

**Oral History Number: 120-016**  
**Interviewees: Sallie Maclay Brutto and Frank Brutto**  
**Interviewer: Mary Bielenberg**  
**Date of Interview: October 1984**  
**Project: Bitterroot Historical Society Oral History Project**

Mary Bielenberg: This is an interview with Sallie Maclay Brutto. Sallie, when did you come to this little community?

Sallie Maclay Brutto: We came here in 1968 and have lived here continuously since then. Of course, I'm a native of the Bitterroot.

MB: Right, you were born at Lolo, isn't that right?

SB: Yes. Near Lolo.

MB: Tell me about your family.

SB: My father was a pioneer who came in 1880 to the Bitterroot.

MB: And his name was David?

SB: His name was Samuel.

MB: Oh, Samuel, okay.

SB: He had two brothers, David and William, who came pretty much the same time. David and Samuel had adjoining ranches and William [unintelligible].

MB: They came early on into the Bitterroot. I remember one of the Maclays was telling me that her father walked into the Lolo area. Do you recall that your father did that, too?

SB: Yes, that's the story that when he left Pennsylvania and he came, he got kind of [unintelligible] stages to the Bitterroot because he stopped in the Dakota wheat fields to help with the harvest and make a little money. The story is that he came as far as the railroad came at that time, which I think was Bearmouth. Then he walked from there and he had a pair of new shoes and he was saving those shoes because he was going to need them when he started farming. And also I think they hurt his feet a little bit. I've heard that story told and I kind of resented it because it sounded as though he came penniless and barefooted, you know? Which was not the case.

MB: No, I'm sure not.

SB: The movement to come west at that time was [unintelligible] because times were very, very bad after the Civil War. The brothers came from a big farm in Pennsylvania and had it very rough and all these boys decided to come west. He had been a teacher; he'd been an elementary school teacher, so he didn't come barefoot and penniless.

MB: How large was the ranch that you were living on as a child?

SB: The ranch that I was living on, which is still there, it was about 4,000 acres.

MB: Oh my, that's a good-sized place.

SB: Of course, they started out with homestead and kept acquiring land and expanding as they were able.

MB: Was your father just a cattle rancher? Did he have sheep?

SB: It was a general ranch. We had wheat and oats and sheep and cattle.

MB: How many were there in your immediate family?

SB: There were six of us children who grew up. There was one boy who died as a little boy.

MB: What were their names?

SM: Well, Sam, who's now approaching 90 and lives in Lolo.

MB: Does he [unintelligible]? He's not Helena Maclay's father?

SM: No, that's the other branch, William McClain. He has two children named Cheryl and Sammie. Cheryl is very [unintelligible] and Sammie is [unintelligible].

MB: [unintelligible] used to be quite a family name for the Maclays.

SM: It goes back.

MB: Then there were your sisters.

SM: There were four of us girls: Nelma and Annie and Elizabeth and I, there was four.

MB: Now Nelma and Beth live here.

SM: Nelma still lives here in Hamilton after they both were medical technologists and when they retired, they came here because my mother was living with my other sister at the time.

MB: As far as from Lolo, you went to the University.

SB: Yes.

MB: Is this where you met your husband, Frank?

SB: Yes, we were both in journalism school.

MB: Right, I remember seeing a picture of both of you in one of the newspapers that the alumni association puts out.

SB: But I went to Florence-Carlton School.

MB: Oh, you did?

SB: I was just in the first grade when the Carlton School was combined with the Florence School.

MB: Was it a one-room schoolhouse, is that correct?

SB: Carlton School was pretty much a one-room schoolhouse and of course, we had to come to class by horse-drawn vehicle.

MB: Right. How did you get to school every day? Was it on a buckboard sort of thing?

SB: No, after they consolidated, they had the service. It was a big covered wagon and in winter there was a stove in the middle of it. In those days, for some reason, there was no snow. They had a bobsled, so in the winter it was a bobsled.

MB: I see. It's interesting that there isn't that much snow anymore because I remember, even as a child, having much more snow in Missoula growing up. Well, then, now you married Frank Brutto right out of school, or did you go to work?

SB: No. We graduated in 1929—

MB: During the Depression—

SB: That's when the Depression started. I went east to stay with Nelma for a while and I happened to get a job in Wisconsin. For four years, then, I was the editor of a little weekly newspaper in Burlington, Wisconsin.

MB: That must have been rather interesting.

SB: Oh, it was. When I got the job, I thought I was going to be going around picking up personal notes, and it turned out that I was the editor. Fortunately, I had worked on the *Kaimin*, University paper. We had it pretty good. We had a pretty practical course in journalism in those days, so it was no real problem for me to take on the editor's job.

MB: Was the Dr. Stone—

SB: A.L. Stone.

MB: Yes, he was (talking over each other)

SB: The dean.

MB: I imagine that he was a very fine teacher, wasn't he?

SB: He was very good, and very practical. He wasn't particularly training people to be foreign correspondents. He was concerned with community journalism, and I think he very well taught us the basic of objectivity and truthfulness and that kind of thing. I was going to say Frank, also, he was the editor of the *Kaimin* and I was the associate editor in the school, so we went our separate ways after we graduated and he went to Chicago and got a job in Evanston. We were both pretty lucky that we both had jobs through those very difficult years. But we weren't married until 1933.

MB: I see. When you were married, then did you go to Chicago?

SB: I continued to work in Burlington for a while and then we got together in Evanston. We were there pretty continuously. He went from the Evanston papers to the Chicago papers and then to the AP [Associated Press] as he has often remarked. He never really had to look for a job. He always was called from one to another.

MB: And all of them so interesting, too. Actually, Montana journalism graduates, it seems to me, have done very well.

SB: They have done very well. I think they have a very good record considering the size of the school and the facilities that we have.

MB: When you were with the Associated Press, you and he were sent around the world, actually, weren't you, to various parts of the country? The whole country?

SB: Well, not that bad. In 1940, when it was very apparent that we were about to get into the war, they needed somebody in Rome, and they wanted someone who spoke Italian. Well, his Italian was very rudimentary. It was the kind of Italian that the immigrant people speak at home

and it's not for Italians, so he didn't feel that he was all that good in Italian. Part of what he had said on his application form at the AP, yes he would be interested in foreign correspondence. So when they were in need of somebody to go to Rome, they picked him out of the files. In 1940, our first baby was born in February, and she was three months old when he left to go to Rome, and she was in kindergarten by the time he got home.

MB: Oh my. But didn't you get to go with him?

SB: No, not until 1946, after the war.

MB: Did you work at all while he was gone? Did you go back into journalism?

SB: No, I didn't. I kind of concentrated on photography just as a hobby and I got pretty proficient in that.

MB: Where were you living?

SB: I was living in Rochester, Minnesota, where my mother and older sister—my older sister was still not retired, so we lived there together. I didn't do much, a little volunteer work here and there, but I really didn't do too much. I had a little girl to take care of.

MB: Right. Frank, then, was in the thick of things right in Rome. Was he strictly in Rome?

SB: When he was on the way to Rome, by ship, France fell. He had been scheduled to go to Genoa, to Italy, but they stopped in...Portugal.

MB: Oh, there's been some—

SB: The stopped in Lisbon. They eventually put in at Lisbon, but because of the fall of France, the refugee problem in Europe was very severe, and so the ship actually stopped at a couple of ports on the coast of France and picked up refugees. Whereas it left the port of New York with 75 passengers aboard—now this was this was the USS Washington, this enormous passenger liner. Actually, it was the first U.S. ship that went into what they called hostile waters because the U-boats of course were operating at that time. The passengers were given no idea that they were going to be picking up refugees, but by the time they got through picking up refugees, there were so many on board that they were putting beds in the swimming pool and wherever they could to accommodate these thousands of refugees. Then they went to Lisbon.

MB: Did they leave the refugees at Lisbon or did they bring them back to the United States?

SB: I don't know what they did them. Somebody else asked me that, and I don't think Frank even knows whether they were returned to the United States or whether they were taken to other countries.

MB: Did he get off at Lisbon or did they go—

SB: He got off at Lisbon.

MB: Oh, he did?

SB: He was there for a matter of a couple of weeks, waiting for transportation, and he finally got a plane to Rome, but meanwhile he was studying Italian all the time because he wanted to—

MB: Yes, well I would think it would have been quite difficult to get into that maze of languages all of a sudden, when he really hadn't had—

SB: He had an ear for Italian, having heard it at home. He started studying French in Switzerland. I guess I'm getting ahead of myself. I think the first story that he handled when he got to Rome was the fall of France and terms of the—what do you call it? When a country falls, what do they have?

MB: I can't think of it.

SB: Well, anyhow, because France had fallen, one of the dictator countries, of course, laid out the rules.

MB: Was this the Vichy government that took over with the fall?

SB: No. I can't tell you that. I don't know. Anyhow, thinking that the Americans in Rome would be interned, which they would have been, and those who stayed there were interned, they sent Frank and some of the other AP men out via Switzerland. But by the time he got to Switzerland, there was no way out because it was Axis countries all the way around. So he was there for five years, but he was working. He was a working newsman all the time, and trying to cover Europe [unintelligible] handful of American newsmen there. Trying to cover the news that was happening in Europe by the press that came into Switzerland, by the newspapers that came from other countries.

MB: When he would write an article, would he mail them out? How would he get the information out? Was it through teletype?

SB: Well, the wire, the cable. I think maybe in an emergency sometimes they phoned to London, but in general, I think they had pretty complete wire service or cable service.

MB: Do you remember at any time when he was over there, did he come across any other Montana correspondents, do you remember? Did he ever mention that?

SB: I think maybe there was one, but I wouldn't be able to tell you his name.

MB: Did all of the correspondents live in the same hotel or the same area or did they have apartments when they were—

SB: [unintelligible]

MB: What part of Switzerland was he in?

SB: He was in Bern.

MB: Oh, in Bern, I see.

SB: And lived in some very posh hotel there. That was pretty interesting, but he would have to tell you about it. The people who were there in Switzerland trying to avoid being involved in the war.

MB: Yes, I'm sure. I wanted to ask you, did he ever go back? Have you ever been back there since the war to see where he covered all of these places?

SB: No, we haven't gone back.

MB: You haven't. After the war, you joined him, then, in Italy, is that right?

SB: That's right. In 1945, after the fall of Germany and Italy, they sent him back to Rome in 1945. He came home late in 1945, on home leave, and in 1946, Marta and I were able to go back. He flew back. This was the story of my life. Whenever he came or went, he came by air and I had to come along with the children and the luggage. [laughs]

MB: On a ship—

SB: On board ship. I think every three years we had home leave, and I always had the job of negotiating, and I was not a good sailor, so I had all these trunks across the Atlantic.

MB: Crossings which were highly [unintelligible]. How about your children? Were they good sailors?

SB: Oh, Marta was a perfect sailor. I could never find my way around a big ship, but she always knew where she was and which direction it was going. Here's Frank.

MB: That's all right. Your life in Italy must have been a fascinating one.

SB: It was pretty fascinating. Right after the war, things were really rough and as a matter of fact, I've written a book about our experiences in those years after the war, but I've never even offered it to a publication.

MB: Oh, you should. What's it called?

SB: It's called *The Lady is Delicate*. That means in Italian *la signora è delicata*—she's pregnant.

MB: [laughs] Yes, I had a feeling that was that.

SB: Because she was.

MB: Your second daughter [Elizabeth] was born in Italy.

SB: She was born in Italy.

MB: Where did you and Frank live? Were you in Rome?

SB: We lived in various places, but our first experience was in a country villa that was eight kilometers outside of Rome. It was a big, really old country villa. Not real fancy, but big: 20 rooms, I think we had. We did have some pretty hairy experiences there.

MB: Did you? By that, what do you mean?

SB: Well, we slept with a gun beside the bed.

MB: Because people were so desperately poor?

SB: Yes, and a lot of people were homeless, and they were trying to get (unintelligible, talking over each other) we were really out in the country. About every night, you could hear a gun fire here or there, people protecting themselves.

MB: How about food? Was it easy for you to get it or was it as difficult as it seemed to be for many people who lived during that time?

SB: At first, when Frank was still connected to the service, we had some money privileges. After the end of the occupation, why we just were on the global market.

MB: You were in Italy for how many years then?

SB: Frank actually retired in 1962.

MB: And you were there until then?

SB: We were there until then, except we were back and forth on home leave every three years.

MB: I imagined before we started this that you had lived in—

Frank Brutto: [unintelligible] '62?

SB: We left in '62.

MB: You mentioned that you had lived in Brazil, though, too.

SB: In '62, Frank was assigned as bureau chief to Brazil, so we were in Rio de Janeiro for the next three years. Then travel with (?) in Rome was in high school by this time, so she went to the American high school in Rome, in Rio.

MB: [unintelligible] proficient in languages.

SB: Yes, she was because she had gone to Italian schools and a French school and of course, growing up with Italian children, she learned the language that way, too.

MB: Of the two places that you lived, how would you compare Rio with Rome, for example?

SB: Well, in Rome of course, there's so much more historically interesting and there is no end of what you can see and do in Rome if you take the time to do it. Rio is a great place for younger people. I think there was kind of an interesting difference between the way an adolescent girl was treated in Rome by the young boys, and in Rio, because in Rome, they're always being very macho and they are trying to get with the girl. In Rio there's a great deal more freedom between the sexes. They play together on the beaches, they go to school together, there isn't nearly as much of that kind of thing, so she really enjoyed it down there. It was a pretty good school. I taught journalism in the American school in Rio.

MB: I imagine that was a fascinating thing to get back into for you.

SB: I only have a B.A., which doesn't amount to much anymore, and I couldn't teach in a high school in America, but their standards were not so strict there and I was proficient in it so I did teach there and I had a very good experience. We put out a little English-language newspaper, which they had never had—well they had had a kind of one, a very crude one up to that time, but we did a really professional job and had a very nice little school paper.

MB: That was in what year? '65 or so? '64 and '65?

SB: Yes.

MB: I wanted to ask you, were there just American children going to that school?

SB: No, from a lot of different diplomatic families, I think. Primarily American, I guess, yes, when I think back.

MB: How were your living conditions in Rio?

SB: Well, we had a charming little old villa.

MB: Another villa.

SB: Yes, but nothing really fancy. It was just a real old country place that was in pretty bad condition, but we enjoyed it because it had an interesting back yard. If you read my book of poetry, [What News From the Pleiades?] you'll see a poem called (names poem title in another language) which means "built in shadows," and that was the name that Elizabeth gave to our little villa. It was crude. The water system was underneath—there was a cistern underneath the house, and when we got around to looking into the system, we found somebody's old boot in it. (Both laugh, talk over each other) then we had to boil the water. The meat supply was not very good. Of course, they speak Portuguese there, which was very difficult for me. Italian is not too difficult, but Portuguese sounds a little like French and a little like Italian, so you're always being confused. I should have really settled down and studied these languages, but I just didn't do it.

MB: After you left Rio, did you come back to Montana?

SB: We were two years in New York then Washington D.C...no, I'm getting confused, too. We were two years in New York City.

MB: I see. But you did spend some time in Washington D.C.?

SB: No, we didn't. That's just a slip.

MB: Was Frank with the AP all this time?

SB: Yes.

MB: That was the headquarters for Associated Press—

SB: Yes.

MB: But you firmly decided that it was time to come back to Montana where both of you had family, I suppose.

SB: Well, that was largely—some years back had bought a house in California and thought that we'd retire there, but as we came back every three years, there was more people and more traffic and we just decided, no this isn't what we want. So we came here.

MB: Did you people buy this home here on the west side or was it a part of—had you owned it for quite some time?

SB: No, we bought it. We bought it some years before we retired. It was rented for a few years. No, we bought it. It's an old, old farmhouse. It's been remodeled in various ways.

MB: You brought back with you all kinds of interesting things from Italy and South America that look very nice in your home. Is there anything special that you brought back that you have great fond memories of? You mentioned that you and Frank had collected some old maps that were from early books and there were some things that you left there I suppose.

SB: Well, we aren't very avid collectors. We just bought what appealed to us and after leaving there we thought all the wonderful things we could have had [laughs] instead of a house. But we don't have very much from [unintelligible] two of these, which are folding chairs [unintelligible], roller chairs.

MB: They're from South America.

SB: They're from Rome. I had quite a good collection of copper; there's some of it there. That one, authentic-owned kitchenware from Italy. Pretty good collection of that. I can't think of anything offhand that is particularly, you know—

MB: Yes, that you really treasure, but they all bring back such interesting memories, I can see. When you came to the valley, you had a number of projects that you became involved in, Sallie. What were some of them? What was the number one? You mentioned the arts council that you became involved in. Was this one of the first projects that you took on?

SB: I think I've always had a feeling for community. When you live abroad, you're always a foreigner. You live in Rome, you're an American, you live in Rio, you're an American. There isn't really no opportunity to do anything in the community line. So I was all gung-ho for things when I came here. I really wanted to do things, and I think the Montanans through the Arts, the valley branch, was the first thing that I was interested in.

MB: What did you do? What was the organization at that time?

SB: It was, as it is now, except it was more fine arts and more variety of the arts: literature, for example, and photography. These things were included at that time because it was an MIA branch. I was president of that for four years. I've always been able to write good publicity for

failing organizations, and I wrote thousands of words with that, unpaid, just to help organizations that I thought were worthy. Then I started a little theater here.

MB: Where did they perform?

SB: In the McCracken carriage (?), the McCracken barn (?). Upstairs in the McCracken barn (?).

MB: Oh, is that right? Is it large enough to house that many people?

SB: [talking at the same time] It was not very big, and it was probably very dangerous, but we did have a couple of nice seasons in. Our niece was one of the actors. I put an ad in the paper and said anybody interested in a little theater, and set a place for people to meet and I was surprised how many people were interested. They just kind of took it on because that's all I was interested in, was just getting it going.

MB: Wasn't [unintelligible] Green here at that time?

SB: Yes, she was.

MB: [unintelligible].

SB: Let me think. I'm not sure that she was here at that time. I think she came a little later.

MB: But she's always been interested in theater.

SB: She's always been interested in that. Gus (?) Trugood was very much interested, and...Frank, what's our friend who dances and the one who's in [unintelligible]?

FB: Charlie Brennan (?).

SB: Charlie Brennan. She was very much interested.

MB: What were some of the plays that you gave, do you remember?

SB: I can't even tell you. There were just little one-act things, kind of theater in the round. After two years, I went back to Rome, so I guess they went on maybe for a while, dwindled. But that group of people still kind of say I was the one who started it. Because they would have been.

MB: Why did you go back to Rome?

SB: Because I had wanted to stay here for a year or maybe more while Marta was finishing high school. After she finished high school then I went back to Rome.

MB: When you and Frank came back and settled for good, I don't remember, you were probably here when we moved in the '60s, but you became very involved in the Senior Citizens' Center, which was O'Hara House. Why did you feel it was so necessary to have something like that?

SB: As a matter of fact, since in the '40s, I have been more or less studying aging and retirement as kind of an academic subject, I was interested in the subject. Senior centers were quite new at that time, so when I came here, I thought, "Well, this might be a good place to start a senior center." So we did start the senior center in O'Hara House.

MB: Yet it came to be very popular, didn't it?

SB: It functioned very successfully for the three years.

[Break in audio]

MB: Where is the Senior Center now?

SB: Actually, after the three years, we were funded for three years, and we had hoped that the county would help, but they were not interested in helping. So we couldn't keep up O'Hara House. We had to give it up. We mapped (?) around various places for a while, and the group divided. Part of the people were interested only in pretty much just in recreation: dancing and bingo, that kind of thing. They went one way and we went the other. We continued with our meetings and our potlucks and so on, right up to the present.

MB: They meet, then, at the courthouse. Is this the one that meets at the courthouse?

SB: We meet in the courthouse and the [unintelligible] provided there. The other people are the golden age group.

MB: Probably one of the most successful things that you've become involved in that certainly—

[Break in audio]

SB: One of my chief interests for a number of years was the historical society. At the time, they were considering destroying the old courthouse. I was president of the historical society. We were just sort of wondering, will somebody come forward to save the courthouse or will the commissioners have their way and tear it down and have a parking lot? I waited a while and nobody was interested in doing anything, so I decided, well, we're going to do it. I guess I can claim credit for having spearheaded the movement to save the courthouse. The Greens were very much interested in it too because they were interested in new [unintelligible]. We managed to get it on the ballot so that the people were able to vote what they wanted to do with the old courthouse. They voted overwhelmingly to save it so that now we have the museum there.

MB: Yes, and it's such a magnificent building for a museum, and it's—

[Break in audio]

MB: —museums when you have to have some more room because they're so crowded already with things. People are selling balls (?) now.

SB: I was talking to Irma today and she said they had something like 500 people there at the apple day, and because the weather was bad, they had to have a little part of it inside. She said, "We really need another room."

FB: [unintelligible].

SB: Well, yes.

MB: I think I would like to know about the directorship of the museum.

FB: [unintelligible].

SB: Did you ever know Joel Bernstein?

MB: I know that he was from Stevensville, but that's about all.

SB: Well, he was treasurer (talking over each other)

FB: [unintelligible].

SB: Anyhow, after my term as president was over, we were searching for a president and he was available, and he became the president. He and I put on the preview opening of the museum.

[Break in audio]

SB: —old buildings should be remodeled and it should be insulated and that all kinds of things should be done to it, none of which was necessary. That building is very beautifully built [A.J. Gibson was the architect] and is not—

[Break in audio]

SB: It's cool in summer and warm in winter, as a matter of fact. He had kind of grandiose ideas that just didn't fit in with this community. He also wanted a much higher salary than the county

was only willing to give us one mill, which isn't very much money. So he just got out of the picture because he didn't get his way, I guess. That's the sum of it.

[Three audio breaks in a row]

SB: —as trustees: Lina Bell and Henry Grant and I were the first three trustees of the museum. We operated it for a while without a head, as a matter of fact, just for a few months. Erma Owings was retired from teaching and we knew that she was here. I didn't know her at the time, but Henry and Lina Bell said, "Oh, she doesn't want to work. She's just retired. She doesn't want to work."

I said, "Well, let's try her." So I called her up and asked her if she'd be interested in helping at the museum. What we needed was a librarian because we had so much stuff that wasn't catalogued in any way. She was interested and she came and she worked and she was officially our librarian until we decided that she really should be promoted to be the director. She's been—

MB: She's a fantastic woman—

SB: And she does a beautiful job.

MB: Yes, and she's almost a walking history book, which is marvelous because it's so fulfilling to go and ask her a question and have it answered correctly, you know. Well Sallie, now what's your next project here in town?

SB: Well, I don't think I have any next project. I've been trying to eliminate projects, but I still do publicity for the cancer society.

MB: You had a bout with cancer.

SB: Yes, I did. In 1979, I was sidelined for about four months and just barely walking around and wearing my wigs when I had to do this job for the museum, putting on that first preview opening. But I was one of the lucky ones. I'm completely cured, and I've had no problems ever since; it's now six years.

MB: Isn't that wonderful? You look wonderful.

[Break in audio]

SB: [unintelligible]. That's marvelous.

MB: Well, I do appreciate so much you giving me this interview because it's very interesting and I know it'll be valuable.

SB: Of course, my present interest is my book of poetry which is just out.

MB: And the name of it is?

SB: "What News from the Pleiades?"

MB: Yes. Have you published any other books besides this one?

SB: No.

MB: This is your first publication. I'm going to have to get this—

SB: These are poems that have been accumulating over many years. In a sense, it's kind of an autobiography because I have poems there that relate to different experiences throughout my life.

MB: It's interesting to know that somebody in the Bitterroot has a book on poetry, and it will be valuable I know, someday, for all of us to have a chance to read it. Thank you very much.

[Break in audio; end of interview with Sallie]

MB: Frank, in our conversation with Sallie, she mentioned that you were an Associated Press correspondent and was sent to Europe before America was really involved in the war. Could you tell us a little bit of your interesting first association with Europe and what you did?

FB: Yes, because actually the start was, to me, something that still is very vivid in my mind I suppose because it was the first and it was new and it was a very exciting time. I was assigned to this rather quickly and really because my boss in Chicago assumed I knew some Italian because of my name actually. I didn't know any Italian, but he said, "Well, you can learn it on the boat." So with that admonition, I quickly obtained a passport, went from Chicago to New York and was given a very short time and just a few directions for me written out that said, get on that boat tomorrow morning.

MB: What was the name of the boat, do you remember?

FB: It was called the USS Washington. It was a big ship, and it was the first American boat that was venturing into what we then called belligerent waters. At the same time, about 75 people—there was quite a mix-up of people. There were some Germans who were trying to get back to Germany, there were some Poles who were trying to depose. There were just an assortment. A lot of people were almost desperately trying to get to some destination: home or something else. There were also three American boys who were anxious to get to France to do ambulance [unintelligible]. We thought the boat would land at Genoa and Rome. Actually, it

never got there. Actually, when I think back on it, I'm quite sure now that the boat was on a secret mission, because no boat that size would undertake to take 75 people across the ocean, which was quite dangerous at that time. We found out later what its mission actually was. We went slowly across the ocean, blacked out, and one morning the boat stopped and we didn't know exactly where it was. We got out and looked and found out we were at Le Verdon, France, which is not far from Bordeaux.

MB: You mentioned blacking out.

FB: Blacking out, in other words, the port bellows were blacked out so there would be no lights going out. A lot of transport were being torpedoed at that time by the German submarines. In fact, this very boat escaped narrowly on its return to the states. It was spared. At Le Verdon we waited there, we docked. It was a desolate dock, there was nobody there except a couple of dock workers with brooms and blue suits. On the third day, the real reason for the boat going there was apparent. Hundreds of refugees, most of them Jewish, just came streaming—that got off the railroad train, they streamed onto the boat and filled it, filled it, filled it. I'd had our very nice room all to myself; that was over. It happened that the cots were put in the swimming pool, in the halls. At the head of each cot was a coat hanger. The boat was just packed with these people. We then set out, not to go home, but to Lisbon where the original 75 passengers were discharged. Some of them would have liked to have stayed on at that point because meanwhile, Dunkirk had happened. We were not aware of the significance at that point, but it was a pretty dreary torrent. We were let out and I'm not very good at remembering dates but that's one day I remember was the day the boat docked at Lisbon. It was my mother's birthday and it was the day that they declared war on France. You remember what Roosevelt said about that, that the [unintelligible] sister had plunged the dagger into the back of [her] sister.

MB: What is the date?

FB: June 10, 1940. One day I remember. Lisbon was a maelstrom of people; it was a horrible mess, the comings and goings. Also there was a dreary feeling about things. A lot of people thought the war was over. The British forces had made that heroic escape across the channel and it seemed that it was finished. A lot of people thought that, and I was trying to get passage to Rome. I didn't get it right away. We were talking about what was going to happen, in the AP office, Associated Press office in Lisbon. Some said, 'Well, it looks like it's over.' There was a nice British gentleman there who had a lot of experience, and he said, "It's not over." He said, "It's not over at all."

They said, someone said, "Well, why do you say that?"

He says, "Well, because of oil." He said the German forces are going to run out of oil, which—this was a prophecy—which several years later, when the American flying fortresses devastated the remaining oil works, proved to be true. Because at that point, this was nearing the end of the war, [unintelligible] Hitler could not get his war planes up into the air. So that old boy knew

a thing or two. The ambulance [unintelligible] we had hoped to get on France never did, as far as I know. They couldn't have gotten to France. Also, interestingly enough, there were some who had done ambulance service in France had come out. They were in Lisbon and one of them was Robert Montgomery who, I don't know, some old timers might recall. He had starred in a picture called *Night Must Fall*.

MB: Yes, I remember that.

FB: You remember that?

MB: A marvelous actor.

FB: Yes, well, I met Mr. Montgomery when I was living in Lisbon streets and it was crowded. He looked desolate and heartbroken. I walked up to him and I said, "Mr. Montgomery, [unintelligible]."

He started up, looked down, and he says, "No." He didn't really sound like he believed it. That's what was happening there. I eventually did get a plane to Rome. It was sort of an army plane which flew very low along the edge of the Mediterranean and it arrived towards evening. It was over Rome the first time I had seen it, and then it swooped down and I looked down at Rome; it's one of the most peaceful scenes I've ever remembered. There were two white ox on a green hillside. One of them looked up at the plane and kept on just doing what he was doing. We came down. I was driven to Rome and had my enrollment [unintelligible]. I was taken to the Ambassador Hotel by some of my peers there at the Associated Press, and it was a gay, gay meeting there. The Italians who had just entered the war thought it would be a matter of days and it would be over, and so they were almost celebrating the end of the war. The Ambassador was a very plush place. There was Count Ciano and Edda Ciano, Mussolini's daughter who later, I'm sad to say, saw her husband, Ciano get shot. Shot as a traitor. They thought the war was over, but in fact, it was just beginning. As a matter of fact, six years were to pass before I would see Sallie and three-month-old daughter again.

MB: That's a long time to be away from your family.

FB: Yes, that's kind of a record [laughs] [unintelligible].

MB: [talking at the same time] The servicemen didn't have that record.

FB: No, [unintelligible]. It was a very interesting time, brutal and whatnot. That's how I started my tour of duty.

MB: When you got to Rome, was there a special office that all of the men out of, all of you reporters?

FB: The Associated Press, of course, had its own office in Viassetina, just at the foot of the Spanish Steps, there's a building. We had an office there, and remember, we were not at war, so we had quite a good staff there. In the same building, there was the German agency. There was the Japanese agency, and there was the French agency. We were all sort of halfway cooperating under these strange circumstances. This is a setup that at the end of the war, was changed. The Associated Press established more coverage of its own without exchanges with the Japanese. They used to have an exchange at that time, between these various international agencies. That more or less stopped. Each one then became more independent. I'm talking now about what happened after the war.

MB: Would all of this news come in to you over teletype? How did you get the news stories?

FB: Of course, at that time, we were covering [the news] the way you'd cover anywhere. We covered Italian ministries and have the daily handouts and read the Italian newspapers. There was a competition every day to get the—I've forgotten which paper it was. It was an important paper in Rome; there were a lot of them. But there was a [unintelligible] who was a famous Italian journalist at that time, so there was a competition to get his editorial every day with when it was still wet. He usually gave some indication of what [unintelligible] of Slovenia was thinking.

MB: Did you hear Mussolini speak?

FB: Oh, frequently, yes. He'd have these balcony speeches from his palazzo, [unintelligible], right by the great white memorial—

MB: [talking at the same time] I'm trying to think—

FB: —memorial to the fatherland. Of course, they also had the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Many times they would gather voluntarily. They said that sometimes they were pushed a little bit to listen to him. He gave some very dynamic speeches. At that time there was still this enthusiasm they thought that they just got into the war in time to get in on the loot, you know, and make some demands, but as time went on, it became obvious that it was not going to be that easy. Then, of course when it was obvious too, that America would soon be in it. We were already making preparations to—

MB: Leave?

FB: Leave. What happened was that we reduced our staff—oh, incidentally, too—this might be of interest—enough to get confused because things were moving so fast. But cut down our staff considerably and I was supposed to be on the way home via Switzerland. I left.

MB: Now how did you—were you on the train?

FB: On the train. There's no problem getting out at that point, but of course, the others there elected to remain behind. Newspapermen like Herbert Matthews [reporter for the New York Times], who made quite a reputation for himself. Richard Nasock (?) was bureau chief of the Rome operation at that time. From the United Press there was Reynolds Packard, who has written a few books, and all these quite well-known men who had been there two, three years. John Whitaker was from the [Chicago] Daily News. He was very prominent at that time. Most of these men are now dead and gone, I believe. So I went to Switzerland and I was supposed to be on the way home, and when I got to Switzerland, they said, well, you've got to stay a while.

MB: What town? Geneva?

FB: [unintelligible]. Most newspapermen were stationed in Bern. It's my understanding what happened, of course, to the people who remained in Rome were then exchanged by the Italian government for Italian newspapermen. So they got home a lot faster than I did. As I said before, I didn't get home for six years.

MB: Now, they were exchanged for Italian newspaper men for (talking over each other).

FB: Diplomatic exchange and the same thing happened to the diplomats. So they went with the diplomats and got home fairly soon. Of course, some of the men came back as war correspondents with our forces. Meanwhile, there's a sense that there were no armies yet [unintelligible] on the scene. We in Switzerland sort of took over the job of reporting as much as we could. Switch into crisis entirely (?). In a way, I think it's the untold story of what happened. I can't begin to tell you at this point. So we covered it as well we could.

MB: It was a melting pot of so many—

FB: It was a center for espionage, of course, and it was a convenient place for the opposition to get together and try to do something. Later on of course, Allen Dulles arrived there to take over the intelligence. Meanwhile, we were doing as well as we could, covering. I would cover the Italian front and French and well, because at that point too, our staff in Bern reduced considerably. With our staff the way it was...E.C. Daniel, who later married Margaret Truman, he went to England and got out and another man got out. There were two of us; myself and Tony Hawkins (?) who stayed behind, and we were there for about...

MB: You mentioned also that Howard K. Smith was one of your associates.

FB: Well, at the time, he was working for Time Magazine, and he went from...I hope I'm right here, because he changed to Columbia Broadcasting. I believe when he arrived from Berlin and he had just written his book *Last Train From Berlin*. He was there for the duration. He was an extremely nice person and an excellent journalist. He later then switched to—

MB: ABC?

FB: No, I believe it was CBS. Later, then, I think he changed again. I don't know.

MB: You know his son is in Maryland, a reporter for one of the television stations.

FB: He is?

MB: Yes.

FB: Well, I see Howard once in a while.

MB: Yes, you get [unintelligible].

FB: [unintelligible]. He told me quite a few years ago that he might retire but it seems that he didn't do it for a long time. He was going to write. I lost track of him.

MB: I wanted to ask you, in going back on the ship that you were on that was all filled up with the Jewish people who were trying to get out of Europe: did they go back to the United States? Did they take them to the—

FB: They all went to the United States. It was a sad sight because—

MB: Were they from all different countries of Europe?

FB: That I don't know, at least some, they must have been. I imagine they probably were Jewish people who were fairly well off.

MB: Yes, and were able to get out.

FB: Were able to get out. Obviously, arrangements had been made to pick them up and now you can see that this was the real reason that the USS Washington was going over there. Not to take 75 people to—

MB: Portugal.

FB: Portugal or to Europe or anywhere because those were [unintelligible].

MB: When you were in Rome, where did you live? Did you have a special hotel room—

FB: Well, when I first arrived, I just lived in a hotel room. Of course, after [unintelligible] we lived in [unintelligible]. We changed our residence every three years. We were there during the post-war period which, that too was extremely interesting because there was so much going on. That's when Elizabeth was born in Rome and that was quite a night. We lived in a great big

villa, [unintelligible] and we had a little car at that time which I used to drive into the front room, roll up the Persian rugs. So this particular night when that came, we went to [unintelligible] to the clinic in Rome, and Sallie went up to the hospital and I stayed behind to guard, to idle the car next to the doctor's car.

MB: Now, why did you guard them?

FB: Because at that time, during the occupation, there was a lot of people who were hungry and there was a lot trouble and a Jeep tire was worth about 60 dollars on the black market. So I had an Army 45 and I just sat in my car and waited until I was able to get somebody from the office to come and take my place. Then I went up to the delivery room, not exactly a delivery room in there and there was Elizabeth being born and supervising it all were six G.I.s in Eisenhower jackets. It was quite an experience, not for me so much, but for Sallie. That's where Elizabeth was born.

MB: Interesting that you should call her Elizabeth and not some Italian name. [laughs]

FB: Heaven, no. She was given Marta. That's what we called Marta when Marta was born, our first one. I thought I had invented a name: Marta. It was Italian. Well, I don't know what it was. I thought it had something to do with Mars, war. I said, "Gee, we'll just name her Marta." Then when I got to Rome, I discovered Marta was simply the Italian for Martha. But to me, it still had a bellicose connotation to Mars. [laughs]

MB: Both of the girls, then, went to school part of the time in Italy.

FB: Yes, they did, and they did very well because they went to French school and learned French and of course they learned Italian very quickly. It was no great effort on their part because I'm convinced that children exposed to languages pick them up beautifully and indeed very, with great ease. Much more so than adults.

MB: But this time, you were speaking it very clearly.

FB: Yes. I was speaking Italian quite well. Of course, I knew some French, which I picked up within Switzerland. Switzerland has three languages spoken: French, Italian, German, and then there's a fourth, Swizerdeutsch, which is—

MB: Romansh.

FB: Romansh, yes. Romansh you could say is a fourth, because that's an older language, with the Swiss-German is a sort of a, it's German with a little bit of Swiss.

MB: Isn't Romansh kind of an old world—

FB: The old language, which they're trying to keep—

MB: Hill people.

FB: —preserve.

MB: Right. In fact, I think that in one area, they speak almost Romansh—

FB: Yes, there is.

MB: High ski areas.

FB: That's right.

MB: Well, this is a fascinating experience for you and your family to be over there after the war. It must have seemed quite calm by comparison to your experience with it during wartime.

FB: Yes, it was, except for a good deal of the occupation, there were troubles. As you remember, the communists were quite strong, and so sometimes there were battles in the streets, political battles and there was quite a—I have to stop and think of it. After the war, Palmiro Togliatti, who was considered the brilliant person who was the number one communist—you also have to remember that the communists at that time were not looked upon the way you look upon them today. They were our allies. The Italian Communist Party was, perhaps still is, the biggest communist party in Europe. When the war was over, and trying to reestablish the Italian government, Palmiro Togliatti was in so strong a position that—

[End of Interview]