadcast, or were you just a writer?

YOLE SILLS: At the VOA?

INTERVIEWER: At the VOA.

YOLE SILLS: Oh, every day we would have meetings with the people in charge of separate intelligence operations, and these people, this particular group of people worked on intelligence reports which they would get from Europe. And on the basis of what we knew was going on and the progress of the war, there was decisions made about the response to fascist propaganda.

So it was a war with a - daily war, conversational war, with the German and with the Nazi propaganda and with the (inaudible at 0:12:39.3) the Europeans were under the aegis of German occupations.

INTERVIEWER: Was part of your job then to listen to the Italian propaganda?

YOLE SILLS: Pardon?

INTERVIEWER: Did you listen to the Italian propaganda, the fascist propaganda?

YOLE SILLS: Yes, yes. We had that, and we also had intelligence reports. A large part of what I did was in answer to intelligence reports, you know. Today we would find out that 45 people had been shot in the morning, accused of collaboration with the allies, that sort of thing, and then immediately I would write a broadcast, which is in answer to what we heard broadcast on the broadcast units, radios. [0:13:35.0]

INTERVIEWER: And which did your office then do the broadcasts as well?

YOLE SILLS: Pardon?

INTERVIEWER: Did your office do the broadcasts? Were the broadcasts -

YOLE SILLS: Yes. We used to broadcast at the - the OWI offices were at West 57th Street. The entire operation, I think still part of it is in that area. All the languages were broadcast from New York City. And there must have been - I don't recall exactly what the number - 20, 30 - easily, 20 to 30 language sections. They grew, of course, as time went on. [0:14:21.5]

So it was a very thrilling and interesting part of my life. Of course, I spoke Italian all day long. Then I would go home and I'd speak Italian with my parents and my grandmother and I was die-cast (ph), so to speak.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do the on-air broadcasts as well yourself, personally?

YOLE SILLS: No, no. I didn't have the voice for it. I didn't care about it. We had announcers. Each one of my programs, I used to score them for conversation among three people, because in that manner we could play off different parts of propaganda items which we would receive in the morning, and it was a question of trying to keep ahead of fascist propaganda or Nazi propaganda and then take the lead in starting the discussions, which we wanted, say, partisan units in Italy to hear about. We would feed them the intelligence which we received during the day and gave them whatever information was considered useful by them. [0:15:40.8]

INTERVIEWER: Oh, interesting. So it was strategic information, then, for people fighting.

YOLE SILLS: Yes. Oh well, we also had propaganda themes which we underscored: democratic America, sort of down with fascist, you know, that sort of thing. [0:16:04.7]

INTERVIEWER: And so had you been - I mean just to rewind a moment, had you been expected to go off to college? Were you raised to go to college?

YOLE SILLS: Oh yes, of course, yes. And I was going to go to Hunter College, as a matter of fact. But at that time there had been a tremendous increase in college populations, and all of a sudden they had no more room for people in Hunter College, isolated to go to Hunter College, which were mostly women at that time. And so the

spillover of Hunter and City College became Brooklyn College, which was created as a separate institution.

And what was interesting about it was that quite a segment of the faculty was Europeans, European refugees; people who had fought in the Spanish Civil War, for example. Two of the seniors who impressed me tremendously, and obviously having come in as a freshman, were two guys who had worked in the Spanish Civil War as soldiers, and one of them came back blinded, and of course there were these meetings on campus with him and emotional as can be. So my college experience was a very adult kind of intellectual experience rather than, say, the more traditional kind of college - four years of college kind of experience, and I don't regret it at all; it was very interesting. And immediately from there on I went to the OWI, and then I hired two of my professors as writers.  
[0:18:11.6]

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any female role models at Brooklyn College?

YOLE SILLS: No, we didn't think in those terms at all. It wasn't a traditional college in many ways. I mean it's a city college. It was a city. I mean it was not a private college, you know. NYU and CCNY, that whole culture, they were all part of that culture.

INTERVIEWER: And what year did you graduate from college?

YOLE SILLS: Oh, 1939, I think. Yes, I think so. It was such a long time ago.

INTERVIEWER: And then did you go right to work for the VOA in '39, or was it not until after Pearl Harbor that...

YOLE SILLS: No, I was with the VOA almost immediately. I had been told that there was some hiring done in New York City at a mysterious office and, you know, word got around and people were all college graduates looking for jobs. And I was told that they were interviewing, and such-and-such a mysterious office in New York, and I went and I had a ten-minute conversation with an Italian interviewer and they hired me on the spot. Then I turned around and I hired my professors, two of my professors, a year later.  
[0:19:40.3]

INTERVIEWER: And then to move on to Japan.

YOLE SILLS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Tell us about the kind of work that you did in Japan.

YOLE SILLS: Oh, first of all, when I went immediately after the war to be interviewed, I thought, to be able to go to Italy, which is where I wanted to go, they told me, "I'm sorry, but that particular operation has been terminated, we no longer have that. We don't have an occupation of that part of Europe any more." And I was very disappointed and they

said, "Well, would you like to go to Japan instead?" And I said, "Japan? Yes." So off I went. [0:20:22.6]

And in Japan my job as information officer; the information officer, which is the propaganda office of the United States government, that's what it really was. We had four or five people whose job it was to feed information and news of what was happening in the occupation to corYOLE SILLs from all over. And I was one of four people dealing with the allied press. And my opposite was a wonderful colleague who just visited us last week, my beloved coworker, Wilton Dillon, who was with the government in Washington, and he was in charge of dealing with the Japanese press. [0:21:18.9]

In other words, our office, which was the creator of information, that propaganda for the occupation, had two branches: One that dealt with feeding what we wanted to - the news that we wanted propagated about what was happening in the occupation of Japan to the Japanese press, and he was in charge of that. And I was in charge of dealing with the allied press. I was only one of three people dealing with contacts with corYOLE SILLs who dealt with the allied press. And it was fascinating, just marvelous. We were, in a sense, censors. In order to get stories printed that went out that would cover the occupation, the activities of the occupation, you had to have clearance. And in effect, MacArthur's office said, "You can broadcast this," or "You can write this for the New York Times or whatever," so that's the way it went. [0:22:25.5]

INTERVIEWER: What was it like to work in Japan after the war? What was the country like?

YOLE SILLs: Well, first of all, when I arrived it was May of 1946, which was very early in the occupation of Japan. As a matter of fact, I went over on a troop ship and the troop ship was stopped midway because there were submarines in the area. So we had this little scary drill, submarine drill, which I remember, it was very dramatic. [0:23:01.7]

Then we landed in Yokohama and I was stationed - immediately I was sent to the Public Information Office. And I was told my first assignment was to go to Ueno Station, which is the Grand Central of Japan, at night, to check out stories that we had heard reported orally that people were dying of starvation in the station at night, because it was warm and it was a place that people had no houses; they were bombed out. Tokyo was an absolute smashed paper community. And I was assigned to do stories, which I found during the middle of the night which was the Grand Central of Japan. And I remember saying to myself as I walked to Ueno Station, "This is insane. I wouldn't be walking in the middle of the night to go to Grand Central. What am I doing here?" [0:24:22.3]

INTERVIEWER: What other projects did you work on?

FEMALE SPEAKER 1: (Inaudible at 0:24:24.9).

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

You're doing great, Yole. I'm going to ask you that again and you can then be... So tell me the personal feeling you had, having this job in Japan.

YOLE SILLS: Say this again?

INTERVIEWER: What feeling did you have with this job in Japan? How did...

YOLE SILLS: First of all, it was thrilling. My entire - it was six years in Japan that I spent and it was fascinating; every minute of it was fascinating. First part of it was being part of the public information section, which was a small section of the occupation which was made up of two wings: One which dealt with correspondence from all over the world, and the second half dealt with people who were dealing with a Japanese press. And indeed this colleague of mine that I mentioned to you was my opposite; he dealt with the Japanese press. [0:25:37.7]

And we got our order, if you will, from a variety of different organizations within the occupation and they were intelligence operations. Oh, I don't even remember. We got the sources of information which we used, which we then wrote up as press releases; came from a variety of different parts of the occupation. [0:26:09.1]

INTERVIEWER: Did you work on any specific policies or issues in Japan?

YOLE SILLS: Yes. Later on when I changed - I had many jobs which I did in the occupation, but later on I worked in the land reform program, which one of the - in publicizing the land reform program for the allied press.

The land reform program was one of the basic reforms of the occupation under MacArthur which was one of the best reforms, in effect. That pushed the dissolution of the zaibatsu. The zaibatsu were the industrial combines; that was perhaps less successful over the years. But the land reform program was a basic reform which redistributed the land which had been broken up, either large estates broken up into tiny plots owned by someone who was a shopkeeper on The Ginza in Tokyo, for example, and had inherited a small piece of land through family inheritance at one extreme, and at the other extreme there's the big landowners who owned huge tracts of land. [0:27:39.3]

So the reform of the occupation which was designed by a Russian, Wolf Ladejinsky, a Russian who had been working for the Department of Agriculture for most of his professional life and was very, very respected, had written a great deal on land distribution patterns throughout Asia - and Wolf Ladejinsky was his name - was the designer of this fantastic reform which completely redesigned the ownership of the land throughout Japan. [0:28:19.6]

And this was made up of large estates which had been the property of traditional land-rich Japanese families or small shopkeepers who had a store, say, on the Ginza, which is one of the main streets in Tokyo, and had inherited a tiny little piece of land through his uncle. And it was a disastrous kind of organization as far as productivity was concerned,



because there was a confused setup for distribution of the products of the land.  
[0:29:07.1]

And the idea was to redistribute the land to those who actually cultivated the land. So the land reform program, through a design by Wolf Ladejinsky, became the model for many land reform programs throughout Asia, as a matter of fact, after the occupation of Japan.

INTERVIEWER: And tell me about the work that you did with Japanese women.

YOLE SILLS: Well, I was always an effect. I was a propagandist for the occupation. That was the nature of my job is I reported on what we, the occupation forces, had, in effect - mandated is a delicate way of putting it - mandated for the Japanese. [0:30:02.0]

So fundamentally the people who worked on it, people I worked with in the occupation, were all new dealers; the best of the best. They were all young democrats who were working in this ideological - well, we could do what we pleased. We suggested to the colonels that this particular reform was what Japan needed. So after a while the reform was suggested and sent up to MacArthur's headquarters and there the general said, "Fine, let's do it. This is a reform of the occupation of Japan." So Japan was re-made, redesigned, in effect, by liberal American intellectual academics and it was a thrill to be part of that. [0:31:09.4]

INTERVIEWER: And was women's reform a part of that process?

YOLE SILLS: Pardon?

INTERVIEWER: Was the reform of women's situation?

YOLE SILLS: Yes. First of all, the status of women in Japan was abysmal, actually. They had no power. It was a very traditional society. But I can tell you that a large part of the credit for what we did to push ahead reforms for women was due to the activities of a wonderful woman lieutenant, a WAC; an unglamorous, rather motherly-looking young woman, who single-handedly looked up as many groups of women that she could find out about who were surreptitiously feminists, got them all together, and pushed ahead a fantastic number of reforms and the status of women under the occupation, which then became part of Japanese society. So it was thrilling. I used to see them come in at the beginning of her tenure, so to speak. Unfortunately she died of cancer during the occupation, which was a tragedy. [0:32:34.3]

And here she was in her WAC uniform, not looking awfully well-turned-out. There was always one button that was slightly unbuttoned. And she had a small office and every day I used to see this parade of Japanese women in their kimono with this typical humped look that the Japanese kimono gives to women because of the obi which they wore around their waist which made the covering garment look humped. [0:33:16.1]

And I would see these women stream in to see Lieutenant Ethel Weed every day, and alone, and with enormous energy and enormous imagination she literally established or reestablished a native women's movement in Japan which was really responsible for a great many reforms in the status of women in Japan which had been absolutely crushed under the militarists.

INTERVIEWER: Were there other women who worked with you in the office?

YOLE SILLS: Oh yes. In effect, we all had the status of corYOLE SILLSs, official corYOLE SILLSs, yes. Not many. Well, two or three I think at the beginning. [0:34:09.9]

INTERVIEWER: And what kind of work did the American women do, besides Ethel Weed?

YOLE SILLS: I remember there were two women economists, I think, who I think were involved in the dissolution of the zaibatsu, the reform of the concentration of economic power in the hands of the zaibatsu. But fundamentally there were very few women actually, very few, compared to men, of course.

INTERVIEWER: So it was a remarkable opportunity, it seemed like.

YOLE SILLS: Oh absolutely, fantastic. I ended up by having a job at the end as a historian. And my job as historian was to write two of the volumes of the occupation, one on land reform and I've forgotten what the other one was, which have never seen the light of day. They're probably buried in some cellar in what used to be the war department, God knows what. Any rate, I did it, but enjoyed it very much. [0:35:31.6]

INTERVIEWER: And how did your tour come to an end and why did you come back to the states?

YOLE SILLS: Well, first of all, first thing that happened which was world shaking, is that I met one day with Sills at an embassy cocktail party, which like all embassy cocktail parties turned out to be a big bore. So off we went with a group of other friends and went swimming and we got, shall we say - we got to know each other. [0:36:02.1]

But we couldn't get married and get housing. In other words, we had no right to be given housing by the occupation authorities, because the priority was given to men who were waiting for their families to be brought over - husbands and wives as well, children as well as wives - and they had priority on both transportation and living quarters. So I had to wait until my father died and my mother was my sole dependent. Because she came as my dependent, I was given the same status as men waiting for their wives to come over and then we were given official housing. We had quite lovely, you know, Japanese villa, which we shared with the owners who discreetly were non-visible most of the time.

So then of course it was a completely different lifestyle and it was lovely. We ended up by having a fabulous apartment right across from the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, which was wonderful. [0:37:33.5]

INTERVIEWER: What was the opinion among the Americans - what was the opinion of the American occupying force of the atomic bombs that had been dropped?

YOLE SILLS: Among members of the occupation?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

YOLE SILLS: Well, I can tell you what my own reaction was. I was a duty officer. Every month or so, each of the members of the occupation, people who had particular assignments in the occupation, had to rotate a weekend assignment, so I was stuck for a Saturday and a Sunday and bored and reading some magazines that I'd managed to get which I hadn't seen. And to my great surprise, there was this report on the dropping of the bomb. And half bored, I opened it up and I saw the photographs, and it was as if I had been struck physically; it was a fantastic shocked experience. There were photographs of people fleeing from the - well, the one that you've seen in the press more was a little boy with no clothes on, fleeing the bomb - it's a very famous photograph - screaming, and it was unbelievable. The impact that it had on us was tremendous. I mean it was shock. And then you could imagine the second time we dropped the damn thing, how much of a... [0:39:33.8]

So from that standpoint it took me quite a while to get over the feeling of shock that I had about what we had done, despite the fact that the occupation was very good and very well carried out. But I think myself that we should not have dropped the second bomb. And whether or not there was any possibility that the first bomb would have done the job of stopping the war, I don't know. Probably not, and I've asked myself that question many times, especially since a friend of mine, who then later became the wife of the American ambassador to Japan, she was Japanese but had - Smith College graduate and aristocratic family and so forth. [0:40:23.8]

I went to see her; she had invited me for a weekend. She had a little Japanese house near the water. And she said, "I want to show you something," and she took me on a walk along the cliffs, looking down - overlooking the bay. And she took me in a cave, and she said, "Look at this," and in the cave there was a small, what looked like a torpedo which was about the size of a very small man, and this was one of the human torpedoes which the Japanese were going to release to sink the ships in the harbor, and that was quite a shock. These were human torpedoes; they were ready to do that. [0:41:20.2]

We know about the kamikaze, because the kamikaze were publicized a great deal more, but there weren't that many stories about this particular other aspect of the defense of Tokyo that you hear about. But it was shocking. One little man, one little torpedo, psst.

INTERVIEWER: And so why did you and David decide to come back to the states?

YOLE SILLS: Well, for one thing, when I - my father died when I was there, and therefore, all of a sudden, I was awarded the possibility of getting living quarters for all of us. Before that, we had wanted to live - we had to live - we could get married. We were married at the American consulate, but we were not given housing, because the people who had priority were the men who were waiting for their families to come over from the states, so they had priority on all housing which was signed by the authorities. [0:42:33.8]

When we - my father died, then my mother became my dependent and we were given housing, like other members of the occupation. There happened to be a very nice villa and we were very - we ensconced either there or in an apartment. The apartment we had at the end was not far, opposite the Imperial Plaza, and that was it. [0:43:10.0]

INTERVIEWER: And then coming back to the states?

YOLE SILLS: Well, one thing that I should mention is that while we were in Japan the Korean War broke out. Indeed, I had - this might be interesting as a footnote - I had had a minor accident and I had a stiff neck, and the local doctor looked at it and said "You'd better go get it x-rayed at the general hospital," which I did. They did that, and there I waited in a corner with my x-rays in my hand as I saw GIs being transported on stretchers, the stretchers carried by colonels, into the library where they were waiting to be sent off to military hospitals, and these were American GIs. This is when we went north and got involved with the war. [0:44:15.5]

INTERVIEWER: And then when did you come back to the states and what was your thinking then?

YOLE SILLS: When did we come back to the states? We came back - by that time - David, when did we come back? Hooo...

DAVID SILLS: I'm trying to think of what year. It must have been 1950, '51.

YOLE SILLS: Yes. Yes, that was it.

INTERVIEWER: And what did you do then? What did you do when you came back to the states?

YOLE SILLS: Let's see, what did I do when I came back to the states? Hold on a minute, I'm trying to remember. Well, I was at the bureau; came back and - yes, I worked at the bureau for - [0:45:09.9]

DAVID SILLS: And the Voice, too.

YOLE SILLS: What?

DAVID SILLS: You worked for the Voice too, the Voice of America.

YOLE SILLS: When I came back - when we came back, I forgot, I continued - yes, I continued writing for the Voice of America and - right.

INTERVIEWER: So you continued work for the Voice of America and then you worked for the bureau?

YOLE SILLS: Yes, the bureau, yes. I was at the bureau - I had some interesting assignments. The most interesting assignment at the bureau was working with a project which dealt with the reform of medical education, which I was very much interested in. I had always been interested in this. And this was - these reforms of the occupation are what, in effect - I'm sorry, of the reforms of the medical education were, in effect, what led to the kind of medical education that we now have. So they were quite revolutionary and I won't go into the details; it's much too complicated. So I became very much interested in the sociology of medicine, which has been a dominant interest on my part. [0:46:30.9]

INTERVIEWER: And what kind of work did you do at the bureau?

YOLE SILLS: Well, the bureau had projects, research projects of various kinds, and I was a low-ranking bureau member I think. I was given - hold on a minute; I'm trying to remember.

DAVID SILLS: Migrant workers?

YOLE SILLS: The migrant - yes, the - yes. People would come and give assignments to the bureau and the bureau then got some of its operating money, I guess, from these assignments, yes. This is such a long time ago; I try to remember the... [0:47:22.7]

And then I was assigned the task of providing experience to graduate students by getting them involved in interviewing projects involved in these assignments that I was given. So in effect, I trained a number of different students on interviewing techniques for the bureau for - I've forgotten (crosstalk).

DAVID SILLS: You worked on one polio project, remember?

YOLE SILLS: Pardon?

DAVID SILLS: You did interviewing for the polio project.

YOLE SILLS: For the polio project. Gosh, this is a long time ago. God, I'm... Give me a second. I'm trying to remember some of them.

INTERVIEWER: So I had pulled a few up. There was the migrant worker. There was the pajama project.

YOLE SILLS: The pajama project, yes. I kept ducking people when they asked me, "What are you doing?" "I'm working on a pajama project." [0:48:29.9]

WOMAN SPEAKER 1: Tell us about it.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, let's hear the pajama project story.

YOLE SILLS: Look, whoever wanted to get some cheap survey done at the bureau came to the bureau and I got stuck with it. The idea was to provide training for graduate students who want to get into research, sociology majors. So they would be - I would be saddled with them and then I would talk about interviewing techniques and what to do and so forth, how to go out in the field and come back with satisfactory information. It was pretty - well, I don't think it was very innovative, but it was interesting, and it was a good experience. Also for me, it was nice dealing with graduate students who were looking for experience, so that's fundamentally what I did. [0:49:36.9]

INTERVIEWER: And the pajama study; what was that about?

YOLE SILLS: What I was saddled with was commercial studies, and this was the pajama industry came wanting to - let me see, give me a second. This seems to be...

DAVID SILLS: Commercial project that the bureau took to keep alive.

YOLE SILLS: Yes. It was not only a question of keeping alive, but providing interviewing experience for graduate students who had none whatsoever. So in effect, they'd be assigned to me and then I would assign to them interviewing technique for - and planning the research that they were assigned with, so it was that sort of thing. It's not terribly, terribly intellectually stimulating, but it was fun for me and it was good dealing with graduate students, so that's what I did for quite a while; I had forgotten exactly how many years. [0:50:50.2]

INTERVIEWER: So was it a letdown to do that kind of work after the sort of thing you were doing in Japan?

YOLE SILLS: Oh yes, of course. So anyhow...

INTERVIEWER: Well, can you talk a little bit about that, what it felt like to be doing commercial projects for the bureau instead of...

YOLE SILLS: Well, the thing that I enjoyed most of what I did at the bureau was a noncommercial project. One that I remember was it was a whole series of projects which dealt with the reform of medical education. Incidentally, that was very, very important. It seems to me that the reform of medical education, which was one of the basic reforms in education, was what the bureau got involved in doing. And I don't remember the exact details, but I'm trying to remember... [0:51:51.4]

Anyhow, there were two or three projects that I got involved in whose purpose it was to reform medical education. And medical education when I was there was quite different from what it is now, though.

INTERVIEWER: So in general, did you feel like you didn't have the same opportunities in the states that you had in Japan and then during the war? [0:52:16.1]

YOLE SILLS: Oh, of course, of course. I mean what I had done in Japan was thrilling; it was the remaking of a society. But on 115th Street in New York City, you didn't exactly reform society, but it was interesting. Whatever assignment I got I found interesting. And fundamentally, I think the reforms of graduate education, which started at that time, were the things that were most interesting. I mean before you became a medical student and you went - medical students didn't have the opportunities at that time which they obviously then developed very shortly thereafter; being sent on the wards, for example; being involved in much more advanced experience with patients than they had had before. Before, you went to school, you became a medical student and then that was it. Then you went through the requirements. [0:53:37.7]

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever think about going on for your PhD?

YOLE SILLS: Yes and no. I wasn't very much interested at that time. One thing, we had adopted a child, a three-and-one-half-year-old boy, and so therefore my life changed for quite a while, and so the impetus for continuing in sociology disappeared. And I ended up by having a number of academic jobs actually of various kinds which kept me busy and which I enjoyed very much. [0:54:26.1]

INTERVIEWER: And then besides the bureau, what kind of academic jobs did you have?

YOLE SILLS: Gosh, hold on a minute. Oh, well, the last - I had a number of jobs in the academic world; for example, I worked for the New York Academy of Medicine for several years. The academy had a series of interdisciplinary discussions with the top-notch people in medical education. And I took the results of these seminars and turned them into a book. So I did a couple of projects of that kind, which was, in effect, turning just raw sociological material into more readable material and it was very interesting. [0:55:48.4]

INTERVIEWER: Would it have been possible for both you and David to have careers in the context of the 1950s?

YOLE SILLS: Oh sure; that wasn't the point. We adopted a son, we adopted him when he was three-and-a-half years old, and that's quite a story, because at that time adoption dependent on your being presented this child for 15 minutes on the basis of which you made a decision as to whether or not you wanted him; it's unbelievable. This is totally reformed now. [0:56:35.6]

And we had decided we wanted a child and couldn't have one and we just both decided we wanted to adopt one. And the way it went was quite different from our expectations; to wit, we were told to come to a meeting of people who were in the adoption...

(Music playing)

INTERVIEWER: So sorry. So sorry.

YOLE SILLS: Done (ph)?

INTERVIEWER: I'm sorry. Yes, so you were talking about the adoption?

YOLE SILLS: Well, we were - they'd opened the door and this darling boy came out. And so they gave us five minutes and they said, "Well, do you want to adopt him or not?" Period. So that's the story of our adopted son, Gregory. [0:57:35.4]

INTERVIEWER: And so after that, then you were a mother. And did you work - had worked part time?

YOLE SILLS: Yes, that was it. I did a lot of part-time assignments of various kinds, writing up seminars, and I've forgotten. I did so many of them I really sort of forgot. [0:58:00.1]

And we were going to go back. We were always on the verge of going back to an overseas assignment which David might have been involved with it. Indeed, we went back, we were in India. We lived in Bombay for a year and David was teaching at an organization which trained graduate students from all over the world in methods of social research. And I was working on something for the New York Academy of Medicine, a book on interdisciplinary seminars of top-notch physician educators. So it was that kind of involvement which I had which was fluid, shall we say, but interesting. And I was a mother for a period of time. Together with that, my mother was semi-invalid so I had my hands full on that sort of thing. [0:59:04.2]

But I ended up by doing a lot of teaching. I was a professor here, a substitute professor there, and that sort of thing, so that's the quality of my academic involvement.

INTERVIEWER: And what subjects did you teach?

YOLE SILLS: Well, they were basically sociology of medicine. I got very much interested in the sociology of medicine, and I also became very much interested in the sociology of retirement communities, which is probably one reason we're here. Because I found this was fascinating, together with a friend who was a Swedish architect, a woman architect. We had started doing a good deal of research on the development of these communities which were, at the beginning, just purely real estate enterprises into what they are now, which is all over. I mean these retirement communities like these are all



over the place, and that was an interesting sociological idea, which I was very, very much involved in for quite a while, and then ultimately here we're in one so far. [1:00:23.0]

INTERVIEWER: And we're surrounded by furniture that you've designed. Tell us a little bit about your interest in...

YOLE SILLS: That's right. That's right. But we're always on the verge of going back overseas. And David had offers to go to - I've forgotten - involved in a couple of projects overseas, so fundamentally that's... We did go back to Japan, which was marvelous, just to visit Japan, and I'd go back again anyhow, anytime, so we did a lot of traveling. [1:00:58.0]

And the experience in India was a very, very interesting one; it was during Nehru's last few years. And I remember seeing Nehru come and give his speeches on Champati (sp?), this used to be near the beach, and was very thrilled by the way this extraordinarily attractive intellectual; it was marvelous.

INTERVIEWER: So as you look back over your work career and life, what are the highlights and what are you most proud of doing?

YOLE SILLS: That's a very difficult question. You don't really want me to think about giving you an answer, do you?

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

YOLE SILLS: It's very difficult. No, I've been - I was never that much interested in teaching as such. I was I think fundamentally a mediocre professor when it came to teaching undergraduates who were not interested. I never found I was thrilled by the idea of having that kind of a job. So fundamentally I did a lot of work in the academic field, which had nothing to do with actually teaching. I wasn't that interested in being a professor. [1:02:17.6]

I ended up by being - working as a sort of dean at a college, a new college started by an Englishman in New Jersey; Ramapo College, it's called. Rather interesting interdisciplinary college with innovative ideas in an exploration of research projects and so forth, and that I enjoyed very much because it was offbeat. It wasn't the traditional Sociology I, Sociology II kind of thing, so fundamentally that's about it. [1:02:59.7]

FEMALE SPEAKER 1: Can I ask one question?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FEMALE SPEAKER 1: If you had anything to say now to, you know, young women now who are, you know, graduate students or starting over their careers, what kind of advice would you have for them? [1:03:10.9]

YOLE SILLS: Well, it's a very difficult question to answer, because obviously the answer would be, well, what's available?

FEMALE SPEAKER 1: I mean you look at people - (inaudible at 1:03:28.4) want to keep you. Pretend that Pete asked the question.

YOLE SILLS: All right, thank you.

INTERVIEWER: What advice would you give young women today?

YOLE SILLS: I think it's terribly important to get involved in activities which are not only traditional, to look for research possibilities which are intellectually exciting, and it all depends on what your proclivities are. I realized that I was really fundamentally not very much interested in teaching undergraduates, and especially undergraduates in, shall we say, in non-elite institutions. And most of the teaching possibilities are, you know, obviously in non-elite institution. Not everybody goes to get a teaching job at Harvard or Yale. I mean the average, run-of-the-mill kind of undergraduate institution isn't that thrilling as a job - as a career possibility as far as I was concerned. [1:04:48.0]

So fundamentally it would be nice to get involved in research which has some intellectual excitement to it. And in effect, in an odd sort of way, I manage to do that, not being trapped into a particular career pattern. And after I became a mother obviously with an adopted son I had fewer opportunities for that sort of thing, and you have to find the kind of solutions which give you the intellectual excitement that you look for in a career. [1:05:29.4]

So I'm a nontraditional person to ask that question of, because I had nontraditional involvement, but the jobs that I did do - for example, a whole series of seminars for the New York Academy of Medicine on the future of medicine in American society, which had guest speakers from all over, including a number of them from England; the designer of the National Health Service legislation, for example, was one of them. And they were fascinating, because these were seminars with absolutely top-notch people within the field of medical education. [1:06:19.2]

And I put these all into a book for the Academy of Medicine, and as far as I'm concerned, I was really involved and the subject matter was new, it was fresh. There were people from all over the world who came and they're nontraditional rather than the traditional sort of project that you get involved in.

INTERVIEWER: So one more: I'm impressed with the range of writing you've done over the course of your life from the VOA to the Japanese experience.

YOLE SILLS: Yes, right.

INTERVIEWER: Columbia and then on. What's been your favorite kind of writing or experience with writing? Which of your writings are you particularly proud of?  
[1:07:07.7]

YOLE SILLS: Well, in a way, I guess you would call it non-creative writing. It's creative in the sense that if you take raw material, which may be confused, difficult, difficult to assimilate and interpret into a cohesive whole, that that kind of writing is the most interesting to me. For example, at the, say, Academy of Medicine, these were seminars which went on for two hours with people who were top-notch people from England and from United States and some of them from Europe who talked about the problems facing America and American medicine and the kind of emphasis on medical education. This was at a time when medical education already was going through quite a different revolution than it had been before. At that time you went to medical school and you came out and you immediately were put into a very traditional career pattern.

[1:08:31.4]

Since then, of course, the opportunities in medical education have expanded enormously all over the place. Well, that kind of experience, for example, I think is just fantastic in a way that it had not been in, say, 20 years ago. So that aspect of it, the innovative aspects of professional education, is one way of summarizing it perhaps, which I find interesting.  
[1:09:01.6]

INTERVIEWER: Ma'am (ph), do you want to ask any questions or add anything else?

FEMALE SPEAKER 1: Great. Thank you. Thank you very much.

INTERVIEWER: That was really wonderful, Yole.

YOLE SILLS: Oh.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks so much for...

DAVID SILLS: Yes, this was...

FEMALE SPEAKER 1: Oh great, yes. These are some...

DAVID SILLS: I made this book because on our...

INTERVIEWER: Oh yes, sorry, yup.

FEMALE SPEAKER 1: Okay, put it down here.

YOLE SILLS: ...all over the place, you see, and they're all Italian Americans; not a single one of them knows a word of Italian. Most of them have never, ever been to Italy, and that's the quality of Italian American (inaudible at 1:09:52.7). And what most people

don't know about Italy is that Italy is three different societies: The north, which is the educated north, the intellectual north and so forth; and then there is the funamilli (ph), the farming south; and then there is Sicily, which is a different continent.

INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible at 1:10:16.3) that you've lived?

YOLE SILLS: Well, India was - we lived in Bombay for a year and the whole Indian experience is completely different from any other experience that - restricting your choices to - aimed at partisan units in the north and they had secret ways of listening.

INTERVIEWER: So where did you learn interviewing, then? Was that not - you went to Columbia?

YOLE SILLS: Pardon?

INTERVIEWER: Where did you learn to interview?

YOLE SILLS: Me, I learned (inaudible at 1:10:46.3).

INTERVIEWER: By interviewing?

YOLE SILLS: Of course. I have to learn to interview to interview (ph). It depends. It's the subject that guides what you're saying. And it isn't that there is a particular technique. You're looking for a particular kind of information and you will ask questions that lead to it. Yes, it was fascinating. Of course you became quite skilled at following leads, because an awful lot of the information we had was intelligence information, which was given back to us through intelligence reports.

So during the day, for example, I would read these intelligence reports and find out that in such-and-such a town 20 people were executed by the Germans at 5 o'clock in the morning. Well, then I made it my duty to report that and to express my outrage and the outrage of our culture against this ridiculous kind of behavior, to put it mildly. No, it was fascinating.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

FEMALE SPEAKER 1: You know (ph)?

YOLE SILLS: I used to.

FEMALE SPEAKER 1: But not any more?

YOLE SILLS: I have to go back to it.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Oh, okay. Because we were wondering if we could get a...

**END TRANSCRIPT**