

MARGARET ANN FUNSTON

This is a portion of the Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri in the 1940s program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Counsel and with support from the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today is May 27, 2009, and this interview is being conducted at the Nodaway County Historical Society Museum, Maryville, Missouri, in Nodaway County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. We are here to interview **Margaret Ann Funston**. She was born on September 28, 1926, and she's going to tell us about what life was like in the 1940s and I believe she worked in a factory (air base) and she's going to tell us a little bit about that.

Amthor: Okay. First, let's talk a little bit about your background, where and when you were born, and tell us about your parents' occupations.

Funston: I was born in Hawarden, Iowa, and my father passed way when I was 3 months old and so my mother and my brother, we moved to a place in Kansas called Downs, Kansas, and spent some of my childhood there and then we moved to close to Abilene, Kansas. And that's where I went to high school and grade school.

Amthor: Okay. You mentioned a brother. Is that the only sibling you had?

Funston: No, I have two other sisters. They're quite a bit older than my brother and I. My brother is 3 years older than I.

Amthor: Could you tell us what life was like in leading up to the 1940s before the war started?

Funston: Well, there was gas rationing and there was tire rationing. You had to get some kind of a permit to buy a tire if you wanted to. We lived in the country, so my brother drove a Model A and one of our friends had a Model A with a rumble seat and that was quite fun in those days.

Amthor: Where – do you know where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Funston: Uh, I must have been in high school, probably. But I don't remember. I knew something bad had happened, but I was not serious about it.

Amthor: Did you have a radio or did you listen to the radio about the war at that time?

Funston: Yes, we had a radio. It was a battery radio 'cause the place I lived we didn't have electricity yet.

Amthor: So, when the war started, where were you and what were you doing in '41? Were you still in high school or had you graduated?

Funston: No, I was still in high school. I graduated in '44. So, I worked between the year 43 and '44.

Amthor: Okay. Can you tell us what it was like when the war broke out and up to your period when you were working in the factory?

Funston: Well, I don't know exactly how to answer that. They, you know, come out – they were wanting people to work and so this was during summer vacation, so two other friends and I decided we'd try to get a job down at Herington – at the Herington Air Base. So, we applied and we were accepted, so we went to work down there.

Amthor: Tell us what it was like to work in that factory.

Funston: It was a big airport and big hangars where they run those big planes – they were B29s mostly- and this airport gave the last 48-hour inspection on the B29s and it was called the Staging Base because they did the last modifications on the planes there. So the – a bunch of us girls – we were practically what you called “Rosie the Riveters” ‘cause we took the cowlings off of these big planes and they were sheets of metal about like that that was on the outside and it had the rivets on the edge, so we had to take the cowlings pieces off and the experts would check the engines then and then we'd put them on. So that's mostly what we did.

Amthor: And how long did you do that?

Funston: It was three months.

Amthor: How many planes do you think you went through?

Funston: Oh, my, I have no idea. I mean – I know one of the plane's names was Dauntless Dottie. That always stuck in my mind. But we also did a few B24s, but it was mostly B29s. They were huge.

Amthor: Now the 29s, are they the ones that were in the Pacific?

Funston: Yes. Yes, they were a huge plane and they said that they were hard to shoot down because they were so large.

Amthor: Were they used in Europe – the smaller ones?

Funston: Yes, well, yes, they were used in the war.

Amthor: So what was it like during the time when there was a lot of rationing going on? Did you have to worry about that during the war?

Funston: My mother did ‘because sugar was rationed and if the women wanted to do any canning, they had to kind of trade around so they could get enough sugar to do their

canning and stuff. And then the Model A we were driving, we always, I can remember, all the country kids would get together and one person would drive the car and pick up three or four country kids and take us in to school. And so, the gas rationing was pretty critical then.

Amthor: What did you do for entertainment during that period?

Funston: Well, when we were - when I was in Herington they had quite a few entertainment parties, you know, out at the base, and I have to mention this. The thing that sticks in my mind was they had Glen Gray and the Cassaloma? Orchestra play at one of the dances they had out there and the song was "Blue Moon". And every time I hear that it reminds me of that time.

Amthor: Do you remember what type of dances were popular?

Funston: Oh, some of them did jitterbug. I was never like that. I could just do the regular dance, but there were a lot of people that really knew how to do jitterbug and the full skirts and the full skirts with the dog embroidered on them. Poodle skirts – yes. And the shoes, the popular shoes then were what they called saddle oxfords. And so everybody always wanted to buy saddle oxfords – and the clothing – of course, we wore jeans or overalls to work out there because we were around so many, well, men, and mechanics and things.

Amthor: Was it disappointing when your job ended and you had to do something else?

Funston: Well, I had to go back to school. I had to go back. I was a senior and I had to go back to school then, so...

Amthor: So, it was basically a summer job?

Funston: Yes, it was just a summer job.

Amthor: Did you go to very many movie theaters or...?

Funston: Yes, we went to quite a few, but generally when we got home at night we were pretty tired, you know. I know three of us rented this apartment made out of cinder blocks, very small. And we had quite a time 'because we were all young and I know the one girl – this hasn't anything to do with the job, but the one girl decided she needed a puppy. So she got the puppy and the puppy had fleas, and the fleas got in the couch. So we had quite a time with that.

Amthor: So, what other type of experiences did you have working at the plant or at the Air Force Base?

Funston: Well, it just went pretty smoothly, you know. We had our crew chief that we kind of got together with in the mornings when we'd get there and he'd assign us different planes to work on and jobs to do.

Amthor: So, did they have a radio there that you could listen to, to know what was going on about the war?

Funston: No, if they did, we didn't pay any attention to it.

Amthor: Did you have one at home where you could listen to radio programs or anything?

Funston: No.

Amthor: On the last, I mean when the war was ending, do you remember when the atomic bomb was dropped and how the people were feeling about that?

Funston: Uh, yes, and it was unbelievable, you know, and you just couldn't believe that many people were killed, you know, during that time. But everybody was happy because the war was over after that. The Japanese had surrendered.

Amthor: Now, were any of your family members involved in the war?

Funston: My brother was in the Air Force.

Amthor: Could you tell us about his service?

Funston: Well, he was in, I think, three years. And he flew a plane. He flew a C47 and I know he was stationed over in New Guinea for a long time and he was on, I think, the second plane that landed in Japan after the peace treaty was signed and he said how they were all quite apprehensive because they didn't know exactly how the Japanese would accept them, but everything went okay.

Amthor: Now, did you meet your husband after the war?

Funston: No, we went to school together.

Amthor: And you said he was in the Navy?

Funston: Yes.

Amthor: Could you tell us about his service?

Funston: He joined as soon as he graduated in 1944 and he went to Camp Bradford, I think that was in Norfolk, Virginia, and took his training down there and he was what they called a storekeeper - is that what they called them, where he was on the - made the

payroll – helped make the payroll – and so that’s what he did. And they were going to be shipped out somewhere. I know they got their orders and were on the ship, but I don’t know what happened, which I was happy for. He never did go out very far.

Amthor: So, did he – he pretty well stayed in the United States? He didn’t really go across seas or anything?

Funston: No. No.

Amthor: When did you both get married?

Funston: Well, we got married in ’45, March of ’45.

Amthor: Did he participate in the GI Bill? Did he get any other training after the war was over?

Funston: Yes, when he came home, he took a – what kind of a – correspondence course, because at that time we had a son and soon another son and, so, he had to work and so he took a correspondence course in the engineering – electrical engineering and then he got a job with the REA, Rural Electric Administration, and went on from that. In a couple of years he developed a manager position at Clay Center, Kansas, and then, when he was 28, he was hired up here at Nodaway-Worth, so that was quite exciting.

Amthor: Now, did you – after you were married, were you a stay-at-home mom or did you work outside of the house or.....?

Funston: No, I was a stay-at-home mom. It was very tight.

Amthor: After your work there on the planes, did you ever wish you could go back and work in that type of field again or was that...?

Funston: No, I was just perfectly happy.

Amthor: How about the other ladies that you worked with? Did they go on and work outside of the house?

Funston: No, they got married, too, and, you know, had families, and settled down. There were very few women at that time - they just more or less stayed home. I think it was later on that people really started working for jobs, or I mean for extra money.

Amthor: So, after the war, were you or your husband worried about the spread of Communism?

Funston: No, we didn’t seem to be. No.

Amthor: Were you concerned about the economy or inflation?

Funston: No. You just accepted the fact you didn't make very much money, and, of course, there wasn't that many different things – you know, there was no television back then. The basic was to be sure you had a car and food and a place to rent and that was just the main concern then, for us, anyhow.

Amthor: Were you concerned about polio? Was that a threat during that time period?

Funston: Yes, it was, and I remember the boys getting all of their polio shots and I think you had to have three of them. And so, yes, 'because we knew people that their children had had polio, and it was pretty sad.

Amthor: I have one last question. Well, actually two. Is there anything we didn't cover during the 1940s that you may like to share with us now? I may not have asked the question or I missed it, but that was important to you that you would like to share?

Funston: No, I think you asked about everything. I can't think of anything else.

Amthor: Looking back on the 1940s, and your experience at that time period, and comparing it to today, is there anything that came from that period that you would like to help with this period that could give advice to people living in this time period that you would have learned from that period?

Funston: I don't know. There just seemed to be closeness with everybody. I think you kind of clung together because it was just a special time and it was just wonderful how everybody went together to work for the government and help out on everything. It was just a good time. I don't think there'll ever be another time like it how the people were.

Amthor: Okay. Well, thank you for sharing your story with us today. We really enjoyed it.

Funston: Thank you.