

Northwest Arkansas Oral History Project  
 Gwendolen A. Rakes Interview Abstract  
 October 17, 2019

Interviewee	Gwendolen A. Rakes
Year of birth	1938
Place of birth	Frimley, Surrey, England
Interviewer	Susan Porter
Interview date	2019-10-17
Interview location	Rogers Historical Museum; Rogers, Benton County, Arkansas
Keywords	<p>Rakes, Gwendolen A.          Rakes, Doyle          Porter, Susan          Cave Springs, Benton County, Arkansas          Rogers, Benton County, Arkansas          Hawley, Hampshire County, England          St. Andrew's Episcopal Church; Rogers, Benton County, Arkansas          St. Theodore's Episcopal Church; Bella Vista, Benton County Arkansas          Castles          Churches          Conservation          Jayceettes (Organization)          Homes and homebuilding          Motorcycles          Recreation          Small town life          World War II</p>
Description	<p>Gwen Rakes is called 'the English Lady' for good reason. In this interview she tells of a grandmother who lived in an English castle, life in a bomb shelter during World War II, relocating to the United States with a husband and baby, building her present home on the family farm, and racing motorcycles competitively until she was in her 70s.</p> <p>Rakes's story of her grandparents sounds like a fairy tale. But it is true. Grandmother worked as housekeeper for one earl in a castle outside London. Grandfather was the gardener and driver for another earl. Because grandmother's employer disapproved of grandfather, the pair could not marry until the earl died. But marry they did. They raised their children, Rakes and her brother, during World War II years. The family relied on trading father's garden vegetables for friends' chickens. Rakes remembers her father wrapping her in a comforter as he took her to the bomb shelter. She could hear the bombs, but it was a place of safety. Today's tornado sirens bring those memories back.</p> <p>Life in England meant trips to London and Wimbledon. She</p>

	<p>attended a convent school where favorite classes were art and English. Always loving sports, she played lacrosse and swam. Rakes remembers the castle where her grandmother worked as being cold with lots of blankets on the walls. Yes, it had a dungeon.</p> <p>Rakes met her husband Doyle, an Arkansas native, while he was stationed in England. Married in an English village church in 1958, they moved to Rogers after a short time in Corpus Christi, Texas. Times were lean at first. Doyle advanced into management at Harris Bakery. Rakes stayed at home with their two sons and a daughter. For a while, the family had no washer or dryer. Today Rakes continues to prefer hanging the wash outside.</p> <p>Moving to the United States, Rakes was not sure what to expect. She remembers Rogers as small and rural, giving her the opportunity for gardening, hiking, tennis, painting, and knitting. Always committed to conservation, Rakes rode her bicycle around the community instead of driving.</p> <p>Rakes believes the Rogers community was safer then than today; everyone knew everyone. Rakes did not worry when her three children walked to school or stayed late for one of their sporting activities. Her time was spent as an active 'class mom', member of Jayceettes, Girl Scout leader, tennis player, and member of a community recreational committee. The children spent time playing with the cattle and picking beans at her husband's family farm in Cave Springs. The family was active at St. Andrews Episcopal Church in Rogers. Rakes was a part of the altar guild, choir, senior warden and women's groups.</p> <p>After the children were grown, Rakes and her husband decided to build their own home on the family farm. For a year they drove around looking at homes deciding what they wanted. Rakes designed the home; she and her husband built it without a contractor. The result is a cozy, efficient tongue and groove home filled with baskets, ceramics, and paintings created by Rakes...Doyle called it 'country clutter'. Of course, there are flower and vegetable gardens. Doyle passed away a few years ago. Rakes continues to reside in the home. For over twenty years, practically from its beginning, she's been a member of Bella Vista's St. Theodore's Episcopal Church.</p> <p>When Rakes decided riding on the back of Doyle's motorcycle was not as fun as driving her own, she bought herself a Honda. She went on to have several BMWs. Rakes and the family enjoyed riding and racing (motocross, circle, flat track, drag). Rakes was often a trophy winner, competing competitively until in her 70s. She and her Ducati were well known at the tracks in Monett Missouri and out by the Rogers airport. Rakes often joined a group of women motorcyclists for a ride.</p> <p>Like her grandparents, Rakes' life may sound like a fairy tale: best of all, like theirs, hers is also true.</p>
Duration	35 minutes

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Interview sidebar	Rakes rode and raced motorcycles: "I used to go up to Monett, Missouri and drag my Ducati...I'd ride it up there, change the ...carburetor, race it, change it back, and ride home...I didn't win money; I won trophies." [00:32:16]