Interview with LEORA SMITH
Interviewer:  Marlene Mayo, Professor Emerita of History, University of Maryland
Location:  Gywnn Oak, MD
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Transcriber:  Amy Wasserstrom

[Note:  Keith Smith, Leora Smith’s husband, was present during part of the interview and interjected his thoughts at one point.]

MM:  Today is March the 11th, 2014, and I’m just inside the Baltimore City limits interviewing Lee Smith or Leora Smith, who likes to go by Lee Smith.  And this is a very exciting interview, I am sure.  Lee, could I start out by asking you when you were born and where you were born – your early years.

LS:  I was born the 16th of April 1921, ten miles from the town of Hayden, Colorado, which sits on the banks of the Yappa River in a beautiful part of Northwestern Colorado.

MM:  Did you continue to live in Colorado for your early years, your elementary education, high school education?

LS:  Yes, I did.  In fact, I rode a horse to school for elementary school and my children think it’s very funny that I can’t ride a bicycle. And I have informed them that that’s alright, I can ride a horse.  I went to high school in Hayden and then I went to a small junior college in Grand Junction, which is now a four-year college.  This is Grand Junction, Western Colorado.  And I went there, but I did not get a degree from there.

MM:  Were you interested in any particular subjects at that time?

LS:  Music.  I’ve always played the piano and my mother has a lovely singing voice.

MM:  Isn’t that interesting.  That was my favorite instrument, too, when I was growing up.  I’m very grateful to my mother for getting me the piano.  This takes you to approximately the late 20s or the early 1930s, the Depression, the Crash.  Was that particularly evident in Colorado, where you were growing up and being educated, the Depression years?
LS: There was probably no money and not very much time to do anything. My mother could do all kinds of wonderful things. She was a great cook. She knew how to make clothes. She made all my brothers’ shirts. She made all my school clothes, until I got big enough to do that. And she was a creative person in her way. We stopped every night of our lives to look at the sunset, because the view from our ranch window across the north was a whole range of mountains. And when the sun would set there in the late afternoon, particularly in the winter time when there was snow, it was incredible. So, being outside, learning to look at things, I think was part of my very early education. And I think making clothes was a real outlet for me, because today all the kids want to look alike. In those days, you wanted something different.

MM: As we go into the 1930s, and war begins to seem imminent in Europe, I wonder to what extent you had interest in or an awareness of the world outside Colorado or outside the United States. Or did all of this going to war, the European War starting and then Pearl Harbor, was this kind of a shock to you or something that was part of your growing consciousness.

LS: I think it was just growing consciousness. Because when I graduated from high school in 1929, I went off to this junior college for a year on a scholarship – that was not renewable unless I lived there – so I did not go back, because I didn’t have enough money to do that. So I got a job selling yard goods in a department store and then I married. And everybody was either in military or going to war, or your family was, your brothers, your uncles, your aunts, all of my school friends. The town of Hayden lost one man during the war. We felt very, very lucky. But it was something that everybody was doing and the thought that I personally would ever visit either Japan or Germany; I would have laughed at them. Who, me? No way! And, yet, I did do that later.

MM: So you were working in the department store in the late 30s, early 40s, during World War II?

LS: Uh-huh.

MM: And you met your husband.
LS: Yeah. We married in ’42.

MM: In 1942? And he was already in the military?

LS: He was in Air Force.

MM: Was he being trained for the European war or the Pacific theatre?

LS: He ended up in the Pacific. In fact, he helped drive the Burma Road.

MM: He flew cargo over Burma Road?

LS: He was security with them. I think he drove through there. This is probably what, in the long run, caused the marriage to break up. And it did this to a lot of young people because the men were sent overseas, they learned a lot of things, they saw a different world, and the rest of us had stayed home. So when they came back, we were not the same people.

MM: Did you get into any kind of – I know you had some art training here along the way – and I would like to know where that was and how that came about. And do you remember women going off to work in factories and things like that during World War II.

LS: A lot of young women that I knew, worked in factories. And I interviewed for a job once at the Gates Rubber Company making fan belts. And when they told me I would stand at a machine for my 8-hour shift and cut fan belts, I said, I can’t do that. I just could not do it. But I didn’t have art training, as such, at that point. It was not taught in my high school. We did a lot of music and dancing, but we didn’t have art. I went to college, again, no art. That just came from this love of making things. I always wanted to paint, but I didn’t have anything to paint with. Let me think a minute here. After the marriage broke up, and I came back from Japan, I had then gotten into photography.

MM: Oh. Ok. Well we’ll then get that into the narrative.

LS: Then I went to photography school. That was the first time I did any kind of educational thing, which was art-related.
Leora Smith Interview

MM: Let’s come back to that. Now your husband came back – you were all rather different people – the families that they came back to. This would be in 1945 approximately? And how did your lives take a turn and land you both in Japan?

LS: Well, he had enjoyed being overseas very much. So we were sent here to Baltimore. He came to language school to learn Japanese.

MM: He was sent to language school?

LS: Uh huh. Right here in Baltimore at Fort Holabird. And the young Japanese that was teaching it became a friend of ours. In those days, they did not let the wives learn the languages. Later on, the Army changed that, because they found out that the wives could reach people the men could never reach. And I believe even today probably, women who evince a real interest in learning the language of a country, if they know that’s where they’re going, get that opportunity. But I didn’t have that. But what I did, was I took the books that he had and I took the final exams. So when I went to Japan, because he was then sent to Japan.

MM: Was he in the Army Air Force or Navy Air Force?

LS: Army Air Force. It was Army Air Force, in those days.

MM: And they assigned him for language training. That’s very interesting.

LS: Isn’t it. Yes.

MM: Do you remember the titles of any of those books? Were they history books or culture books?

LS: I have no idea, because I never really saw the books. I just saw what he brought home. And worked from what – it was a second-hand education.

MM: And so they sent him, and he was married, so you were allowed to go to Japan, too. Did you have to go through any kind of clearance as his wife?

LS: No. And see he went to Japan before I could go. There were no families there when he first went back to Japan.
MM: Did he go to the Yokohama area?
LS: Yes.
MM: So he was in the Army. He had nothing to do with Yokotsuka, the navy base?
LS: No.
MM: Strictly army, Yokohama.
LS: Yeah. Actually, what he came to Holabird for was not just to learn Japanese, but it was an intelligence school. So he was on leave from the Air Force to the Counter Intelligence Corps, the CIC.
MM: So when he went to Japan, when he was posted to Japan after the training, was it approximately late ’46 or early ’47?
LS: He went there earlier than I did. He was there... I went over in ’47. He was probably there in ’46. See, when he came back from India, we only had about six months. And then he was gone again. And that six months we spent – it might have been maybe more like a year -- because we were at Fort Holabird here for quite a while. Then we went to San Antonio, Texas. And from there, he went to Japan then.
MM: What was his rank?
LS: He was a Lieutenant at that point.
MM: So let’s turn this back more toward you. So you follow your husband to Japan, 1947, and so it would be interesting, your very first impressions. Did you go by ship or did they send you over by air?
LS: Everybody went by ship those days. I went through Seattle. I went on a ship with a lot of families. I was among one of the first contingents of American families to go over. They may have started a little sooner than that. I don’t know that we were the first, but we were certainly early.
MM: Do you remember the month at all?
LS: Do I remember what?
MM: The month.
LS: I think it was September or October. It was in the fall.

MM: In the fall?

LS: Uh huh. And because dependent housing was just being built in Yokohama, we were housed in Fujiya Hotel. And that was wonderful.

MM: It would be interesting to hear a little bit more about the Fujiya Hotel. What kind of accommodations they had for you. And were there all officers and families living in that hotel?

LS: Only officer rank and quite a few people from the War Crimes Trials people were there. Does the name Santha Rama Rao mean anything to you?

MM: Oh, yes, it does indeed!

LS: I saw her the day that Gandhi was killed. They were at the hotel that day.

MM: They were staying... Her father was the head of the... one of the judges... Santha Rama Rao, yes, indeed. Someone I’m very interested in.

LS: He was one of the judges on the War Crimes Trials. I did get to go to one of those one day.

MM: In Tokyo?

LS: In Tokyo.

MM: Because they had also a Class B and Class C in Yokohama.

LS: I don’t remember which place, but, yes, we did get to go.

MM: Yes, Santha Rama Rao was, sometimes she’s referred to as one of the jetsetters. Part of the crowd of the jetsetters in Occupied Japan. How interesting. So you had the high-ranking civilian families.

LS: It was a real treat to be there. Probably more so than I realized at the time. Because we were probably on the bottom layer. I had a room at the very top, up the side of the mountain. Fujiya is built on a mountain slope, a big mountain slope. And the bar was at the bottom. And my room was at the top. It was 65 steps from the bar to my room. Up stairways, along halls, up stairways. The reason I
know it was 65 steps was because I was perfecting my Japanese counting. And when I would get stuck, I would have to stand on a step til I could come back to it. And the little Japanese girls that worked there would come by and they’d do their “hee hee hee”. They thought this was very funny.

MM: Were the rooms you were in, were they Western furnished or did they have some Japanese-style rooms as well.

LS: They may have had a few, but I think very few. I brought along for you, something that Jackie found on the internet about Fujiya Hotel. And it was started originally as a tourist hotel, to attract European and American visitors. So it was almost exclusively Western in its furnishings. They did have a room with tatami mats where you could go and have a Japanese dinner, but you had to arrange for that.

MM: That would be one way of Americans learning a little bit about Japanese society and Japanese culture. And I wanted to ask you more about the lives of women who were married to officers. Was there time or interest to make forays into Japanese neighborhoods or to see a bit of the life of Japan and what Japan was all about? Were Americans, and particularly American wives, interested in that sort of thing?

LS: Some were, some not so much. We had a very wonderful recreation director there, with I don’t remember what they called the… because she worked for the Army. Her name was [Vi Adder]. She came from Denver. And Vi arranged all sorts of trips for us, which is why I got to see a War Crimes Trial. She took us to see the Great Buddha in Kamakura. They arranged lots of trips for us. Prince Takamatsu has a villa not too far from Fujiya Hotel, and periodically we could go to a tea ceremony there. But this was all pretty much arranged. It was very hard at that time to really get to know the local people. Their lives were very different and I think there was a little bit of – I want to say – fear, and yet I wasn’t really afraid. But, after all, we had just beaten them in a war and you didn’t know quite how to play this. I did find that with a camera I could get to see people. The series in the book of the rice harvest. These people were delighted that I wanted to come and see what they were doing and they would pose. The
hard thing was to get them to stop posing and to do what they were supposed to be doing. And I was very fortunate in that I had a reflex camera. So I’m looking down in the camera, and they don’t know I’m taking the picture because I’m not holding it up to my face. But I think it was very hard in those days to have much of a relationship with the Japanese people.

MM: That’s very interesting. I just wanted to back track a little bit. Your boat came into Yokohama.

LS: Yes.

MM: And did it come in daytime? I mean, did you have any chance to see what Yokohama was like, whether it had recovered at all from the bombing of 1945 or it was it pretty grim and desolate?

LS: You could tell that it had been. Although Yokohama was not badly damaged. The Air Force is pretty remarkable. It can bomb what they want and miss what they don’t want. And I took a bus trip once from Yokohama to Tokyo, I got to see Frank Lloyd Wright’s house before they tore it down. It was still standing. That was a very big industrial plain between Yokohama and Tokyo. And what you saw were dozens and dozens of great huge metal safes. Everything else was gone. Because most of Japan, at least in those days, was pretty much wood, so it would burn. So there’d be safes around the countryside. The devastation was interesting because that was all commercial and it was just levelled. Tokyo was not bombed much at all.

MM: When you saw it in 1947.

LS: Yeah. And when you got out into the countryside, like a Fujiya or an Odawara or an Otami, it was fine. And you realized that a lot of people had gone about their lives, as everybody has to in a war situation.

MM: You mentioned, after this lovely experience in the Fujiya Hotel, you then went into dependent housing?

LS: Yes.
MM: It would be interesting. I don’t think anyone in these oral histories has ever described very much dependent housing.

LS: Well, there are some very funny stories about some of that, because they were built very quickly. The impetus after the war in Japan and in Germany, too, was very interesting, I think, because we learned something after World War I, when we packed up and went home. And we left a vacuum. And we have Mr. Hitler to thank. We did not do that in Europe. I have many good German friends who still thank me for the Marshall Plan. The emphasis in Japan, partly because of MacArthur because I think he really loved Japan, and we wanted to help rebuild and help do something. So there was a very different kind of feeling about all this. Where was I going with this?

MM: We’re talking about dependent housing.

LS: We were putting people to work. And these houses were built by little Japanese men with all kinds of tools that we didn’t know about and they were cheap. They were built with cheap lumber. They built a lot of duplexes, they built apartments, they built some single houses, but not very many. Mostly, they were duplexes. And the Americans love heat. So, once the building was finished, essentially, they would turn on the heating system to see if it worked. And they would turn it up real high and all the wood would shrink. So the doors didn’t fit and the windows didn’t fit. And the panels in the cupboards had moved in. So then there were little Japanese men who came with little strips of wood and covered all these splits and things. You had an army of little people that came and went. You never knew what they were going to do.

MM: There must have been a good quartermaster there.

LS: It was interesting. And the Stars and Stripes would get delivered every day by little Japanese boys who would go through the housing area and leave your paper. And they had a little song and dance that went, “Good evening! Enjoy your papaa [sic]! Goodbye!” and then they would get out of sync and they’d greet you with, “Goodbye! Good evening! Enjoy your paper!” and they would be gone.
MM: What was this? What was the paper being delivered?

LS: Stars and Stripes. So, that was fun.

MM: Were there amenities? I mean, was it like living in a little American town inside of Japan? Did they have movie theatres or churches or schools? Or was it primarily housing?

LS: Primarily housing and then I think schools came later. Because a lot of people came then with children. An interesting thing was this was exactly the time when the Army, well, the military, integrated.

MM: Oh, yes.

LS: Truman said, “This is ridiculous. We’ll have none of that.” So, housing was allotted through a lottery system. And your name went in a pot, along with lots of other people. And then on certain days, you’d go down and maybe you drew a house and maybe you didn’t – or an apartment or whatever. And there were some occasions when somebody would not move into a duplex because a black family was going to be living in the next one. And the Army would have none of that. If you turned that down, your name goes to the bottom of the list. Which was an interesting thing.

MM: So, Truman’s order was enforced.

LS: It was enforced.

MM: That’s very interesting to know. Were there large numbers of GIs in the area, that is, would these African American military be of officer rank, not regular soldiers?

LS: Mostly, yes. Almost exclusively.

MM: I’m curious – I know something about the Grant Heights and other complexes in Tokyo, and I wondered, did the Military build a wall around your dependent area?

LS: No.

MM: They did not try to separate you from the Japanese neighborhood.

LS: No.
MM: Very interesting.

LS: In fact, several of the pictures in my book were taken just by walking out of the neighborhood. There was a pond over somewhere a different way and I’d go over there and watch kids. Watch the seaweed gatherers, you know. And I knew enough Japanese that I could communicate a little bit. And I was taller than they are, mostly. I wore a red coat and I wore tennis shoes. I was really interesting to those kids. And I could converse with them about my family, whether I had brothers, sisters. Where I came from. They would ask me what my father did and I would tell them that he was a cowboy and that, of course, was, to them, wonderful. It was nice. Then I had more contact really with local people, once we moved into the housing area, than I’d had a Fujiya Hotel. Because this had always been a tourist hotel up there. Now, there were several wonderful shops in Minoshita, which is where Fujiya Hotel is located. And those people all spoke English, because they had always spoken English. It was a tourist hotel. And some of the nice things I have, came from there.

MM: You mentioned your camera and taking photos. Had this become already an avocation or a vocation of yours?

LS: I think so. I think so.

MM: And when did this start? This interest in taking photos or it just kind of a normal part of life, to commemorate events and …?

LS: You were in a land you didn’t ever think you’d be in, it was a different situation, and, also, I found Japan very beautiful. And taking pictures was just a really good thing to do. I wanted to bring it home and show people. And then when I came back, TV had just been invented, and nobody wanted to know about anything except the TV.

MM: Well, now they do! You had some training in photography at some point?

LS: When I came back from Japan, after that first marriage broke up...

MM: And that was in ’48?
LS: ’48. I went to a photography school in Denver. I graduated from the Lamme Photography School in Denver. Steven Lamme – L A M M E – owned the photography school. But a lot of my pictures were taken before I ever had any classes.

MM: So you seem to have had an eye for it or an instinct.

LS: I think this comes – I’m like the Native Americans – it comes from living in the land. Looking every day at what the sky tells you, watching the plants grow. And my mother was, I think, instrumental in that, too. Stop what you’re doing and come watch the sun set. So, it makes you visual, that you don’t even realize you are. And I think that the Native American has a super dose of this. That’s something that’s always been interesting to me. Because they’re taught from very early on to look at things. And I guess I was, too, really.

MM: That’s fascinating. So you come back, you’re recently divorced. You come back, you go to Denver. Was it a sense that you had to have training or that you had to somehow make a career or make money to live.

LS: Uh huh. And I worked for a company in Littleton, Colorado for a while doing commercial photography. But I found that I was not happy there. It was... People didn’t know what was going on in the rest of the world and they didn’t really care. And if you’re a young divorcee, you’re pursued. I found that unhappy making. So I ended up going back to Civil Service, and taking a job, and going back to Japan.

MM: Now that to me is very interesting. In fact, it reminded me of one question I wanted to ask, but I’ll ask it later. When you decided to return to Japan, did you this time have to undergo an interview and clearance in order to get the job? And how did you know the specific job?

LS: I didn’t know a specific job. What you do is you go to Civil Service Offices, and you tell them you want to go overseas and you’d like to have a job. And they say, what can you do, and you say well I can type 60 works/minute and I know shorthand. And I can do this and I can do that. So then you have to
take tests to see if you can do that. And, if you can, then you’re put on a list. And the people in Japan or
Germany, or wherever, are sending in lists of the people that they need. And, so, I was picked up to go
to Japan. When I got to Japan, I didn’t have a job in mind. They did ask me what I’d like to do, and I said
I would like to work with Civil Affairs, I’m very interested in the Japanese people. And they said, great.
That’s where we need people. And I did not want to live in Tokyo because American women were living
in the hotels two and three and four to a room. That was not my idea of being in Japan.
MM: Like a dormitory.
LS: Right. In the hotels, the big hotels they took them over in Japan, down in Tokyo. And I was not
about to stay in Tokyo if I could get out. And so...
MM: Did you have any time at all in Tokyo? I mean your observations.
LS: A couple of weeks.
MM: That to me is very interesting. I haven’t heard very much about this would be unmarried women
who were working. Were you called Department of the Army Civilians?
LS: Yes. DACS.
MM: That’s the term. So the Civil Service Office that you went to, was it in Colorado?
MM: And then, they had some connection with the Department of Army in Washington, DC?
LS: Probably, because I did the same thing then when I transferred to Germany.
MM: I see.
LS: It was still Department of Army Civilian.
MM: I have read a little bit, but haven’t heard very much about the housing, living arrangements for
unmarried women or DACS working in Tokyo. So I know that you didn’t want to stay there, but your
observations of how they were living are very interesting.
LS: Yeah, it was three in a room.
MM: This is 1950?

LS: Yes. And a lot of people were party animals, and I wasn’t particularly. So that wasn’t very much fun.

I have a very funny story to tell you about the Daiiti Hotel in Japan, in Tokyo. This was for senior officers – Generals, big guys. The Americans took over the Daiiti Hotel, which was one of the big, you probably know the Daiiti Hotel. And they got a bunch of GIs to train the staff. And they hired little Japanese kids, boys and girls, to work, to do things – clean the rooms, make the beds, cook the food. And one little boy was taught by somebody to open the door when the General would approach, then he would bow very low, “Good evening, Sir, you never had it so good.”

MM: To which the General replied...

LS: He didn’t last very long.

MM: That was one of the questions I was going to ask you about the earlier experience and then the later experience -- if you had any observations of the good or bad behavior of American soldiers or GIs in Japan. And whether you wanted to add anything along those lines.

LS: I think, mostly, it was pretty good. My later Japanese friend Eiko said, “Well, we’re kind of glad that some of them weren’t very nice because it made us realize you were just people like us.” But when I went down to Kure, I had my own room.

MM: So you got out of Tokyo. They assigned you to Kure.

LS: After two weeks, I went to Kure.

MM: How long were you in Tokyo? About two weeks?

LS: I was in Tokyo probably about two weeks.

MM: Two weeks. And then you got the word about Kure.

LS: I was put on the train and sent down. They said watch for the sign. Somebody will meet you and they did.

MM: This is a long train ride.
LS: Oh, yes. It was great. And I don’t fit in Japanese trains. I’m about four inches shorter than I used to be then and I just – I hung over the benches. But when we were down there, an officer had to be on call. It was called “officer of the day”. And then those of us of the lower ranks were called “charge of quarters”. And your telephone number and your room, or wherever you stayed, I didn’t have a phone in my room, but the quarters, you were on duty that night. You had to stay there in case they needed to get a hold of you. So one night I got a call. There was a very bad thing going on down in Hiroshima. Now this was an Australian-occupied zone, this was not American-occupied. This was Australian.

MM: Kure... Hiroshima was, yes, BCOF, British Commonwealth Forces. But Kure was American, or split or...

LS: We were. Civil Affairs was in Kure. But as far as the Occupation, that was Australian. And the call I got was, there was a bunch of Australians in a bar in Hiroshima and the British Navy landed, because Etajima was right off. The British Navy landed and they got into a fight with the Australians and they threw the Australians out. And that would have been alright, except then the Americans came, some of them, and they threw the British out. And the poor bar owner is very upset. “What can you tell me to do?” (This is an MP calling in.) I said, “That’s way above my ability to handle. You call the officer bay.”

MM: Where were the Military Police?

LS: There weren’t enough of them, apparently. But, it was an interesting area because there in Kure, we had no facilities really. We used the Australian officer’s club. And we had no PX and no commissary. We could get a jeep once a month to take us down to the piers, to the docks, and get a boat, because there was a boat there that belonged to Civil Affairs, and we could go across to the island of Etajima, which had been a big Navy base and they had PXs and all sorts of things. That was our way to shop. The Australians were very pleasant. We liked them. They actually had charge of the building that I lived in. We know because it got infested by the rats once and we had to deal with the Australians to get rid of the rats.
MM: They, too, brought their dependents. The Australians had wives and children?

LS: I think they may have. There were a couple housing areas out. There was the Nijimora Housing Area, which was out in the country. We did have an officer’s club over at Nijimora. There was an American housing area there, but it was not very big. Very small. And one of the famous stories was of the Australian who was dating an American girl and one night he couldn’t get a jeep to take her home. Now, the Korean War is going on, and he commandeered a tank and took her home in a tank. And it created havoc, because everybody thought they were being invaded.

MM: I was going to ask you about the Korean War. And you went in 1950, do you recall if you arrived in Japan before or after the Korean War started? The Korean War started June 25th.

LS: It was after, because the Princess Pats were on my ship, from Canada. And they were on their way to Korea.

MM: I see.

LS: When I went back over, it was my third trip across the Pacific. The Princess Pats were with us. And we sailed out of Seattle.

MM: On an American transport or...?

LS: A transport ship. There were 22 officers. I took a picture of them. I sold 100 copies, too.

MM: Practicing your photography? No, not practicing, working on it.

MM: So you’re going from Tokyo, where you had been before for the War Crimes Trials. You get out of there and go to Kure. What was the situation in Kure? It wasn’t much bombed or hurt or devastated? By this time, 1950, there had been quite a bit of rebuilding, reconstruction?

LS: There had been some.

MM: Kure might have been a target at one point, but...
LS: It was, I believe, because it was a shipbuilding port. And none of that was obvious when I was there. The town itself was not touched, but the wharfs, the piers, the water, none of it was. And Japanese are very neat. I think they cleaned up a lot of it.

MM: I’ve often wondered who did the cleaning up in the period from 1945 to 50. Whether it was primarily Japanese companies and Japanese workers by hand, using their own construction machinery or whether the Americans, the engineers or anything, helped them.

LS: I think there was some of both. Particularly if the Americans wanted it cleaned.

MM: If they wanted it cleaned for their own purposes, their own buildings, their own houses. So you lived in Kure in a house that was under Australian authority.

LS: Yes.

MM: Could you tell me a little bit more about that as well. Their arrangements – were there mainly single women or unmarried women or was it a...?

LS: It was a house just for DACs, of which I was one.

MM: Male and female?

LS: It was all female. The males were out at Nijimora. We were right in downtown Kure. It had been a Japanese villa. And it had a lovely Japanese-style house. It had a compound around it. There was another two-story house on the property, which wealthy Japanese would sometimes create like a two-story place to store their wealth. Because unlike us, where we have everything out, you bring out a few things at a time. So this was stored in this two-story. There were two rooms in that and there was one gal in each room. The main part of the building had tatami mats on the floors, but there were two rooms at the very front that were used originally for service personnel – check who comes in, who goes out. Take care of the packages, take care of the laundry, all that sort of thing. These were simpler rooms and they did not have tatami mats, which made me very unhappy, because I had one of those rooms. But, I had a room of my own. We could walk to the Civil Affairs building. And this was through
the streets of Kure. And the big market up on the main street was three blocks up the way. If you go through my house now, you’ll find a little ashtray with a bug on it. You’ll find some very lovely little pieces of pottery and things that I bought there, because I needed them. I’d go down to market and buy them. This is when it was nice to know a few words of Japanese. Part of the group that lived there were – one girl was a friend of mine and she was Nisei. She’d been born in this country and had gone back over because she got a job as a translator. And she lived in the house. But these were only women. Now there was a librarian, because we had a library, not in Kure, the library was down in Hiroshima. [Jeanette Pizzarello] was a nurse and she headed the Nursing Department. Because Civil Affairs was broken up into a lot of different departments. There was Public Health, which is what I worked in. And that’s where Pizzarello worked and a doctor from Maine, who was a vet, Dr. Bush. So there were civilians with special capabilities. Some male, some female. But the females all lived in our building. And not just our building, but the attached buildings. There must have been 15 or 20 of us, maybe. There was no kitchen there. There was a kitchen, but no American would have ever tried to cook a meal in it. What we did, we did have cooking things around, because we all got tired of eating out. The kitchen was in one of the Civil Affairs buildings. We had two buildings, one was office and one was a housing type thing. We could walk over there and have breakfast. And when you would come in, the Japanese girls would serve you breakfast. And there would be a folded crane on your napkin. It was nice to be that close and to be able to use this. Now, we were given meal tickets. You got them every week. You got two-week supply meal tickets. Every time you went for a meal, this ticket was turned in. And the Sargent in charge of that kitchen was Tommy Norton and he was a genius. He could make a meal out of peanut butter and crackers, I swear. But we would turn all of our tickets into Tommy, whether we ate there or whether we didn’t. Because he got his supplies based on those tickets. But Tommy was a really nice guy. And if we all wanted a shrimp dinner someday, we could order a case of
shrimp from Shimonoseki. They’d come in frozen, and Tommy would put them in his freezer. And when we wanted shrimp, we could go to Tommy and get our shrimp.

MM: Wonderful.

LS: It was great. That’s where I learned that eggs from Japanese chickens taste like fish, because they feed them all these [shells] and stuff.

MM: But they don’t have salmonella.

LS: No, they don’t.

MM: I wanted to know more about Civil Affairs. You weren’t part of a Civil Affairs Team, you were in a Civil Affairs Office, as a secretary?

LS: Uh huh. Administrative secretary.

MM: So you did typing and filing...

LS: And shuffled the paperwork around.

MM: So this is an office and they had people observing, helping the Japanese or observing. Were they observing whether...

Tape is changed.

MM: We’ll have to repeat that.

LS: If you want a break...

MM: No, this is really fascinating...

Probably a few words were lost when this tape broke off and we were talking about your actual job. It was the Department of the Army Civilian and you were typing and shuffling paperwork around. So they were not actually making use of your training in photography.
LS: No.

MM: So your photography work was on your own and going out and venturing forth and being curious?
LS: Uh huh.

MM: This is, actually, two questions. The first one being whether or not there was an attempt to have
arranged tours, as earlier when you were staying in the Fujiya Hotel. Was there any attempt to promote
an interest in Japanese culture or they just let people explore on their own? Secondly, you did go out on
your own and engaged in photography.
LS: Yes.

MM: So I just wondered if there was any interconnection. Any kind of organization to encourage
people to be interested in Japanese society or culture.
LS: I think not, except that all of us who were there were working, at least indirectly, with the Japanese.
MM: You mentioned the bilingual office.
LS: Yeah. And I can speak more for Public Health than anything else because that was the department I
worked in. There was an Information Office. We had a veterinarian on the staff. Of course, he was
assigned to Public Health people. But there were other groups. I think there was an agricultural group.
But mostly people were relating out in their jobs. We had to turn in reports to Headquarters in Tokyo. I
think once a month. And what our job specifically was about when I got there was the health issue.
When Japan was during the war, and before that, they did not have a very good health system. And
hospitals, if they existed, were just places where people went for a doctor, but they didn’t stay. Or if
they did, if it’s where they had to stay, the family had to come in and take care of them because they
had no kitchens, they had no nursing staff. And the American government can throw a lot of money at
things sometimes without figuring out what’s needed. And we were trying to say, this is what’s needed.
This is what we have and this is what we need to do. And my boss was Dr. Barrett from Michigan and he
was an epidemiologist.
MM: University of Michigan?

LS: He came from Michigan. I don’t know what he’d done in Michigan, but that’s where his home was. And he said there’s no point in building extravagant hospitals, when you don’t have a nursing staff. And what we need to do to help the Japanese people at this point is to tackle their basic health problem, which is Tuberculosis. And when you don’t have a nursing staff and you send the family in to take care of them, then everybody in the family gets it. So, before they closed us down, he had done a whole booklet in Japanese, how to recognize it, how to treat it, and what to do. And there was a big Japanese printing machine in the building. This got printed. And that’s what we were about. Now, we had agents out in, this was Chugoku Region, which encompasses that whole area around Kure and Hiroshima. Dr. Tsumora, who was a Japanese doctor in our office, would gather all these reports from the various hospitals. And he would combine all this information and we’d send it up to Tokyo. And the reason I know particularly about this was, at some point, we were directed not to send any more statistics about Tuberculosis up to Headquarters, because we had stamped it out -- which, of course, we hadn’t. But it was much better. And those of us who worked there had to be tested, TB tested every six months. The old man running the elevator in our building came down with TB. We had a nurse there who was married to a Japanese. She had been over there. She had gotten her nursing degree somewhere in this country, I think. He had probably come to the States and she’d met him here, I suspect. I don’t know the whole story.

MM: She was Caucasian?

LS: I’m sorry.

MM: A Caucasian woman?

LS: Yes. And she was on the staff for Civil Affairs, very valuable because she had an in that the rest of us didn’t have. But this was what Civil Affairs was trying to do. And we had people that worked in the fisheries, departments in the agricultural departments, information departments.
MM: I’m still trying to understand better the Australian American jurisdiction down there. You had this office and it was working in all these areas and you were particularly concerned about Tuberculosis, which really was a scourge. And I think it hit women even more than men. What were the Australians doing? Did they have Civil Affairs Offices or you were doing this work essentially in their territory?

LS: The Australians were there simply to provide support.

MM: I see.

LS: They had soldiers stationed there. They ran the boats that went back and forth to Etajima. They did the security. They had the MPs. They had a housing area. Australian women were there. I had a Thanksgiving dinner once with an American woman who married an Australian. But they were basically support. They did not touch Civil Affairs. That was strictly an American thing. And I think this was because of MacArthur. I think he really wanted us to do what we could for the people.

MM: Would that be true also of Hiroshima? That technically fell in the British Commonwealth area.

LS: Yeah, it did.

MM: I know that you made some excursions to Hiroshima. I know you made some photographs and I wondered how that came about. And whether there was any warning about Hiroshima might still be contaminated or affected.

LS: By the time I got there, there was no concern for that anymore.

MM: No concern at all.

LS: Yeah. And Kure had no good places to eat. Kure had been badly damaged. And the people that were there had very little money. It was very poor. We were instructed not to buy on the economy. Do not go down to the food markets and buy food, because they need what they have. There’s not enough to go around. So we could eat at our mess hall. We could cook our shrimp when we could get it out of Tommy Norton’s freezer. But if you wanted to go out to eat, you went to Hiroshima. It was only a 20-minute drive.
MM: That’s fascinating. [_______] had the best restaurants?

LS: I don’t know, but they did. And there was a Catholic church in Hiroshima that had been established there and they helped wherever they could. So, they were from Belgium, this Catholic Church. All the sisters, all the people there, were all Belgium. They helped get a couple of French restaurants going, which was why we would drive 20 miles down to Hiroshima to eat in a French restaurant.

MM: You drove in jeeps?

LS: In jeeps. Oh, yes. That was all we had. One of the young men who was there with the church, he later became an ordained Jesuit priest, became a good friend of mine. In fact, I took a series of pictures for the church. And he sent them back to Brussels and they got extra money for the church, because they could show them what was happening.

MM: Did they care for orphans?

LS: Yes. There were several orphanages in Hiroshima.

MM: These were mainly Japanese orphans?

LS: Exclusively, I think.

MM: Maybe I’m getting you a little bit off track. I did want to go back to questions of fraternization, that is, social fraternization -- Americans interacting with Japanese in normal social ways and then the problem of fraternization with American or Australian men and Japanese women. And I wondered if you had any observations of that down in Kure and whether any of these orphans or anyone raised the issue of mixed-blood children.

LS: I saw none of them while I was there. I think there was very little of that going on at that time. I do know that some of the Australian soldiers married Japanese girls. And there was a terrible situation, because at that time, Australia would not allow them in. Australia had a no immigration by Japanese. So, in some cases, the Australian soldiers would ask for delayed return and stay in Japan. I think
eventually that got changed. I don’t know when it was changed, but when I was there, it was still a real problem. I don’t think there were enough American soldiers around where I was to know what was happening.

MM: I think the rules were more lax after 1949, than they were earlier in 1945, ’46, ’47 about fraternization.

LS: Perhaps. Yeah. I think somewhere along the line it had to happen. But I did know, in fact I had Thanksgiving dinner one time with an American girl and her Australian husband. Now, she could go, because she’s American. But this was much discussed about what happens to these guys who marry a Japanese girl and he couldn’t take her home.

MM: What about abandoned children? That was not much of an issue in this area? It happened to Australians, primarily, not American GIs.

LS: No. We were a little bit removed from that. Now one thing that was happening when I was in Kure, was the fact that the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission had been developed. And that was stationed there. I think all those people lived in Kure, in the Nishimora housing area. They did not live in Hiroshima. And our people in Public Health related to the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission people. Because, if they were trying to study what happened, let’s say, to a young woman who was in Hiroshima when the bomb was dropped, but she survives and 10 years later she marries and she’s pregnant. They cannot compare her statistics with America, with Hawaii. It has to be somebody local. And so Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission used Kure as their control center. So they were looking for people who lived in Kure. And they’d find another girl who’d match the one from Hiroshima. So they had statistics that were of some value.

MM: Was the Commission engaged primarily in research or did it engage in treatment? Was there any controversy about that?
Leora Smith Interview

LS: I don’t know. I did not know those people very well. I think mainly it was research. They really wanted to know what happened to people. And the veterinarian in our office did a study on the animals. And I remember him saying once that the only animals that were not severely affected, were the chickens. And somebody said, why, and he said, because they have no lymph glands. Whether this was a joke, whether this was honest, was true, I don’t know. But there was exchange between our office and some of the ABCC people.

MM: That was really interesting.

LS: It was an interesting place. I could not have asked for a better assignment.

MM: And so it was on your own, then, that you made these excursions into Hiroshima? You took some photographs in or around the area or inside the city.

LS: Oh, yeah.

MM: You went to the epicenter, where the atomic bomb hit?

LS: Oh yes, oh yes.

MM: I would be very interested in your memories. To what extent you could or could not tell the degree of reconstruction and whether or not it was coming back as a dynamic or a bustling or regular city when you were there – 1950, 1951.

LS: I saw people going about their daily life, but it was obviously still a very poor neighborhood. It was a struggle. And things like these two French restaurants that we used to go to, these were people like the sisters of the Catholic Church who said, we have to get some things going. And they were trying to start things like that. It was an eerie feeling to walk down the streets and to know that it had been so horrible. And yet to know that you were safe to be there and see that the trees were turning green. Because when the bomb was dropped, of course we were told it would be, what, 15 years, 20 years, 50 years, when nobody could go there. And suddenly here two years later, three years later, we were walking down the streets. But when you saw shadows of people on bank steps and you knew that that
person was not there anymore, but his body left a shadow when the bomb was dropped, because it was all charred around the shape of the person. It didn’t make you comfortable.

MM: Well this was before they had the museum. Were they doing anything to create an atomic or Hiroshima park or had they made the dome?

LS: That dome was there.

MM: It was there. Had they turned it into a spot of commemoration?

LS: They were starting to. Yes. You could see that this was happening.

MM: I’d like to know a little bit more about your photography in this period. The range of photos you took, the types of people you saw. Were you pretty much alone when you were doing this or did you have friends traveling with you when you took the photos?

LS: Sometimes, yeah. The ones with some of the kids, a lot of those I did by myself. And when I lived in the housing area in Yokohama, I’d take my camera and go out and walk around. Photograph the kids on the streets, photograph the … One of my favorite pictures in the book, is those three little boys sitting on those cans fishing in a pond.

MM: Where was that?

LS: That was in Yokohama.

MM: In Yokohama. Ok.

LS: And I felt perfectly safe to do this – to go around. I never had any real fear. Nobody ever threatened me. It was an interesting time.

MM: Did any of the Japanese have cameras and want to photograph you?

LS: No. I don’t think anybody had any at that point. I talked to a Japanese some years later about the bombs. And I said, you know, for many Americans that’s a hard thing to think about. He said, many Japanese are very glad the bombs were dropped. And I couldn’t believe that. I said, why do you say
that? He said, because, if you hadn’t done something really forceful, we would have all been fighting on
the beaches with pitchforks.

MM: He really believed that.

LS: I think he was right. I think the military would not have given up if it had just been, you know --
we’re bringing shiploads of soldiers in to take over your country – they’d have been down on the
beaches with pitchforks.

MM: You think the women, too?

LS: Oh, yes. I think so. Because they were told to do this. And he said, I’m glad, I’m glad.

MM: I was interested in your reference to Dr. Tsumura. That a trained professional Japanese would be
in your office, sort of on an equal basis with American counterparts.

LS: The two of them worked together, absolutely. And I think this was true in every office. I think they
were equally well trained. There were many, many Japanese who had been in Hawaii. Some of them
had gone home because things were...

MM: Were these Japanese Americans?

LS: These were Japanese Americans living in Hawaii or in California. They took their families with them
and then they got marooned there. And then, of course, there’s always the give and take of people who
have been here going to school; they’ve gone back. Dr. Tsumura had never been in the United States,
but his English was very good. I think he might have trained in Hawaii at one point. I don’t remember. I
do know that he loved the abacus over a calculator. He would total up the figures to go up to
Headquarters about how many Tuberculosis cases we had and he would do it four times and finally he’d
say, “Oh, enough of that!” And he’d go and get his abacus and do it.

MM: Were you very much aware of the Head of Public Health and Welfare off in Tokyo, Colonel Sams?

LS: No.

MM: No. He didn’t make any trips down there or visit you?
LS: No or, if he did, I didn’t know it.

MM: He’s left a very interesting memoir.

LS: He did?

MM: Yes.

LS: I think it was one of the good things that they, that we, did.

MM: From what you’re saying, it seems to me that Public Health and Welfare had a little bit more of an equal relationship with Japanese than some of the other divisions of the Occupation.

LS: I think that’s true.

MM: Where Americans might come across as feeling superior to the Japanese.

LS: Yes. I think that’s very true. Because we were dealing with their problems. And in other cases, sometimes we were trying to introduce a whole new concept of how to do this. And Dr. Barrett was right. And I don’t know who preceded him, but he was absolutely right. And we need to deal with what they need. And what they needed was help with Tuberculosis.

MM: Were there other diseases that you can remember that were also very important that had to be tackled by... Dysentery or...

LS: I think...

MM: Cholera or... It was mainly Tuberculosis.

LS: What is it Roosevelt had?

MM: Polio.

LS: Polio. I think Polio was one of the things that they talked about. But I know that our main thrust when I was there was getting this booklet done and getting it out to all the Japanese hospitals. And, helping to get a nurses training going. Because it became obvious that if you’re going to have a hospital where people are going to stay, you need a nursing staff. And we had two very good people. And the one of them was the nurse who was married to the Japanese doctor. She was on the staff there.
MM: So, did she have a military rank or was she a civilian nurse?

LS: No, she was civilian. In fact, there was only one or two military people in Kure. We were mostly all civilians. Well, because they were drawing from the professions, the outside professions. People who needed real expertise, as doctors, as nurses, as maybe lawyers. I think there was a legal section to Civil Affairs.

MM: Do you remember, who was the overall head of the various divisions of your Civil Affairs Office?

LS: There was a Colonel down there.

MM: A Colonel was in charge?

LS: Uh huh. And I don’t remember his name.

MM: So he didn’t mingle much with the staff.

LS: Well, he probably was there. And I was there only six or seven months. So...

MM: Before you leave Japan, I’d be very interested in the circumstances of your departure from Japan and what happened afterwards. But I know that some of the photos you took were of children and of school children and if you have any memories of the classrooms, of the children, whether it was co-education, whether the boys and the girls were sort of co-equal – the Japanese boys and girls. Because one of the things the Occupation was involved in was co-education.

LS: Yes. The school in Minoshita was co-educational. I would presume that most of them were. Well, that was another division we had in Civil Affairs was Education, big one. One of the things that impressed me with the Japanese school system was the fact that the children brought flowers. In a couple of the pictures, you see flowers on their desks. You’d see people when you knew that loaf of bread was probably the last cent they had, but there was a flower there. Maybe they spent the last cent for the flower. The kids in those days wore geta, the wooden clog things. And they all got left in an entryway. And they went around in their tabi socks or their zoris, probably their zoris. They cooked the meals. They cleaned the kitchen. They cleaned the schools.
MM: And what were the teachers doing?

LS: The teachers were teaching. But they did not hire a janitorial staff. They didn’t have money to do that. Who cleans the schools? Well, the kids do it! They probably had help with cooking a meal, but they served it. They did the dishes afterward. You know, and I keep wondering if that wouldn’t be a good thing in some of our schools.

MM: Probably would. Nutritious meals. But adequate food, and I’m sure in those days they had to really scramble. Did you get down into Nagasaki, for example, or explore the island of Kyushu? Or was it primarily the Kure and Hiroshima area?

LS: I got onto Shikoku. We had a U.S. Information Office Library in Hiroshima. Did you know that?

MM: No, I didn’t.

LS: You know they established those libraries in various places all over Japan.

MM: I did know Fukuoka and other places, but I...

LS: They had one of the libraries. I’m sorry.

MM: It’s very interesting. Again, ostensibly an Australian area, but United States Information Office in Hiroshima, a library.

LS: Exactly. I think it was the only facility we had that we maintained down there was this library. And the woman who was director of it was a friend of mine and she wanted to go to Shikoku. And we went to Takamatsu and Matsuyama. But I don’t have any pictures... oh I do. Somewhere I had one. I’ve had to clear out some stuff. I have a wood carving that I bought there because there was an old man doing a little wood carving and I have a wood carving that came from Shikoku.

MM: Was there a castle in Matsuyama? So many of those castles were knocked down, but...I understand that one survived.

LS: Beautiful little castle. Beautiful little castle. And because there was a library in each of those two places, I got to go with this librarian friend and visit them, too. I don’t think we had troops in those
places. And the people who were in Shikoku thought they had the world’s best spot. Because in many cases, these were Japanese villas. You know, you never had it so good.

MM: Reading Stars and Stripes to keep aware of events in Japan and events back home, you were doing such good work down there with Public Health and Welfare, I wondered if you had any time or if any of you talked about other things that were going on in Occupied Japan. The kind of reforms that were being attempted or whether things were being forced on the Japanese or you ever heard anything about the Constitution or were you aware of attempts to negotiate peace treaties and end the Occupation.

LS: Not very much. We were pretty much removed down there. We just sort of enjoyed and did our...what we were doing.

MM: Did your job.

LS: We did know that Civil Affairs was being closed out.

MM: You did?

LS: Yes.

MM: What was the date given?

LS: I don’t know. I left in the spring -- April, May, June – somewhere in the spring and came back.

MM: Came back to the United States?

LS: Yeah, because otherwise I’d have to look for a job somewhere. And with the Civil Affairs Offices all closing, I didn’t want to go back to Tokyo, three to a room.

MM: So you went back to Colorado?

LS: No, I went to Vermont.

MM: Oh, another part of the story.

LS: Yes.
MM: I didn’t want to leave you abruptly with Civil Affairs in Kure, I just thought we could continue on a little bit of your life and your career, because I know you ended up in Germany, as well. So we might build a bridge from Japan to Vermont to Germany.

LS: Well, I married again in Japan and it didn’t last at all.

MM: An American?

LS: Yes.

MM: A civilian?

LS: Yes, came back and lived in Vermont, but I lived there for three years. And, I’d been there, done that. So I wanted to go overseas again. So I applied to go to Europe. I’d already been to Japan and so I went down and I said I want an overseas tour and I ended up in Germany. I got three jobs offered in the same week. Weisbaden, Germany, Ankara, Turkey, no. Châteauroux, France, and Spain. And I couldn’t decide and I thought, well, the simple thing is you just take the first one. And the first one was Weisbaden, which turned out to be nice because it was centrally located. From Germany, to get to Italy, to get to Spain, to get to France...

MM: By then, it was not a four-part occupation, but a two-part occupation – the Soviet Zone and the Allied Zone. Is that right? And Americans were at Wiesbaden?

LS: Yes, and I couldn’t go to the East Zone. Because I had a security clearance. I worked for the Air Force in Vermont. There was a General Electric plant up there that made parts for the American Air Force. And we had what was called a Quality Control Office. It had about four Inspectors, and a Chief, and an Administrative Assistant, which is what I was. And maybe one other typist, I don’t remember. So I was working for the Air Force. So this made it great, then when I got tired of doing this for three years, I could say, I want a transfer.

MM: So you end up in Wiesbaden and by then the Occupation of Germany was about to end? Or...
LS: It didn’t end until the Wall came down. I couldn’t go into East Germany until after the Wall came down. Which was in what, ’89?

MM: Yeah. I happen to have been in England in 1955. I remember taking the train through Germany and approaching Austria and it was the end of the Occupation of Austria. And I thought it was preceded by the end of the Occupation of West Germany.

LS: Well, I think it was, because then they called it a Status of Forces. Because you were no longer an occupying army, you were there at the pleasure of the government. But that didn’t change the Iron Curtain.

Keith Smith: Can I interject? The Occupation ended in West Germany, but Berlin was still occupied. And that’s why there was still the World War II occupation there, because of the time I spent in Berlin. So that ended later than the occupation in the zone.

MM: I remember, I could not get a visa, or my passport wouldn’t let me go to Eastern Europe. I got into the former Yugoslavia. I got into Turkey, but I couldn’t get into Hungary or Romania. And, of course, I couldn’t go to East Berlin. I wish I’d gone to West Berlin.

Keith Smith: No only couldn’t I go to East Berlin, but I couldn’t go through the zone, except in a sealed military train or air. I had a car, and I couldn’t drive it through the Soviet Zone to get to... So we hired... I think MPs charged five bucks and they’d drive the car through [...]

MM: You two met in Germany?

KS: We were married there.

LS: Our marriage license is in German. I went to West Berlin a couple of times. I went once by train and I went by air once.

MM: And you continued your photography career.

LS: Yes. I have about 100,000 color slides I don’t know what to do with.
MM: We’re going to have to get you somebody who interviews for Germany. This has been so fascinating, I wonder if there are some things that you remember that I didn’t ask you about with respect to Japan that we should make part of this interview, before we close it off. Because sometimes I am not as familiar with the life experience of everybody that I talk to, and I don’t want to leave out anything important.

LS: Well, I don’t know either. I know that I enjoyed very much being there. That I was comfortable with the Japanese people. I sponsored a young Japanese girl here in this… She came. I did not know her, but I called the University of Vermont and said, “Do you have a foreign student from Japan,” and they said, “Yes, she just came.” We became very close friends. She came and stayed with me every single time that the dorms were closed. And Eiko was like my sister. And nineteen years later, she came to see us here.

MM: Eiko?

LS: Eiko. Eiko died a year or so ago with kidney failure. But I did love being in Japan. I thought it was beautiful. I liked the people. I wouldn’t take anything for that experience. And then I loved being in Germany. And because I was there longer and it was so much easier language to learn, because you could see it. I couldn’t read Japanese. This is why I envy Ryan. He can look at these things and tell me.

MM: Did they have English signs for you down in Kure?

LS: Some.

MM: Some. Some to help you out.

LS: And we drove on the left side of the road, which was a real shock.


MM: Very easy to get hurt.
LS: Well, I think what we did in Japan was good. I wish we could do the same kind of thing other places, but it doesn’t seem to work that way. And maybe the time for that has passed, I don’t know. I know that MacArthur wasn’t always liked. He was very dictatorial, like there will be no more tuberculosis reported out here. But he also had insight into the people and the area. I think that’s something that the military works very hard on now. There’s a great deal more emphasis on languages. My husband spent a year learning Bulgarian.

KS: I never used it, except in a bar in Stuttgart when the bartender was Bulgarian, but I used my French and my German, so that was fun.

MM: Now that you’ve made these comments, I think, you said you were six or seven months, so that would be ’50, ’51. MacArthur was dismissed in early April of 1951 and replaced by General Ridgeway. I don’t know if that’s about the time of your departure. But I guess the final question would be your sense of the Korean War, being down in Kure. Were there apprehensions about the Korean War among the Japanese? Were there concerns, thinking about what had happened to them, the bombing of Kure, the atomic bombing in Hiroshima? Or was it just a war across the pond?

LS: I don’t know. And I didn’t know enough Japanese to be able to discuss it with them. I didn’t see great unrest. I know the Japanese were not very well liked because they had not been nice in Manchuria. They’d not been nice in China and there would have been great resentment. But, I don’t think they were really apprehensive about it happening. Probably because the Americans were there, for one thing. You know, that isn’t the best reason to be some place. It certainly was a deterrent at that point. And, you know, I’d like to think of us as being peacekeepers helping people. But, on the other hand, a lot of it has to be done by the people themselves. When the tsunami hit Japan, those of us who’d been there were so upset and wanted to do something. And I called Ryan’s mother. And I said, “Shawnee, what can I do? Can I get school kids to get boxes of things together to send?” She said, “No. No. It costs more to ship it than it would to buy it. You can send money, but don’t do this, it doesn’t
work. Just don’t do that.” And she said, “And you know, the Japanese are an extremely efficient people. They will take care of their islands.” They’re still struggling with it, aren’t they?

MM: They are. I think there’s some sense that the Japanese are a developed country and industrialized and they can pay for this, but they can’t. And so they’re very, very grateful for the help and I think money, she was right, giving donations. This is one last question then, talking about the tsunami two years ago and the earthquake and then the nuclear reactors, I wanted to go back to conditions when you were there again in 1950, ’51. The earlier time, ’47, there was still a big problem of food and food relief and whether or not it would be fair to compare the Yokohama area with Kure, but were you aware of any American charities or humanitarian relief efforts that were going on that were private. Or, there weren’t too many military, you said, but whether the people who were very poor were being helped out a bit with food relief?

LS: I don’t think so.

MM: Or medical relief? What you were doing was a form of medical relief. I’m doing some research now on humanitarian relief and I was just wondering about that part of Japan. Maybe the Australians were doing it.

LS: I don’t know. I think people were very poor. I saw that a lot. I saw kids, you know, you wondered if they were warm enough, all that sort of thing. The one thing I do know, of course, was the church in Hiroshima, and they were doing a lot. And the interesting thing there is the fact that I kept in touch with this young Belgian. I saw him here several times after that. I saw him in Germany once. We corresponded until he died a few years ago — all these years. But they were doing quite a bit. I think there was a little bit of fear about some of these things. People were not sure that we’d be welcomed. They were not sure that the atomic bomb wasn’t still poisoning the air. Just the people who were there said, Oh no, we need to do something.
MM: It was very interesting to hear about that church, the Catholic church. Was that the Mary Knoll Order or do you know? There were nuns there, too. It would be interesting to know what order – Jesuits or Mary Knolls, I think, had quite a presence.

LS: That may be them.

MM: I don’t know about the orders of the nuns.

LS: I know that I took these pictures, because he asked me to. And then I gave them to him and he sent them to Belgium and they got some additional help, some additional money. But I don’t know the order and I didn’t then. And I think our relationship existed so well because I’m not Catholic. And he was ordained in Montreal. I went to his ordination, when he became ordained a priest. It was a long-time friendship, because we both loved Japan.

MM: Wonderful.

LS: But I don’t think there was a lot of real help coming to the people in those days.

MM: A bit remote. Or maybe the Australian-American jurisdiction.

LS: Well, it might have gone on more some other place. I do know that one women in Yokohama was recruiting Army wives to do reading for the blind. That had been a thing she’d been doing in this country. And all of a sudden she had this wealth of people with nothing to do, because we all had household help. Every apartment and every house had one or two maids. You didn’t even know what to do to keep these kids busy. But she was recruiting us to read for the blind.

MM: Were these maids paid for by you and your husband or were they paid for by the Army?

LS: By the Army or the Japanese Government. It was probably a part of the reparations thing.

MM: I said that was the last question, but I just have one more out of curiosity. You had photography as your hobby, but do you know if any of the others, or you yourself, ever got engaged in the tea ceremony or flower arrangement or very interested in that or any of the arts of the Japanese at that time?
LS: I think people did – particularly flower arranging. They did classes at Fujiya Hotel on some of these things. Fujiya Hotel also owned a golf course and I started golf lessons there, but then it turned cold and wet and that was the end of it and then I came home. The Japanese golf instructors were very good. And I think people probably went over not realizing what the possibilities were. That this is a highly cultured people with a lot of talent. I have a feeling that a lot of the families had no idea that there was even these possibilities.

MM: Well, I hate to end this – you have such wisdom and such interesting things to say about the Occupation period. I can’t thank you enough.

LS: Well, you’re very welcome. I’ve certainly enjoyed it.

MM: I did. I’ve learned something. It’s a very different experience. I hope everything comes out ok.