

Bob & Diane Borlase

An average American couple who dedicated their lives to serving their country and their community.

Chapter 01 - 1:26

Introduction

Announcer: Bob and Diane Borlase's service to our nation and to our state came in the form of the US Navy, the US Coast Guard, and the Oklahoma County Sheriff's office.

Bob enlisted in the Navy in 1952 during the Korean War. He was chief radioman, using international Morse code as his ship patrolled the coast of Korea.

In 1953, Bob and Diane had a one-week honeymoon before he was sent to the island of Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands for a year's worth of isolated duty.

Following the navy, Bob worked while attending a technical school in downtown Detroit. One night he heard an advertisement on the radio, which said that if you were an ex-serviceman the Coast Guard could use you.

By this time, Bob and Diane were raising a family, which in 1959 had grown to three, eventually growing to five daughters. So in 1959, Bob joined the US Coast Guard with duties as a radioman on an ocean station near Honolulu.

And then during the Vietnam War, the US Coast Guard played a vital role where Bob served as chief radioman. The ship assignment limited coastal infiltration by the Viet Cong into South Vietnam.

Bob and Diane will tell you about their service in the US Coast Guard, their move to Oklahoma City, and Bob's work in the Sheriff's office. They would like to be remembered as an average American couple who served their country and their community.

So now, listen to this oral history interview with Bob and Diane Borlase on VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 10:00**Coming to America**

John Erling: My name is John Erling and today's date is November 14, 2017.

Bob, would you state your full name, please?

Bob Borlase: Robert Arthur Borlase.

JE: Your date of birth?

BB: 3/31/32. March 31, 1932.

JE: And where are we recording this interview?

BB: At my home in Bethany, Oklahoma.

JE: Joining us today is your wife, Diane, to keep us on the straight and narrow. Diane, you think you can do that?

Diane Borlase: Sure, no problem.

JE: When did you two meet?

DB: In 1949 in Detroit, Michigan, at a friend's house.

JE: Okay, we will talk about that.

Bob, your father's name?

BB: Edward Borlase. He had no middle name.

JE: Where did he grow up?

BB: In England, Cornwall, England.

JE: Cornwall, England.

DB: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: How did he come to the United States?

BB: By boat, came over in about 1920, I think.

JE: Did he come through Ellis Island?

BB: Yes he did.

JE: Where did he settle then after he came through Ellis Island?

DB: They went to New Jersey, he and his brother came over and they had an epidemic in New Jersey and his brother died. And he came to Northern Michigan, the upper peninsula, to work in the mines up there.

JE: So it was work in the mines that brought him to Michigan?

DB: In the copper mines up there. He had worked in the mines in Red Roof, Cornwall, the tin mines.

JE: So he followed his profession from England?

DB: Yeah.

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: What was his personality like?

BB: He was a very stern person, he took command. He was not a huggable type of fellow to be a father. We had five boys in the family and two girls. And I worked for my father for

a period of time, but he was always my boss. But he was there whenever you needed anything. He was the most dependable person you ever want to know.

JE: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

BB: I had four brothers and two sisters. I had an older brother and two younger brothers, and an older sister and a younger sister, then me.

JE: So you're in the middle?

BB: Yes.

JE: Your mother's name?

BB: Mary Louise and her maiden name was Loquin.

JE: What was her background? Where did she come from?

BB: She came from Bay City, Michigan.

JE: So the two met in Michigan?

DB: Yep.

BB: Yes.

JE: Obviously. And what was your mother like? Her personality?

BB: Ah, she was a huggable. My mother was a very nice person, took good care of us kids, was always there if you ever needed her.

JE: Your father had to earn quite an income because he had seven children.

BB: Yes. Father hauled ice and coal during the Second World War. I remember him, he worked for Pitman and Dean for a while, and he delivered coal right to your residence. He would deliver it by a wheelbarrow to some addresses and he also had a conveyer to put it on another one's so he could use it. And he'd bring ice right into the house and put it in the refrigerators. And he did it at our own home there for a period of time.

JE: Everybody enjoyed hearing the icemen coming in the summertime, didn't they?

BB: Yeah, right. And the end of the Second World War put him out of business because they started building refrigerators and supplying it to homes.

JE: Yeah. What did he do then?

BB: He worked for an automotive repair and gasoline station. And he went to work for a man called Art Conley. He worked for him for a long time and then bought his own gas station and ran it.

JE: Did you work for him in that gas station?

BB: I worked with my dad at the station with the Conley's. We worked together, and my older brother also worked with my dad at the gas station. And then dad bought a gas station of his own.

Then I was in the military. And when I got out of the military, I worked for him for a period of time.

JE: What about your grandparents? Do you have any memory of them?

BB: On my dad's side, no. But on my mother's side, yes. I remember my grandfather and my grandmother. The family used to go over to their house for Christmas and for stuff like that. They had a cottage at Stony Point in Michigan. In the summer, we would go there and sometimes the whole family would stay there by ourselves. We would have a reunion or a get-together every year with the whole family at this cottage.

JE: So it's obvious then, you only knew your maternal grandmother because she grew up in the United States.

BB: That's true.

JE: And she probably grew up in Michigan.

BB: No, I don't believe so.

DB: They grew up in Canada, they were French Canadian.

BB: French Canadian.

JE: Okay, did they speak English? Only speak French or...?

BB: It was kind a little bit of both.

JE: You remember hearing both?

BB: Oh, yes, but I wasn't around them very often. We'd see them a little bit in the summer and we always saw them around Christmastime. My grandmother was a very huggable person. She would grasp you and give you a big hug.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: But there was a lot of grandchildren and the family was large, her family itself.

JE: So do you have pleasant memories then of Christmas and large gatherings at Christmas and Thanksgiving?

BB: Yeah, I did. It was one of those times when there was a lot of people around and I'm not much on being around a lot of people. I've been there all my life doing that but I'm not always comfortable in that.

JE: You were even that way when you were a young person.

BB: That's correct.

JE: Would you describe yourself as a shy youth?

BB: I would, yes, I would very much, yes.

JE: Was that a handicap for you, being shy?

BB: I felt at times it was. I'm not too open right today. I don't feel comfortable talking to strangers. Frankly, I'm not comfortable right now.

JE: [all three laughing] Well, we admire your honesty.

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Did you have any health issues as a child?

BB: I was always a small person and lightweight. I'm not always but at that time I was. Later on in life I put some weight on. I'm trimmed down some now.

JE: What was the first school that you attended?

BB: I think it was Hosmer, I went to the first school—

JE: And where was it?

BB: That was in Detroit. But we moved from there. I went to another school, I went to Keating School for a while. And when they put me in the Keating School I was very lightweight and malnourished, I believe, and they put me in an open-air class. They actually had a room that was set up for people that were light of weight or had health problems, maybe. It was set up with these deck chairs that folded back. The desktops would fold over the front of your lap so you could do your work. But you took a nap in the morning and you took a nap in the afternoon. And the fed you milk and graham crackers, stuff like that. And I stayed in that until my folks moved from that house over to a new neighborhood and I had to go to a different school.

JE: Was that in a school that you—

BB: Yes. It was a school.

JE: Why were you malnourished?

BB: I just was a small person.

JE: Okay.

BB: And I—

JE: But you were fed?

BB: Yes, I was a very small person, very thin, and from my size, light of weight. They just put me in that school, I don't know what the deal was, I really don't.

JE: But you were healthy because you ate at home, you had food at home?

BB: Oh, yes, it wasn't that, I mean, you know, that wasn't the problem. I just—

JE: They just felt you were weak.

BB: Well, weak and small and like I said, if I'm in this and they call it an open-air school.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

BB: It was just a section of the regular school. When I left there, my folks moved over a few blocks and put us in a different school district. I had to go to a different school. And I was so far behind because I wasn't being educated all this time, but they kept promoting me in grade. I just had a heck of a time catching up with anybody.

JE: What year are we talking about, approximately here?

BB: About 1940 to '44, somewhere in there. In 1945, I think, we moved to a different address. I'd had difficulty catching up with the other students because of this lack of training or education to start out with. I didn't get along well in school for a long time and—

JE: Okay, let's talk about elementary, fourth, fifth, and sixth, were you lagging behind then as a—

BB: Oh, up to about the seventh grade. I was lagging all through my education at that point. I just never did catch up with the rest of the people.

We had one class, what was it, Mrs. Grace?

DB: High school.

BB: High school, Miss Grace and Miss McFarland, I'll never forget. My older brother went to the same school that I did. I was sitting there in one class and they were calling roll by the seat. The teacher called out my name, it was the first day of school and she called, "Robert Borlase, do you have a brother named Edward?"

And I says, "Yes ma'am."

"Uh-huh (affirmative), if you're like Edward, I'm going to fail you."

JE: Oh.

BB: And that was the first day of school.

JE: [laughing]

BB: Then I went down to another class and I had a similar problem. So a couple of days later, maybe, I went to school and I'd forgot a pencil or forgot something, and she says, "I see you're just like your brother, I'm going to fail you."

JE: What was your brother like, Ed?

BB: To me, he was my idol, I mean, this guy was—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: ...the one that drove me into the navy, he joined the navy in the Second World War, he went in the navy and all that. And he was always somebody I really looked up to. So I quit school.

JE: In what year, what grade?

BB: That was, that was the eleventh grade.

When I could I joined the navy.

JE: So you never went back to school?

BB: Yes I did, I did go back. I took my GED in the military and I got my high school diploma in the military. But when I got out I wanted to go further on with school. When I got out of the navy I went back to Wright High School and took classes in math and in English and literature and stuff like that so I could go to college.

Chapter 03 - 8:45

December 7, 1941

John Erling: In 1941, December 7th—

Bob Borlase: Yes.

JE: ...you were nine years old.

BB: Nine years old.

JE: Do you remember that day?

BB: Yes I do. I can remember hearing President Roosevelt give “This day will live in infamy...” or some speech. We had a big old radio and we lived over there on Lennox and I can remember hearing that. It was scary to me, I was scared. I do remember it.

JE: Anybody in your family affected by it?

BB: My older brother, as soon as he could, he joined the navy.

JE: As a result of—

BB: Yes, as a result of that.

JE: Right.

Diane, your background a little bit, where you grew up?

Diane Borlase: I grew up in Detroit, Michigan. I was born in Capac, Michigan, which is a very small town up in the thumb area. My folks have surely lived in Detroit. My mother went up there because her sister was up there.

I went to school in Canada for a couple of years at St. Mary’s in private school, because my mother and father both worked and I was an only child. So I went there for a couple of years. Then came back to Detroit and went to public school most of the time in Detroit.

JE: Bob, when you dropped out of high school in the junior year, eleventh grade—

BB: Yeah, yeah?

JE: ...you would have been sixteen?

BB: Seventeen.

JE: Then you went to work?

BB: I found a job on the way home from school. When I quit school I stopped at a gas station that was up on the corner of the block and I got a job pumping gas and greasing cars and stuff.

JE: Because you had experience from your father’s service station.

BB: Well, well, no. I’d pumped gas for a long time, I learned how to do some of that there. I worked in a gas station before my dad did, really. I just worked there at Colts Standard Service, was the name of it. Colts, C-o-l-t-s.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). You remember what your parents said when you said you had quit school?

BB: Ah, they weren’t very happy about it but Dad accepted it. He hadn’t had much of an education either.

JE: And your mother had high school?

BB: I believe so, I think she did, yes. My older sister did, and, of course, my little brother, I don’t think he did. He may have finished, I don’t know, later on, but he had his troubles.

JE: You worked at that gas station then for a long period of time?

BB: I don’t think it was, maybe a couple of years. Probably until I went into the service.

JE: When did you go into the navy?

BB: I went in 1951.

JE: How old were you then?

BB: Nineteen.

JE: Why did you go into the navy?

BB: My brother was a radioman in the navy during the Second World War. And I went in the navy because I was going to be drafted into the army and I wanted to follow my brother. And I said, "I'll join the navy rather than go in the army."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: So I joined the navy in 1951. I believe it was in December. At that time, you were obligated for eight years. I did four years active and the other four years were inactive reserve, is what they called it—you were subject to call. And before that expired I joined the coast guard.

JE: When you were young, what did you think life would be like when you got older? Did you have any hopes, dreams then?

BB: No, I can't think of, I don't know, it was just day to day when I was growing up.

JE: What did you enjoy doing, playing, and fun?

BB: I played baseball, I like baseball. I bowled a lot of bowling, I had a pretty good bowling average, and that's something I did with my father. It was one of the few things, other than work, with my father, one of the few things I did with him, I bowled on a bowling team with him. Growing up, I worked in a bowling alley, I set pins. That's back before they had the automatic racks.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: You'd sit back in there in a pit and the ball would knock the pins out and you'd jump up and you'd send the ball back and put the pins into a rack. And then the second ball, you sent the ball back and you lowered the rack and it would set the pins. I got so I could do two alleys, back and forth, and you got paid like ten cents a line. The manager would keep track of how many lines that people bowled on those alleys that you were setting. And you'd get paid according to that.

JE: If you were managing two alleys that was—

BB: You, you would make twice as much money, you know.

JE: Yeah. Was that when you were sixteen, seventeen, in there?

BB: Somewhere in there probably, maybe even have started a little younger than that.

JE: Yeah. Was it Korea that drove you into the military?

BB: Yes it was. I joined the navy just to follow my brother's path when he was in the navy in the Second World War rather than to be drafted into the army.

JE: How old are you then when you joined?

BB: I believe I was nineteen.

JE: You hadn't met Diane yet?

BB: Yes I did.

DB: We met in 1949.

BB: Nine, yes.

DB: We lived in the same neighborhood. I met him at a friend's, somebody that both of us knew. I went over there and Bob was there and that's when I met him.

BB: Yeah.

JE: At somebody's house?

DB: At somebody's house, uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: What's the age difference here?

DB: Two and a half years, he's two and a half years older than me. I was fourteen.

BB: And I—

JE: And you were?

BB: Seventeen.

DB: Seventeen.

JE: So you've known each other since you were fourteen years old?

BB: Oh, yeah.

DB: Yes sir.

JE: It's interesting at that age. Did you date, did you go out?

DB: Oh [laughs].

BB: No, we couldn't afford to go out. I used to go over to their neighborhood and we'd meet over in front of a drugstore, usually, and go walking.

DB: He'd have a cup of coffee, which a dime at that time.

BB: Yeah, or something.

DB: And I didn't drink coffee so I'd have a glass of water because I didn't drink soft drinks either.

JE: And this again about the year?

DB: Nineteen forty-nine.

JE: And this was in Detroit?

DB: Uh-huh (affirmative).

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Were you close to downtown Detroit?

BB: No.

DB: No.

JE: Did you ever go downtown Detroit?

DB: Oh, yeah, you'd take the streetcar down.

JE: Were there stores, big department stores?

DB: Oh, big department stores.

JE: Like what?

DB: J. L. Hudson Company.

BB: Yes.

DB: Which was a big department store.

BB: Crawley's.

DB: Especially at Christmas, they had these windows where they would put animated people or things in the window so they were known at that time all over. When the movie theaters were downtown though we didn't go to the movie there. And the ballpark was down there, when you could get in for what? A dollar and a half or two dollars, Bob?

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And you're talking about the Detroit Tigers?

DB: Uh-huh (affirmative).

BB: Yes.

JE: Did you go to those games when you could?

DB: We did.

BB: Yeah.

DB: But when we were dating before he went in the service, we didn't have money one.

BB: No, no, no.

JE: Were you anti-Yankees then? The New York Yankees? They were big—

DB: I don't think so.

BB: [laugh] I don't think I was anti anything really, you know.

DB: You know, there was no television. The games were on radio, if you happened to listen to them. We got to go to the games so seldom—it just wasn't the same as what it is now.

JE: No. Do you remember the name of the play by play announcer on the radio?

DB: My mother worked for a man by the name of Dan Patrick, who did that—

BB: Oh, yes.

DB: ...for Detroit. And he did it for the Lions as well. My mother worked for the radio station there that he worked for, for the newspaper.

JE: He was a famous name for a long time, wasn't he?

DB: Uh-huh (affirmative).

BB: And the Lions was a football team for Detroit.

JE: Yes.

BB: Yeah.

JE: And the newspaper was the *Detroit Free Press*.

DB: News.

BB: News was—

DB: News was the big one and then the *Free Press*.

BB: *Free Press*.

DB: And the *Times* at one time but—

BB: *Times*.

DB: ...it didn't last too long.

BB: I delivered the *Detroit News* for a while.

JE: Oh, you did?

BB: Yeah, I had a route.

JE: You were a worker, weren't you? I mean, you felt you needed to be working?

BB: Yeah.

JE: And you had many jobs.

BB: It didn't seem to me like it was a lot but—

JE: It was just the thing to do?

BB: Yeah.

JE: Do you remember movie stars that you saw in the theaters?

DB: Oh, yeah!

BB: Alan Ladd.

DB: Yeah, but we could not go see *Gone With the Wind*.

BB: Yes.

JE: Why is that?

DB: Because at the end they said, "Damn." You could go sit—

BB: What—

JE: Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

DB: Yeah, yeah.

BB: Don't give a damn, yeah, we couldn't go.

DB: You couldn't go until you were eighteen.

BB: Yep, at that time.

JE: Oh, so this wasn't a parental thing?

DB: No.

BB: No.

JE: It was the movie's?

DB: Yep, yep.

JE: It was rated adult.

DB: Ratings, yeah.

BB: Yeah, they meant something.

DB: But you know, Clark Gable and Cary Grant and all of them were movie stars and Barbara Stanwyck. Lot of musicals at that time. Lot of horror movies too, not like what they are now, but *Frankenstein and the Wolfman* and things like that. You could go on a Sunday afternoon for fifty cents and see three movies.

JE: Was that part of your dating?

DB: Yeah, well, we went at night every once—there was that one down by us, Bob, what was the name of that one theater where you could get in for something like a quarter?

BB: Lakewood?

DB: Lakewood, yeah.

JE: Right.

DB: You'd get in for a quarter. You could go any time. Now you have to go when the movie starts but there you could go any time. And if you came in the middle you just stayed until the point where you came in.

BB: And Cinderella was the—

DB: A little bit—

BB: ...main movie theater around there.

DB: A little bit more expensive.

BB: It was more expensive so we didn't go there very often. Some supers—

DB: And the Times, wasn't there a Times Theater?

BB: Yes, Times Theater.

Chapter 04 - 8:35

The Navy

John Erling: Racial issues, blacks and whites back then, were you around blacks?

Bob Borlase: Oh, Detroit had some riots during a period of time.

Diane Borlase: Yeah.

BB: But I worked in a black neighborhood for a long time. Where I delivered papers was partially a black neighborhood. Later on before I went back into the military, I worked at my dad's gas station, which was a black neighborhood, and we had no problems. In fact, cold days, the lady across the street from the gas station would come in and stand in by our heater waiting for the bus. The bus stop was right out front of the gas station.

DB: Our high school was half white, half black.

BB: Yeah, sure. And I think that prepared me a lot for military life.

JE: And for life as a whole.

BB: Yes. And I worked here at the Sheriff's office the same way.

JE: When you enlisted in the navy, what was your first port of call? Where did you go?

BB: I went to Great Lakes.

DB: Illinois.

- BB:** It's in Illinois, it's near Chicago, in between Chicago and Milwaukee, in there, the dairy in there. I went to boot camp there.
- JE:** And the Korean War is on right now?
- BB:** Yes it was on.
- JE:** Is that where you were destined to go?
- BB:** Yes.
- JE:** How did you go? Were on board ship and stayed there?
- BB:** Yes. What I did is I went down to what you call recruit training. And I went through recruit training. And after I left recruit training, my brother was a radioman in the Second World War so I joined the navy and I had to be a radioman. I was sent to radio school where I learned international Morse code and all the procedures, transmitting messages and receiving messages. Then I was sent to the USS Walton, it was a destroyer escort, that's the ship I served on and went to Korea.
- JE:** All right, how close to Korea were you?
- BB:** We went to Korea, we were there, went by, we patrolled up and down Korea and did whatever they wanted us to do over in Korea. When I got off the ship and flew home, that was 1953, and that's the year we got married.
- JE:** You had communication—
- BB:** I was a radio operator.
- JE:** Yes.
- BB:** Our messages were sent broadcast but it was in international Morse code, we didn't use voice. The only people using voice were the people up on the bridge. They have the HF frequencies or something like that. But the radiomen sitting in the radio room—
- JE:** Was there sensitive information that you were handling?
- BB:** Yes and it was reporting or they were getting information on what to do.
- JE:** Do you remember any of it at all?
- BB:** No, because we copied the message on, it was given to an officer to break the message, to take it and decrypt it.
- JE:** Okay, so you didn't know what it was saying?
- BB:** No, not at that time.
- JE:** You were taking it down and handing it over.
- BB:** Taking it down, that's right. That's all we did. It was broadcast. Everything going to ships in a certain area. There could be fifty ships out there and it was all broadcast. You just copied and you picked the ones out that were yours and you gave them to the communications officer.
- JE:** Meanwhile, this war is going on on land.
- BB:** Yeah, and you're off the coast.

JE: Could you see any?

BB: Well, the problem we had during that time, there was only five radiomen on the ship because the Second World War, when it had ended, all the people went out of the service. When the Korean War started they really didn't have enough people to do things. So we stood watches for four hours on and four hours off, just continuously. You never got enough sleep, you never got enough anything.

JE: So when you were four hours on...?

BB: You were copying code.

JE: Okay.

BB: And what you did was you copied the headings, who the message was going to, in your log. And if you weren't one of them, you didn't copy the text, you just let it go. You'd take a little break. And if it was to you, you copied the whole message and you logged every message that came over.

JE: I guess you guys were terribly curious as to what this message was and who it was from—

BB: Yeah.

JE: ...and who it was going to.

BB: We knew who it was from, it could be from anybody but we would know that.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). Did you ever intercept the enemy's communication at all?

BB: No, no, I don't believe we did.

JE: Right.

BB: Now later on, when I was in the coast guard, we copied all sorts of messages.

JE: How long then was your ship there in Korea?

BB: About six months, I imagine, I don't know. I went over in 1952 and came back in '53.

JE: So you were there in Korea '52 to '53?

BB: Yeah. At the end of that time, I got transferred off the ship in 1953. That's when I came home and Diane got married.

JE: Did you get married too?

DB: [laughing]

BB: Yeah, we were married, the two of us together, simultaneously [laughing] together. We went on a honeymoon to Washington, DC. We came back and after leave I got sent away to the island of Kwajalein, in the Marshall Islands. And it was isolated duty where I could not bring my wife.

We got married, went on a honeymoon, and I left for a year.

JE: Probably a week there?

BB: Seriously.

JE: After your wedding?

BB: Yeah.

JE: And then you were gone to the Marshall Islands?

BB: Mar—for a year.

JE: For a year?

BB: Yes. When I left there, I got sent to Honolulu at Pearl Harbor. I was sent to Pearl Harbor. Diane came over to Pearl Harbor and that's where Kim was born.

JE: What did you do there in the Marshall Islands?

BB: Radio, communications, the island itself had a runway on it. It was in the Marshall Islands and it was the island of Kwajalein. And it was an airstrip. Our radio station was alongside of the airstrip. Some ships came in to give us supplies or pick things up. And when they're doing some of the atomic bomb testing—

DB: Bikini—

BB: ...some planes would fly out of there and to come in. I can remember them hosing the planes down with water on the runway.

JE: The Marshall Islands were heavily involved in World War II, of course, and—

BB: Yes. I did a year of that, then got transferred to Honolulu, Pearl Harbor. Diane was able to come over, and that's where Kim was born.

JE: Your first daughter, Kim?

DB: Kim Diane.

BB: Kim Diane.

JE: She's known today as Kim?

BB: Diane East. Our oldest daughter.

JE: She served in our state.

BB: She was insurance commissioner.

JE: Right.

BB: We lived in navy housing.

JE: That was pretty good living there then?

BB: I thought it was.

DB: Yeah.

BB: What we'd been through up to that point, it was wonderful having a family. In fact, Diane's mother came over there to live a while.

DB: Yeah, that was nice because we had an old car, [laugh] because we couldn't afford anything more. My mother came over and she, at that time, worked for the president of Studebaker Packard Corporation. So we had a new Packard to drive the whole time she was there.

BB: [laughing] Yeah.

JE: Oh.

BB: I had a 1940 Plymouth, I think.

JE: How did she get that car over there?

DB: They had a—

BB: Dealer.

DB: ...dealership there.

BB: She got it from the dealer.

DB: And they arranged it.

JE: Oh.

BB: Yeah, they all arranged and a pick up and she had—

DB: She was, like I said, worked for the president, she was his private secretary.

JE: Well, that was a pretty big job, wasn't it?

DB: Yes, it was.

JE: A very big job.

DB: Yep.

JE: You were there for a year.

DB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: Yeah, then I got discharged.

JE: And you what, you leave? Is that when you're discharged from the navy?

BB: Yes.

JE: Your last year with the navy was in Hawaii?

BB: Yes.

DB: Yes.

JE: And then discharged?

BB: Well, I got sent back to San Francisco through the processing center and I—

JE: Right.

BB: That's where I got my discharge.

JE: Right.

BB: There's really, I didn't get a discharge, I got released inactive duty. In other words, you were obligated four eight years. I did four years active and I was still obligated to the navy for four years. They could call me at any time back, but they did not.

JE: Do you remember in the '50s, the fear of communism and the talk about that?

BB: Oh, yeah. I had no fear of it myself but there was a lot of talk about communism.

JE: Do you remember hearing presidents on the radio like FDR and Truman and Eisenhower?

BB: Sure.

DB: You know, television was coming out then too.

BB: Yeah.

DB: You know, they would have some of it on television.

JE: Did you have TV when you were in Hawaii?

DB: Yes, we did, my mother sent one over to us, do you remember that, Bob?

BB: Yeah, a TV, yeah.

DB: As a Christmas present my mother sent us a television.

BB: Yeah, that was the first one, yeah.

DB: It was a small—

JE: How excited you must have been.

DB: We were, yeah.

BB: Yeah.

JE: Was it black and white?

DB: Oh, yes, black and white, uh-huh (affirmative).

BB: Oh, yeah, black and white.

JE: This would have been in the early '50s.

DB: Yeah, it'd be '54.

JE: That's probably to this day one of your best Christmas presents.

DB: [laughing] Yeah.

BB: Yeah, she treated us very well.

JE: Was she of some wealth, some money?

BB: No, no.

DB: No, it's just, like I said, she worked for the president of Studebaker Packard. So she made good—

JE: So she must have earned a nice income?

DB: Yeah, and a good income.

BB: Yeah.

Chapter 05 - 12:15

U.S. Coast Guard

John Erling: So you're out of the navy, then where do you go to live?

Bob Borlase: We went back to Detroit. We lived with your mother for a while.

Diane Borlase: My mother, on the east side, then we bought a house in Mount Clemens.

BB: Bought a house out in Mount Clemens, Michigan. It's Clinton Township, wasn't it?

JE: Is that close to Detroit?

BB: It's a suburb.

DB: It's a suburb, like from Oklahoma City maybe to El Reno downtown.

JE: So you lived there? What did you do for income?

BB: I went to work with my dad at the gas station.

DB: And I worked at Curtis Wright.

BB: And she worked at Curtis Wright.

JE: What was that?

DB: They made engines, big, large, huge engines.

JE: For cars?

DB: No.

JE: Industrial?

DB: Uh, industrial, yeah. They worked for Daimler Benz.

JE: You had one child that you brought from Hawaii with you.

DB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: So Kim was with you.

DB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: Yeah.

JE: Was another to be born shortly?

BB: Yeah.

DB: Out there, uh-huh (affirmative), Leslie.

BB: Leslie.

JE: Leslie was born there?

DB: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: And then?

BB: Tracy was born there.

JE: Then Tracy.

BB: Debbie was not.

DB: No, Debbie was born out in California.

BB: California.

DB: Right after we had Tracy is when he went back in the coast guard.

BB: I went back in the coast guard.

JE: All right, you were living as a civilian and working in the gas station and what brought you to the coast guard?

BB: Just the routine of every day driving so far to work and working at the gas station and trying to get a college education at night. I was just about work out, I was just tired.

I went to Detroit Institute of Technology for about two years. I was working six days a week, ten hours a day. I was going to school in downtown Detroit almost and we were living out in Mount Clemens at the time, so I was getting up about four thirty or five o'clock in the morning. And I would drive to work. I'd work all day, then I couldn't go home for supper. I had to go to my mother's house. I went over there and ate and I'd clean up

because I was working in a gas station, I was greasy, dirty. Then I would drive downtown, further away from home, to go to school.

I did this for a year and a half. One day I was just driving home and I was tired and wore out and they had an ad come on the radio that said something like, "Ex-servicemen, the coast guard could use you."

I heard that a couple of nights. You know, we had three kids then. Tracy was just a baby. I would get up at five o'clock in the morning and I'd change her diaper and give her a bottle and put her back to bed. And then I'd go to work.

And then Diane was working at the time. And, uh, it was just hectic, so we both finally decided it was time maybe to do something.

So I went to the coast guard recruiter and I asked him would they take me?

He said, "Sure, we'll take you."

I had my previous rating and all that. That was 1959.

JE: So you were okay with that then, Diane?

DB: Yes.

JE: What was the coast guard going to do for you?

BB: It was going to give me a job, I was going to be a radioman, what I was trained to do in the navy. And the coast guard did a lot of search and rescue work. And we also manned things. I don't know if you've ever heard of one, it was called an ocean station. It's a place out in the middle, halfway between Honolulu and the coast. The ship sat on this grid, keying a beacon.

Airplanes flying over would key on our beacon and they had these stations all along the Atlantic and also in the Pacific, run by the coast guard. The ship would go out there and spend twenty-one days on station.

JE: How many men would be on that ship?

BB: Oh, less than a hundred.

JE: Consider it a small ship then?

BB: Well, 255-foot was the ship I was on. But they also had a 327-footer.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: What they'd do is they'd talk to, uh, the stewardesses sometimes would even wake us up, you know, call reveille. You know, they'd talk to us.

JE: Oh, the stewardesses?

BB: Now they'd come on and go over the PA system for us.

JE: They could speak to your ship?

BB: Oh, yeah, up in the CIC they'd actually be talking to them, yeah.

JE: So the stewardess would tell you it's time to get up.

BB: Yeah, they'd record something up there and they'd play it for the rest of the crew.

JE: Oh, yeah.

BB: But not very often, it's just something that could happen.

JE: Your job as a radioman then was to?

BB: We kept the shore communications going, all the administrative communications back to the States. Or it could be to Washington or anybody and we did it by continuous wave CW for a period of time. And then they got the radio teletype going and we used that.

JE: At this point in '59, is that when it is you're talking about?

BB: 'Fifty-nine, '60, '61.

JE: Yeah, there's no war going on at this point.

BB: No, but it was manned all the time by the coast guard. They had one between Honolulu and the mainland and they had one over...that was Ocean Station November, they called it. And then Ocean Station Victor was in between Honolulu and Japan.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: And these were manned by coast guard ships. And on the East Coast we had three or four different sites. They kept that beacon going and talking to the planes going over and giving them the radar fixes.

On the coast guard cutter that I was on, I think it was the Wachusett or one of them, I wasn't on it when it happened but they had one of those commercial planes ditch right next to it and they took the people off it and everybody was taken off it.

JE: And saved and on the ship.

In the meantime, Bob is gone, Diane, for a long period of time.

DB: He would only be gone for a month at a time, I'd guess.

JE: Ok, well, I'm considering that a long period of time. And you're home raising babies?

DB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: So you had three children to take care of while—

DB: Um-hmm (affirmative), yes, I think so.

JE: ...he was gone for a month.

DB: Yes.

JE: But then you'd come home, would you stay home for a while?

BB: Usually two or three months. It depended on the rotation. Several different cutters would pull the same duty.

JE: So was that an easy life, Diane?

DB: I didn't mind it, I didn't.

JE: The children were a year or two between each other.

DB: Yeah, yeah. A year and a half, about.

JE: They would have been what ages about that time? Kim would have been the oldest?

DB: Yeah, about four or five.

JE: Then the next one was?

DB: Leslie, she was probably about three and a half.

JE: And then you had Tracy?

DB: Tracy was almost a year.

JE: Wow, that's a handful.

DB: [laughs] It was.

BB: Yeah, yep.

JE: Did you have any help?

DB: Me! I was my help, and Bob when he was home.

JE: So the pay was pretty good in the coast guard?

BB: It's not something to get rich on but it was dependable.

DB: You got your housing and all your medical and you could shop at the commissary. So, you know.

BB: Oh, yeah, yeah. It had its benefits but you'd never get rich on it.

JE: No. How long were you in the coast guard?

BB: Twenty years, I believe.

JE: Twenty years?

BB: Yeah.

JE: Did you travel a lot?

BB: Oh, yeah, yeah. We were transferred here, that's how we got here.

DB: We went from California to Newfoundland, Canada. From Newfoundland we came back to Seattle.

BB: Seattle.

DB: And from Seattle back to California, then California to Boston, and Boston to here.

JE: Wow.

BB: Yeah.

JE: Then you had a fourth child?

DB: Debbie, she was born out in California.

JE: So you had children from age—

DB: They'd be like two, four, six, and eight, the four of them. I mean, odd years they were even ages and even years they were odd ages.

JE: Right.

DB: And then twelve years later, we had Andrea. She was born in Boston.

BB: She—

JE: Well, everybody took to that kind of living and moving and you didn't think anything of it, did you?

BB: Oh.

DB: No—

BB: I'm the reason why we stayed here. I'll have to confess.

JE: And why is that?

BB: I wanted one of my daughters to start and finish school in the same district.

JE: And that had never happened?

BB: That was Andrea and that had never happened.

JE: So your daughters were always the new kid in school?

BB: Yeah.

JE: What kind of effect did it have on the girls, that they were always moving, always new?

BB: They adjusted well, I thought.

DB: Yeah. Quite often when we lived in certain places it was military housing. So even though they may have been new to the school, there were a lot of kids with them that were always new to the school.

BB: Yeah, they have the similar environment.

DB: It wasn't like we moved to where they would have been the only ones.

BB: Yeah.

DB: So that—

JE: Was part of the culture then, wasn't it, of that?

DB: Yeah, defin—yeah.

BB: Yeah.

JE: Sometimes when you traveled, didn't you travel by car? You didn't like to fly, did you?

BB: Well, we traveled by car mainly because we had a car.

JE: Okay.

BB: All our belongings would be picked up at the house and they'd take it and we'd drive off.

JE: How did you get these four girls in the backseat of your car?

BB: A VW bus was the last vehicle we had.

DB: Ye—yeah, from Newfoundland. We put the VW bus on a ship that took us to Nova Scotia, and then we drove. And Bob reminded of this, we stopped one place in Montreal for lunch and when we walked into this restaurant, everybody stopped talking. I mean, just went dead. And I thought, *What have we done wrong?*

And a man got up, went out and looked at our car, and he said, "It's okay, they're from Newfoundland."

BB: [laughing]

DB: And everybody started talking again.

BB: Yeah.

DB: Well, that was when that part of the Canada wanted to secede from Canada and go with France. Huh, apparently as long as we weren't from Ontario or someplace, by God, it was all right.

JE: Wow.

DB: But it was a strange feeling.

JE: Yeah, it was, and I wonder what they would have done if you'd—

BB: Yeah.

DB: I don't know, we probably wouldn't have gotten served.

BB: When we were leaving Canada from Newfoundland, we were authorized to bring some liquor back with us from the base. So we had like four or five bottles of unopened whiskey, and when we got to the Customs, the Canadians said, "You're fine."

We told them we had it and they said, "No problem." But he says, "Watch out for the other side."

So we got on the American side and the guy says, "Well, you can't take that here."

DB: It was sealed and everything. We even had Immigration put the seals on it.

BB: Yeah.

DB: He told Bob to bring the bottles in there, and Bob said, "I'll break every one of them."

"Well, then take your darn bottles and get out of here!" [all laughing]

BB: We had a big fuss-up.

DB: As we were driving from there, this man honked at Bob and honked at Bob, and—

BB: "Are you lost?"

DB: ...Bob opened the window, and he says, "Do you know what country you're in?"

BB: [laughing] We had that.

DB: So we had a lot of fun with them, the travel.

BB: Yeah, VW, yeah, VW bus with Newfoundland tags on it.

JE: Did you ever stop by the side of the road to have your lunch?

BB: Oh, we done a lot of that.

JE: Did you make breakfast along the side of the road?

DB: We had that little—

JE: Coleman heater?

DB: Coleman stove, uh-huh (affirmative).

BB: Yeah.

JE: And you'd just stop at the side of the road and?

DB: Yeah, the kids didn't mind, they thought it was great. It was an adventure. Because whenever we moved, we just said, "Okay, pack up, we're moving now." We didn't make a big thing out of it and they just got so used to it that they did real well.

JE: Well, both of you then were doing real well too because that was the lifestyle if you're in the coast guard; that's the way it had to be.

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Move on.

BB: You had to keep moving. Yeah, most of your tours of duty were only like three years or maximum four.

JE: And then you'd move?

BB: You can plan on it.

JE: You were stationary for two or three years, at least.

DB: Yeah, yeah.

BB: Oh, yeah.

JE: Just until everybody got real settled—

DB: [both laughing]

JE: ...and then Bob would come home and say, "Well, we're leaving now."

BB: [both still laughing] Yeah, yeah.

DB: We didn't mind. The only thing is I told Bob, "On Veteran's Day, homage to the veterans is fine, but also to families of career military."

JE: Absolutely.

BB: Right.

DB: It's a lot different career than it is just when they go for three or four years. It's a different life.

JE: Right.

DB: That's—the hardest part, I think, was going someplace and not having somebody there if your children got sick or you got sick that you could call on. You know, you didn't have a parent or a brother or a sister or a close friend—

BB: Yeah.

DB: ...to cry with or moan with or whatever, you know.

JE: And probably by the time you had a close friend, it was time to move again.

BB: Yeah, that's right.

DB: That's right, exactly. When I send Christmas cards, they go all over.

JE: Yeah. Did you, Diane, get tired of this type of living?

DB: Not really, no, I didn't mind. I like traveling, which we've done a lot of since he's gotten out of the—

BB: Since we've been here, yeah.

DB: Yeah.

BB: We've been to Alaska three times and Europe twice.

JE: So that spirit of adventure you both have, and you passed it on, I think, to Kim, your daughter, for sure.

DB: Right. The other ones not so much. Our daughter out in California is and Tracy, but the two younger ones, no.

BB: No.

Chapter 06 - 4:40**Vietnam**

John Erling: In your tour of duty, Vietnam was part of it.

Bob Borlase: Yes, I went to Vietnam.

JE: Tell us about that experience, Vietnam.

BB: Well, we went up and down the coast. We were assigned certain areas in Vietnam, and we worked mainly with the army. We were close into shore. They would call upon us every once in a while. We were to keep any Viet Cong from going around, out from sea, and going behind the troops. Because they could go around and get behind them. They would call upon us to fire a few rounds at certain targets.

We were close to shore and we would fire whatever they wanted. That was about every—we'd be out there for about three weeks or so and then we'd go over to Japan or someplace and then we'd go back over there. And we rotated around, we'd get a different assignment. But it was different.

JE: You must have enjoyed, you had to enjoy living on a ship.

BB: I was a chief so we had different quarters.

JE: Chief, what does that mean, chief?

BB: Wh—well, I was a radioman chief. I was in charge of the radio.

JE: Okay.

BB: And communications. Now I had a communications officer that was over me.

JE: But you had special quarters then—

BB: For chiefs, yeah. Yeah, it wasn't elaborate but we ate separately and we had a regular, like, kitchen table. It was like fourteen chiefs.

JE: This is in the '60s then that you're there.

BB: Yeah.

JE: Diane, where are you living then?

Diane Borlase: Seattle, well, Redman, Washington.

BB: Yeah.

JE: Were you then caught up in the conversation about Vietnam and whether the United States should have been there or not? Was that an issue with your people?

BB: No.

JE: Not at all?

BB: No. I just went where I was told to go and did what I was told to do.

JE: So the discussion was never on the ship whether we should be here or not? But the United States conversation drove Lyndon Johnson out of office. So you were—

BB: Well, I ran into some things that made me quite upset with the population of this country, yes.

JE: Like what?

BB: Well, I had a VW bus and I was going out in California and those folks out there used that thing like a chalkboard and they'd write obscenities and things on it because I had a military sticker on my car. And I had to have a sticker to get on the base. They'd write on the side of my VW bus.

A lot of places they didn't want you to wear your uniform, because that would attract attention.

JE: So the very fact that you had a military sticker on your VW bus, they in essence, attacked the bus by graffiti and writing on it?

BB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, they used it like a chalkboard. You got a nice big, long side. They weren't too kind words either, you know, a lot of times.

JE: Did you even fear for yourself?

BB: I did not but I could see why people would.

JE: Yeah. We've heard stories about soldiers coming home from Vietnam. They'd come to the airport and they'd change into their civilian clothes.

BB: Sure.

JE: So the populace—

BB: Yeah.

JE: ...wouldn't identify them.

BB: Yeah, I think there was a time I had a worse experience.

DB: Well, when you came home from Vietnam. He flew home early.

BB: Yeah.

JE: Early.

DB: He left the ship and flew home.

BB: Oh, that's right, I flew into San Francisco.

DB: And they didn't have uniforms on.

BB: Yeah, I flew into San Francisco and was at Treasure Island. We put civilian clothes on then.

JE: So everybody was told to do that?

BB: Yeah.

JE: Yeah.

DB: If I remember right too, Bob, they used to when the ships would come in from the war—

BB: Yeah.

DB: ...they would have big bands and all. And they didn't, they kept it very quiet.

BB: They stopped doing that, yeah.

DB: Right after he got home from Vietnam. We left right after that Seattle and were stationed down San Diego way.

BB: Well, yeah, we, we—

DB: But we lived in Cardiff.

BB: In Cardiff, we lived in Cardiff—

DB: Which is a—

BB: ...and I drove into San Diego every day.

JE: Okay. So you hadn't left the coast guard yet. Your next thing was to go to San Diego?

DB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: For schooling.

JE: What was that schooling about?

BB: I went to advance radio school, just advance training.

JE: Are we coming up then to the end of the war?

BB: No, I believe it was still going on.

DB: It was still going.

JE: So you couldn't wear your military uniform?

DB: Didn't wear it.

BB: They didn't recommend it, but we still had stickers on our car to get on the base.

JE: How did this make you feel then? Here you were a serviceman?

BB: Not very, not very well.

JE: Right.

BB: I know I harbored bad thoughts.

JE: Because?

BB: Well, you know, I think I'm serving my country and then my country is treating me like mud, you know?

JE: Right.

BB: It's just it wasn't very pleasant, that's all.

JE: Right.

BB: And from there I went to advanced training there. And then we got sent to Boston.

DB: No.

BB: No?

DB: We went back up to Calif—up in Los Angeles.

BB: Well, we went to Los Angeles for a while.

DB: Long Beach, because you worked at—

BB: Long Beach.

DB: ...the district office.

BB: District office for a while. From there we got sent to Boston.

DB: Yeah.

Chapter 07 - 8:15**Boston - Forced Busing**

John Erling: What did you do in Boston?

Bob Borlase: I ran the communications center there at the district office.

JE: We're getting in the '70s now.

BB: Yes.

JE: So you leave Boston, and then your orders are to come to Oklahoma City?

BB: That's correct.

JE: And then you work where?

BB: I worked at the Coast Guard Training Center in Oklahoma City. It's located at the FAA Center. The coast guard, at that point, writes promotional exams and training manuals for coast guard personnel. I was assigned to write exams and keep the manuals up to date for the radiomen of the coast guard.

JE: Okay. You talked about college. Did you finish college work?

BB: No, I didn't.

JE: All right. But you did some?

BB: I did some.

JE: All right.

BB: Two years.

JE: I bring that up because you're writing exams and you're doing all sorts of things here. So your training paid off for you and gave you higher pay and a higher position.

BB: No. No matter where I was, the pay would be the same. It was paid by your grade.

JE: Okay.

BB: So if you were a sergeant and doing something, you got paid a certain amount. And if you went someplace else to do it, you still got paid the same amount.

JE: So what was your grade then, when you were—

BB: I was an E-9, that was the maximum I could make.

JE: Well, that's pretty high paying rank then, for the military.

BB: Yes, I was what they call master chief. That's as high as I could go as an enlisted man.

JE: That's higher pay.

BB: Yes, it was.

JE: Were you ever offered officer training school?

BB: I was and I didn't want to go. And [laughing] when we were stationed in Long Beach, I took an exam for a warrant officer and when it came in, I turned it down.

JE: Why?

BB: I don't know, I just thought they were going to send me to New York at the time. And I didn't want my kids to go there. Because of the schooling, so I turned it down.

Right after I turned it down I got sent to Boston.

JE: Same difference, right?

Diane Borlase: No.

BB: No.

DB: New York, it was different, they were stationed on the island and the kids would have had to take a boat into school and that, and it just—

BB: Yeah, yeah.

JE: Oh?

BB: Oh, yeah, it was—

DB: It was right in the city there at the—

JE: So the conditions were better in Boston?

DB: Yeah.

BB: Yes, yes. And that's the only reason, otherwise if it'd have been just Diane and I—

JE: You'd have gone?

BB: Oh, I'd have taken warrant and...

JE: You would have become a warrant officer.

BB: A warrant officer is a commissioned officer.

JE: Yes.

All right, kids listening to this, this is what your father did. He turned down—

BB: Ah, no.

JE: ...a nice promotion because—

BB: It was worth it, girls. [he and wife laughing]

JE: By the way, did you watch the Ken Burns series on PBS about Vietnam?

DB: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: You did? What did you think about it?

DB: Some things I thought were excellent, other things I thought was a bit biased.

JE: Against?

DB: Against the United States.

BB: Yeah.

JE: Did you enjoy watching that, reliving all that?

BB: No. I didn't.

JE: Even though you weren't in battle you still were close to it.

BB: We did some shooting and stuff but we weren't shot of, that I know of.

JE: Right.

BB: And I was kept in an air-conditioned room in my radio room just about all the time we were there.

JE: Just—

BB: When they did the firing, you all had stations where you went and that's where you were to be. My station was in the radio room. So whenever they out shooting or doing something like that, I was locked behind a door in the radio room.

JE: Isn't that something? As close as you were to the cruelty of what went on in Vietnam, you were that close to it.

BB: Yeah.

JE: But still not in it.

BB: I didn't see it. We did a lot of shooting up and down the coast.

JE: Right.

BB: I went ashore at several places when we first got over there because every new area we went into, the captain took me, as the communications person, over with him to check on communications. We set something up on the shore people. So after maybe three or four times of doing that then he realized that I really didn't need to go and I didn't go any longer.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: But I did go ashore quite a bit.

JE: So now we've got you back here to Oklahoma City and how long do stay in the coast guards?

BB: Four years.

DB: Four years.

BB: What year did we get here?

DB: We came here in '75, honey.

BB: Yeah, okay. And I returned in '79.

JE: Of all the places you guys have lived, what would be your preferred?

DB: I loved it up in Boston.

JE: Bob?

BB: Yeah, I didn't like driving in Boston but Boston was a nice—

JE: And what was so pleasant about that?

DB: Well, like I said, I like history. There was so much there to see and do. And I like the Four Seasons, and you know, I really enjoyed it up there. We would go up to Maine and New Hampshire and all through that area and I—

BB: Yeah.

DB: ...liked New England, but we had to leave because of the school problem. They decided to segregate the schools. Where our children went to school it was a mixture of black and white, but they brought in more blacks, that did not want to leave their neighborhood, into that school. The school they went to was old. They locked down the classes. If they had ever had a fire, we'd have lost all our children.

Our youngest daughter, Debbie, had to ride a bus, sitting on the floor, going to an all-black school. Where the Kennedys lived, they did not do that, but where we lived, and the Jewish people lived, is where they made them mix.

JE: So this was forced busing?

DB: It definitely was.

JE: Forced integration.

DB: Yep, yep.

JE: Is what you're talking about. That became a problem for your own children.

DB: Children, yes, it definitely did. I could not go any place because I couldn't be away from the phone in case they called that I had to come pick them up because of riots or something going on in the schools.

JE: Oh, so there were fights going on in the school?

DB: Oh, yeah, right.

JE: Even to maybe shut the school down for a time.

DB: Uh-huh (affirmative), yes. And they closed off all the Catholic schools. You could not put your kid into a parochial school at all.

JE: Because?

DB: Because they wanted you to stay in those certain districts where they had integrated.

JE: So Catholic schools didn't have any students?

DB: But the ones that were there could stay.

JE: Okay.

DB: But no new students.

JE: You couldn't transfer out?

DB: No.

JE: Your children would then be about what grades?

DB: They were in high school at that time, two of them were.

JE: So that would have been Kim and Leslie?

DB: Yeah, no, Kim wasn't with us then. Leslie and Tracy.

JE: And Tracy.

DB: Uh-huh (affirmative).

BB: Yeah.

DB: Kim stayed out in California.

BB: In California.

DB: With my mother.

BB: With her mother, right, yeah.

JE: Okay. Well, that was a real unsettling time then, wasn't it?

DB: Yes it was. And it was very political. Very political. In the fact that, like I said, where the Kennedys lived, they didn't integrate at all. And certain areas of Boston, they did not integrate. They took South Boston, which was Irish, where we were and integrated. But they didn't do the whole city. It was very political, wasn't it, Bob?

BB: Yep, it definitely was.

JE: Huh. And even though the Kennedys, were they going to public school or were they probably in Catholic school?

DB: Catholic school.

JE: But even so, that district—

DB: That area, uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: ...where we lived—

DB: Yeah.

JE: ...even those who went to public school were not integrated.

DB: Yep.

JE: How long did you live there like that?

DB: Three years, we lived in Boston three years.

JE: And would have had to be a trying a time, those three years of being in school.

DB: Um-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Well, the first year or so it was fine and then that's when they decided they had to integrate.

BB: Oh, yeah.

DB: What made it so bad, we had met up with quite a few black families, and they had their own schools, which they were very proud of, and were not happy at all about having to move their children either! So it wasn't black against white or white against black, it was just against the whole mess that they had there.

JE: Well, here in Oklahoma, we had forced busing as well.

DB: Uh-huh, uh-huh (affirmatives).

JE: It didn't go well either. But it doesn't sound like we had riots or big fights, but you did there?

DB: They did, yeah.

JE: In the Boston area.

DB: I went to a meeting when they first decided. I thought, you know, *What's going to happen?* And people stood up and said, "If nothing else, we'll shoot them, we'll get rid of them."

And I walked out. I thought, *No, this is not what I want either*, you know, so.

JE: Shooting blacks, you mean?

DB: Shooting, yeah. Blacks or politicians or anybody else. They did not want to integrate at all.

JE: Yeah.

DB: You know? They didn't want to leave their schools?

JE: Did we have federal troops come out? We didn't, did we there in Boston?

BB: Um-um (negative).

DB: Um-um (negative), no.

JE: But it took care of itself, I guess, eventually.

DB: Yeah.

JE: Obviously.

DB: The police, not federal troops.

JE: The police, right.

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: That's Boston.

Chapter 08 - 4:05

Sheriff's Office

John Erling: So I'm back here in Oklahoma and you leave the coast guard, retire in 1979.

Bob Borlase: Yeah, yes.

Diane Borlase: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: That's over twenty years.

BB: Yes, I—

JE: Did you have, how many?

BB: From 1951 to 1979.

JE: That's twenty-eight years.

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: So after twenty-eight years in the coast guard, you retire?

BB: Yes.

JE: So then what are you going to do?

BB: I went to work at the Sheriff's office.

JE: Why the Sheriff's office?

BB: Well, the next door neighbor here, Larry Watson, he worked at the Sheriff's office. I did nothing for about a year, I was just kicking cans, and I didn't know I was going crazy. He said, "Well, why don't you come on down to the Sheriff's office and talk to him?"

So I went down there, and, of course, I'd been in communications so they put me in dispatch. They hired me on the spot. I worked there for quite a while. And then they said, "Why don't you come on over here to the Records Bureau and you can be a supervisor of communications.

In Records, I would go up and fingerprint and photograph people being booked into the jail. And take down personal records of them.

Then after a while, they sent me to a crime scene investigation school. Then I went out on crime scenes and still worked in the Records Bureau, because it was run out of there. I would develop the film and do the prints.

Then they said, "Well, why don't we send you over to the academy?"

So I went to the Police Academy, and I graduated from that. And they put me out on the street in civil division. Because I was serving process and kicking people out of houses and taking their cars and children.

JE: You met up with some characters, didn't you?

BB: Yeah, yeah, yes, I did that and I retired from there. On my sixty-fifth birthday I retired. I said, "That's enough."

JE: How many years were you with the Sheriff's?

BB: Well, 1980 to 1997—

DB: Yeah.

BB: It was seventeen or eighteen years.

DB: Seventeen or eighteen years.

JE: Wow. You had given us this picture of this very thin boy

BB: Yeah.

JE: And very shy boy.

BB: Yeah.

JE: Who would ever think that he was going to be the guy who works for the Sheriff's Department, knocks on a door, and gives them, what? Subpoenas and all that kind of stuff?

BB: Well, I served civil orders from the court to show up for court.

JE: Right.

BB: I picked up their cars if I had an order to pick up. I picked up their children if I had an order to pick them up.

JE: And met with not very pleasant people.

BB: That's right.

JE: Did you carry a weapon?

BB: Of course, I still have a permit to carry. I haven't.

JE: Yeah.

BB: I just—

JE: It seems so unlikely for you to be in that kind of position.

DB: He did well because he treats everybody with respect.

JE: Well, you're not a threatening personality.

BB: And I even worked with the SWAT team.

JE: You worked in the SWAT team?

BB: I worked with them, yes.

JE: [laughing] I thought SWAT team guys were six-ten.

BB: No.

JE: And they had muscles out to here.

BB: No, well, it started out, I got into shooting a lot and I got into reloading. I'm a member of the Oklahoma City Gun Club. There for a period of time I'd take the snipers over and we'd shoot out at the range every once in a while. But I just got in with the group. I reloaded for them and stuff like that when they shoot, you know.

JE: [laughing] You sure can't look at somebody and figure out, "I know what you do." I suppose you have a big gun collection today.

BB: Yes I do.

JE: You've been collecting for twenty years.

BB: Oh, she wants me, [laughing] she wants, I got to get rid of them.

JE: She wants you to get rid of them?

BB: Yeah, you're absolutely right.

JE: And probably some of them are quite old so they're worth something?

BB: Well, I have a six-gun I bought in the '50s somewhere. My brother and I started shooting back when I got out of the navy. Was that '55 I got out of the navy? But we each put five dollars down on a Colt single-action army pistol. That's how much money I had to spare. We paid it off and then got the gun and we used to shoot. I still have that pistol.

JE: Oh, my, that's an heirloom now.

BB: Yeah.

JE: Well, you sure went to high rankings wherever you were serving.

Chapter 09 - 4:42

Oklahoma City Bombing

John Erling: The Oklahoma City Bombing April 19, 1995, where were you?

Bob Borlase: I was downtown at the office when that went off.

JE: At the Sheriff's office?

BB: At the Sheriff's office. It was just up the street from us at that time.

JE: In the Murrah Building.

BB: Yeah. When it went off, I was at my desk, and the whole place went boom, boom. We got up and could see the smoke and stuff. Then we walked up there, my partner and I. We got there, just a real crumbled mess.

JE: So you felt the explosion?

BB: Oh, yeah, yeah.

JE: Your first thoughts were you didn't know?

BB: Oh, I didn't know what it could be.

JE: If you were just a block away—

BB: Well, it was a few blocks.

JE: Okay.

BB: It was up the street. I walked up to it, I didn't need to drive.

JE: So what are your thoughts then when you walk up to it?

BB: Well, I didn't know what could have caused that. It was all rumble, you couldn't go into it, you know, just a big mass of stone and rock.

JE: Was the Sheriff's office then called into duty? Were you called into duty?

BB: I was already on duty at the time.

JE: Okay, what did you do as being on duty?

BB: Well, there wasn't anything I could do as far as that was. They shooed everybody off because it was a dangerous situation.

JE: So who took over? The Police Department?

BB: Yes they did. And—

JE: They were in charge?

BB: Well, at that point.

JE: At that point, I see.

BB: I'm sure the AFT came in and everybody else in the state and the Feds and everybody probably came in.

JE: But the Sheriff's Department in the ensuing days had to have some role to play, didn't you?

BB: Well, we were looking for the people who did it.

JE: Yes.

BB: But that's all that I know of.

JE: Other than that the Sheriff's role wasn't big then?

BB: I'm not too sure what the Sheriff's, you know, there's different departments in the Sheriff's. I was in the civil division. They have a criminal division, an investigative division.

JE: Yeah. You were one of the first on the scene. They hadn't cordoned it off yet.

BB: No, well, they were doing it while we were there.

JE: Yeah.

BB: And they didn't want anybody close to it.

JE: Did you see anything?

BB: No.

JE: A hundred and sixty-eight people were dead in that.

BB: No, I didn't see any.

JE: You didn't see any of that?

BB: No. They gave a description of the car that drove off. In the course of our work, we were looking for something like that.

JE: For Timothy McVeigh's car?

BB: Yeah.

JE: And then Timothy McVeigh's car was stopped by a highway patrolman and we know the rest of the story from there on.

BB: Yeah.

Diane Borlase: When that exploded, we could feel it, hear it at this house.

JE: Here in Bethany?

DB: Uh-huh (affirmative).

BB: Oh, that was quite a—

JE: And you remember at the same time—

BB: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: At 9:02?

DB: Yeah, because I tried to call him. Because I knew it was downtown, you know? And I couldn't get through to him at all. But then he called me to tell me that they were okay.

BB: Retired from there. And I haven't done any since.

JE: Haven't done anything since?

DB: Traveled.

BB: Oh, travel.

DB: We've done a lot of traveling.

JE: You've done a lot of traveling?

DB: We've driven to Alaska three times.

BB: Still want to go back. [laughing]

JE: Don't you have motorcycles?

BB: I have a Honda 750, it's a 4-cylinder.

JE: You notice how his face brightens up when he says that?

BB: Well, it does because I saved the money to buy that. When I got enough money saved out of my allowance to buy it, I bought it.

JE: Yeah.

BB: Since I bought that in 2003, I've been saving for a Harley.

JE: Oh! [laughing]

BB: Okay? And I finally got enough money to buy a Harley but I've run out of years, not money.

JE: Oh. [all laughing] And maybe Diane too, saying—

DB: I've never said a word.

BB: No, she never said a thing.

DB: He's a grown man.

JE: How did the military life affect your personal life? Did military rules apply to your family? Did you call reveille in the morning? Did they have to make their bed a certain way? Did they have a gig line? Tell us about that, huh?

Diane's looking at you kind of, yeah, what are you going to say to that?

BB: Oh, I would say I probably did.

JE: You ran your house like military?

DB: Not so much the house but we would go to the store and they'd walk, him, and then girls right behind him.

JE: Like, like you were walking in file? Did you tell them, "Walk behind me as you're marching in?"

DB: He just, "You will behave, you will." He was—

BB: No, I just made sure they straightened out, they behaved.

DB: He wasn't mean or anything like that.

JE: No?

DB: But he was strict with them.

BB: Yeah, I didn't let them give her any guff either.

JE: Right. Did they have to make their beds in military style?

DB: No.

BB: No, no, none of that.

DB: It wasn't that bad.

BB: None of that stuff.

DB: It's just we eat at certain times.

BB: Yeah.

DB: You know? And when dinner came, everybody had to be at the table at specific times and things like that.

BB: Yeah.

DB: He was strict with them in certain ways that they had to be polite to people, not rude. And, you know, things like that. Not mean at all.

Chapter 10 - 7:54

Proud to Serve

John Erling: Since you're a gunman, you're a strong supporter of the Second Amendment, no doubt?

Bob Borlase: Yes I am.

JE: A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state. The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

BB: Infringed, yeah.

JE: The Second Amendment. And the discussion of that today, weapons out there, the AR-15s, where do you come into the discussion about all that?

BB: I don't believe they should have a fully automatic weapon, period. There's no need for it. I have an AR-15.

JE: Why?

BB: Well, I have a heavy barrel one. My goal in shooting some of these guns was to try to get all the bullets into one hole at a hundred yards. I never got there but that was my strive.

When I was going to the range to shoot, I always try to sight my rifles in so I can hit the bull's eye.

JE: Yeah.

BB: So a heavy-barreled gun, the barrel is a little bit more stable than on the regular one.

JE: Okay.

BB: That's about all, I just like to shoot, and I like to load. I reload. I don't use factory ammunition. I buy bullets and I buy the powder and I've got a bench and I can reload and I do it.

JE: All right.

BB: And I've just always tried to try different powders or try different weights of bullets to see if they're any more accurate.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

BB: And when I worked at the Sheriff's office, I loaded guns for the SWAT teams so they could go out and shoot and practice. But they always use the factory bullets in their work.

JE: Didn't have to use Bob's powder, did they?

BB: [laughing] No. No, well, I wouldn't want to be accused to loading something that didn't go off.

JE: That's true. So as you look in your life, what would be the happiest times, you think, of your lives?

BB: I think when I'm with that young lady over there.

JE: Yes, a happy time?

BB: That's my happy time.

Diane Borlase: It's been a good sixty-four years.

JE: Sixty-four years you've been—

DB: A wonderful sixty-four years.

JE: Isn't that great?

BB: Yeah, and all the time I was gone, they was always on my mind.

JE: So—

BB: And we spent a lot of time apart. We don't now.

JE: But the fact that you knew she was taking care of the family and house?

BB: Yeah.

DB: Yeah. And I never worried about him, I just knew he'd be all right.

JE: So that—

DB: Maybe that's where my religion comes in, you know?

JE: And what is your religion?

DB: I'm Catholic.

JE: How did your religion come in through this?

DB: I meant like when he went to Vietnam, I didn't worry about him. I thought the good Lord would take good care of him, and he did.

JE: Right.

BB: Yeah.

DB: And no matter where he went. That's like when you asked me about his motorcycle, the only thing I said was, "Wear a helmet. Be sure you wear a helmet."

JE: Yes, right.

DB: Because I knew that he'd be taken care of.

JE: Right. Did you send letters home?

BB: Oh, yes. I'm also a ham radio operator. So when we're out on the station, I called home.

JE: Okay.

DB: We also sent tapes.

JE: So you could do other than writing?

BB: Yeah.

JE: Do you still have the letters?

BB: No, they—

DB: You know when you move so much, things go.

JE: Right.

BB: Still have my ham radio.

JE: You know, a lot of people may not realize this how ham radios today are used in time of crisis.

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And natural disasters. Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico—

BB: Yeah.

JE: ...the ham operators were called in when all communication was down in Puerto Rico.

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative). Right now I'm only check in on Sunday mornings to a group that's called A Quarter Century of Wireless Association, and I just check in there. I'm not very active.

JE: But isn't it nice for you to know that a ham radio—

BB: Yeah.

JE: ...to this day, communication in Puerto Rico is still working.

BB: Yeah. I talked in the middle of the Pacific to her.

JE: What was your handle? What is it today?

BB: My call sign is WA6LZN.

JE: Okay.

BB: That's California call, that's where I got it.

JE: All right. Did you put that on a license plate, I suppose?

BB: I have one in there but it's not on the car.

JE: Do you think your life has been different from what you might have imagined?

BB: Oh, of course.

DB: No, I never thought we'd leave Michigan, you know? When we were growing up and that, you know?

BB: Yeah.

DB: At that time, people did not travel—

JE: Yeah.

DB: ...like what they do now.

JE: Right.

DB: Later on they did, but if they traveled they would have cabins or something on the lakes. When you see wooden cabins or log cabins, that's what everybody in Michigan has along the lakes there.

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

DB: When we were young, you would go up north on a lake, one of the big Great Lakes, that was where you went. Maybe you'd go as far as Ohio one time—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

DB: ...for something, but there wasn't the travel then. So this was a different life than what—

JE: So it did turn out much different for both of you.

BB: Yeah.

JE: It sure did. Anything that you could say you're most proud of?

DB: That we're still together and with all of the bad after sixty-four years, yeah.

JE: You're still together.

BB: Yes.

JE: You certainly value that, don't you?

BB: Yes.

DB: Yes.

BB: She's my buddy.

DB: We're very good friends.

JE: Isn't that great?

BB: Yeah.

JE: Not everybody can say that or have it as many years as you have it.

DB: Especially with some of the different things, you know.

JE: Right.

BB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And today you're eighty-five and—

DB: Eighty-three.

JE: And eighty-three. So we can expect another twenty years.

BB: Yeah.

DB: [laughing]

BB: You can expect what you want. [laughing] But you—

JE: Right, right. How about the young generations that listen to our conversation? Any advice to younger generations that may be listening to this?

DB: Oh, I think sometimes they expect too much out of life. You know, I hear people say, "Oh, we made a commitment." One of my pet peeves is this word "commitment." And they think it all has to be love and have everything. And to me, that's so wrong. That's why you hear of so many people splitting up and divorcing—they don't want to take the bad with the good. They want everything to be good. And I would advise them to slow down.

JE: Bob?

BB: Enjoy life while you have it. Find a good friend and keep them.

JE: Find a good friend and marry them, right?

BB: Yeah, that's good too. Marry them also. She's my best friend.

JE: Right. Do you think the generation after World War II really was the greatest generation?

DB: Well, I don't know after World War II or after the Great Depression. You know, like Bob's family, most of them were born right after the Depression. And some even in. And they managed to sustain and get ahead. I admire them.

And then through the war, where families, we were split up for a year, but some of them, four and five years and what they went to and came back to.

BB: Yeah, yeah.

DB: And did things on their own. They didn't have to have people feeling sorry for them all the time.

Where now, you know, I do, I think that was the greater gen—of course, I can't say anything previous to that because I wasn't around.

JE: Right, but you do think it was? Yeah.

DB: Oh, yeah, I do.

BB: Yeah.

JE: Yeah. Any regrets?

DB: Yeah, we didn't move from Oklahoma. [all laughing]

JE: Oh, Diane, here you're an Oklahoman. And life has been good for you, hasn't it?

DB: Yeah. I won't say anything more. I just don't care for the climate.

JE: Right. How would you like to be remembered, Bob?

BB: Just for what I am, just an average American man who served his country and his community and happy to be here.

DB: And a good father and husband.

JE: How would you like to be remembered, Diane?

DB: The same way, just, you know, that I served my country by being married to him for all those times.

JE: You sure did.

DB: And we raised five beautiful, wonderful children.

JE: Yeah.

DB: And pay our taxes and obey the law, and just as Bob says, average Americans, you know?

Chapter 11 - :33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience.

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