

VIRGIL WALKUP

Joni: This is a portion of the Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri of the 1940's. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Today's date is November 14, 2008 and this interview is being conducted at the home of Virgil Walkup, at his home in Tarkio, Missouri. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. The interviewee is Virgil Walkup, and his birthdate was September 1, 1913 and he lived during the 1940's and this interview is his story of life during this time period including World War II.

Joni: Virgil, we would just like to talk to you some about your background information. Tell us a little bit about where you were born, when, something about your parents, just a little bit about your background.

Virgil: Well, I was born west of Skidmore, Missouri, that outlaw town, and the folks came up here when I was 2 years old, and lived in town for a year or two with my folks, and then they moved to a farm east of Rock Port where I attended my first grade of school at the Opp School, and they came back to Tarkio and moved Northwest of Tarkio and I've been here ever since.

Joni: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Virgil: I have 3 sisters and 1 brother.

Joni: Tell us about your life before 1940, prior to World War II. Tell us a little bit about what life was like at that point.

Virgil: Well, before that there was a depression going on and I started out at the ranch working with Miss W. F. Rankin for 77 cents a day, \$20.00 a month and you couldn't hardly find a job in those days, and I was tickled to death, I was the flunky, I had to do all the dirty work, feed the cattle, feed the hogs and haul hay; we had mules, we didn't have any tractors at that time and later – I lived there for 4 or 5 years, and I was going with a girl about 3 miles northwest of us, and we wanted to get married and we couldn't find a job. Finally we were thrashing oats and I heard a guy, neighbor Anderson, said he was going to quit in July. Well I went out to this fellow by the name of Harry Davis and ask him if the guy was leaving and asked him to give me a job that I wanted to get married, and he said well he hadn't said anything to me yet, so later on, why he said he had talked – said he was leaving – said you can have the job. He said when are you going to get married, and I said Christmas and he said you'll have to hurry it up, I need somebody to plow some ground and shuck my corn. So we hurried it up and we got married the 1st day of October, believe it or not. I got \$35.00 a month and got 3 cents a bushel for shucking corn, so those were the days. And I have a picture of the houses that I have lived in and I always call that house "Honeymoon Cottage."

Joni: Did you have any other family members that participated in the war?

Virgil: I had a brother and my wife's brother was in the war. My brother was in the Pacific Theater and my wife's brother was in the European Theater, he was 3rd Army, 4th Armored with General Patton.

Joni: We're going to talk a little bit about propaganda. Were you aware of the propaganda in the U.S. and abroad of what the government was saying about the war?

Virgil: Well, I just can't remember much about that but I knew they were having trouble, and we were on a family visit and I came home and we were coming home and I had just entered Tarkio and I heard President Roosevelt that war had been declared on Japan. That's the first I knew about that but a lot of politics going on at that time and we didn't have a radio at that time in the home and I didn't get too much news.

Joni: Okay, how did you learn about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Virgil: How'd I learn about it?

Joni: You said you didn't have a radio; did you have a radio at that point?

Virgil: Stop and think, I did because I had to borrow \$100.00 to buy – we moved down there at the ranch and that's the first place we had electricity and that's the first thing I did, I had to borrow \$100.00 to buy a radio and I thought that was the greatest thing we ever had, and we had news on that and we used it a lot.

Joni: Is that how you learned about the progress of the war?

Virgil: Yeah, and the theater, they give news over the theater a lot of times, News World, we got a lot of news that way, there would be pictures of things that had happened you know. We went to the theater quite a bit at that time, about the only entertainment we had.

Joni: Now you said you were here during that time period, did they try to draft you or did you try to enlist in the Army?

Virgil: Oh, I did, I was just over the age, and I have a draft card here I think somewhere. I have one in my pocket book, I've carried it in my pocket book all this time, and I still have it in my pocket book. There's the draft card that I had, and I have one in my pocket also.

Joni: So what happened did you not – you were too old, is that what happened?

Virgil: Yeah, I was just too old and I think down at the ranch here helped me a lot, too, because they produced a lot of stuff and I know Mr. Shaum was my boss, that was Jim Shaum's dad at that time, and my wages got up to \$100.00 and he told me one time, he says Virg, we're not raising your wages, but I'm telling you what to do, you can go out and buy you some milk cows and we'll get you a separator and you can give Miss W. F. Rankin half of it, and I went and bought 24 cows and I was the best paid guy in the country, and the war, I forget, they gave you a certain percent of that money to you for cream and I think that helped me out of the service too, I don't know.

Joni: Well, tell us about that, tell us what life was like during the war when you were home on the farm.

Virgil: Well, I'll tell you what, we went to the ranch In 1939 and at that time we had to have extra help, that's for putting up hay and stuff like silage, and you go town and there would be a bunch of men setting there at the power house, and they knew you were looking for help and

they'd run out to the car and ask how many men you wanted, you couldn't find a job in that time, they were – I can't remember what they got a day but they didn't get very much – they come out and pitch hay all day long and then the war came along and took all the good boys and help was scarce. One year we had 250 acres of corn and we had to have 28 men to pick that corn. They would come and they were older men, they didn't have an elevator at that time, they didn't like that, they'd draw up at the end of the week and away they'd go and one young boy he was a 7th Day Adventist from Kansas City and he told me, he says I've got to go home to church on Saturday, but I'll be back on Sunday, and I says well we don't work on Sunday, you come back Monday, and I told my wife, I said that boy will be back because he left a good coat here. Well in a few days I got a letter from him and he said if you'll send my coat I'll give you the postage for sending, well, I never heard any more. Help was awful hard to find. We had a guy in town, feed man, the name of Frank Peterson and help would come there and we'd be out of help and he'd call up and he says Virgil, we've got another man here if you want him come in and get him. So we'd come in and get him and he wouldn't stay very long and then there was rationing too, on sugar, and stuff like that, and my wife had a heck of a time with the cooking. Every man would come, they had given the ration stamps to somebody else and I think back and I can't understand how she did so well with the cooking but we'd have 3 or 4 men down there year around.

Joni: What was your role during the civil defense and the scrap metal, scrap paper, you know, those drives?

Virgil: Well, I'll tell you what, we had a junk pile down at the ranch and Jim Shaum and let's see – I forget – there's 3 boys came out there, they were young kids at that time, they cleaned up all the old iron and sold it to a junk dealer, and they said they'd probably sent it to Japan, I don't know. We had a lot of junk down there but they cleaned it all up and hauled it off – Hall boy was another boy.

Joni: What did you do for entertainment?

Virgil: Well, we would go to shows and then they would have square dances once in a while, there'd be somebody in the country and they would have a square dance and we'd go to that and that's about all the fun we got.

Joni: Did you go to any movies?

Virgil: We'd attend a lot of movies, yeah that's about – if we had, after we went to the movie, if we had enough money left at the end of the month to buy an ice cream cone or a malt, we were tickled to death, those were the days, I guess.

Joni: Do you remember any of the titles of the movies you went to or the music of the era?

Virgil: Gosh, I can't remember now, it will come to about 15 or 20 minutes after you gals leave.

Joni: How about travel and gas, how did that work out and rubber, was it tires rationed?

Virgil: Oh yeah, tires were rationed; I know I had 2 tires that blew out at the same time. Well J. D. Rankin, he was on the board and I had no trouble getting tires, I'd go to him and he'd say well Virgil I'll give you a couple of tires, and I know one time, we had a guy that came out there to

deliver gasoline for our service, and they had tanks on a stand and he had his nozzle in this tank and I was fixing some hog houses [fence] away and I heard something go ker-bang and his truck, he didn't have the brake on the truck – it went off and it pulled those 4 barrels of gasoline, I don't know how much he had in them but he was so mad he says Virg you can have all this gasoline that's in those tanks and I got, I think I got 50 gallon of gasoline that I'd just dip it out of one tank and I had another tank there that I put it in and kerosene was also rationed and sugar stamps – I've still got a few of them around here somewhere but I don't know where. It was a rough time.

Joni: Can you explain how you got news about the progress of the war, was it radio, newspapers, bulletins, friends?

Virgil: Yeah we would listen to the radio and different things would go on, you know, and then we'd think they were progressing, and my brother, he was a first lieutenant in the war and he had the Pacific Theater and he told how rough it was taking officers training, they'd just drill you until you just couldn't hardly go, I know one time my father had given him a wrist watch and he said he was so tired somebody swiped off his wrist and he never even knew about it, and he was field umpire at Fort Yuchuka, Arizona to a colored division and he says those boys when they were out in the desert, they were scared of snakes. He said they'd sleep on the Jeeps, he said you wake up the next morning, and you couldn't even see the Jeep for the colored guys, he said they wouldn't sleep on the ground, they were scared to death, and he was wounded in Luzon and he lost a kidney by shrapnel in the war and he said when they took him back to base hospital and he said guns were going off and he said every time those guns went off that bed would jump and he said you can't imagine how much pain I suffered, and he also said that he was traveling in the jungle one time down a trail, he says, I was running just as fast as he could, and he met a Jap, he said we sidestepped, he went by me going fast he says, I thought I'd get it any time, and I never looked back and I guess he said there's one good Jap, I guess 'cause he never looked back and he said I never looked back either, and I figured I was going to get it. One time, you talk about entertainment, we were asked to donate blood, so Ruth and I went to St. Joe and we gave blood, she had a brother in the service, too, and I did, and we were down there to St. Joe and a nurse asked me – said, you feel all right, and I said I just feel fine, I said I'd have given 2 vials of blood. Well, they got me in the other room and they said they were going to bring me something to eat and pretty soon I seen that plate starting to whirling like that and that's the last I knew for a minute and I know an Army doctor said oh, he's just fainted; he'll come to in a minute and when I came to my wife was on the table and there was a neighbor from Rock Port on the table, there were three of us on the table. Later on we got to see a free show down there at the auditorium, Jack Benny put on a show and it was nationally advertised, I mean on the radio and there was a car load of us people that had given blood and we went down and we got to see a free show, Jack Benny; and we thought that was great. I know Everett Howell, a neighbor, he drove us down; he had a Buick car and the women in there they would say turn here and turn here, well, he run over a curb one time, and he said I wish you women would quit telling me what to do.

Joni: What do you remember about when the war ended in Europe on D Day, do you remember that?

Virgil: Yes I think I can just barely remember, it ended before the war in Japan, if I remember right, and Ruth's brother was wounded, I forget the name of the town now, but he was in combat duty, and he got shot in the arm. He said his arm flew up around over his head and he didn't

know what had happened for about a minute, and they shot out about an inch or two of the bone in his arm and he had – they brought him to base hospital and they finally brought him back to the east to the hospital in Denver, Colorado and he had about 15 different surgeries, but got something in his arm an infection or something, and they had to take it off up to the elbow, but you would be surprised what he could do. But he got to be an alcoholic, and I think that's probably the starting of that – but he was with General Patton's army and he had a rough time.

Joni: How did you learn about the dropping of the atomic bomb and the Japanese surrender.

Virgil: I can remember about it, I just can remember about when the first one, then I can remember when the war was over.

Joni: How did you feel about that, do you think President Truman did the right thing at that point?

Virgil: Well, anyway it stopped the war. They killed a lot of people and it was a sad deal that way but – they killed a lot of innocent people, but it stopped the war.

Joni: How were the veterans treated when they returned home, what was your perspective?

Virgil: Most of them were really treated good, I know I met one guy, he said when I was in the service he said they treated me good he said, when I come home, they had no use for me, but he was kind of an in and outer anyway, but that's the only time I heard about that.

Joni: After the war was there any concern about communism?

Virgil: I just can't remember about that, I just don't recall anything about that.

Joni: The Soviet Union and the spread of communism to the United States?

Virgil: I just can't recall about that.

Joni: Were there any concerns about the economy, inflation, spread of polio or other diseases?

Virgil: Well, things kind of looked up after the war, I know farmers, I know one farmer down here at the ranch, he rented the ranch, Blaine Shaum wanted me to rent the ranch, and I thought that was too much for me to start farming, because I wanted to start farming and the fellow that got it – why – he bought in, prices were down like hogs and the cattle and stuff like that and the mules and when the war was over they ticked that off and he made a pot full of money, that was Earl Bowman, you probably don't remember him.

Joni: What did you listen to on the radio; did you listen to farm markets, news, soap operas?

Virgil: Well, about the first thing we listened to would be the news and then we would – Jack Benny maybe, and we would get tired of one and we'd go to another.

Joni: So how did the government think of farmers at that time period, I mean there was farmers that had to stay home and feed the rest of the world, the troops, so how was the farming?

Virgil: It was a rough go, I mean, wages weren't very good and it took about everything you got to pay your monthly bill. I know at that time we didn't have a – Ruth didn't have a Maytag

washer and I had bought a car from a fellow by the name of I. J. Nickerson, Ford coupe, and I said I can't make payments on both of those, and he said well, I'll buy the car, and you can just make payments to me on the washing machine and the car, and when February came, I was out of work, didn't get work through the winter, and I went over to him, he lived at Rock Port, by the way and I told him I said I just can't pay you this month I. J. Well, he said that would be a good time to take back the car and the washing machine; well, I guess a funny look come on my face and he just laughed and he said well you'll be start working in March and you can make payments then. But times were rough then, nobody had any money and it was rough going.

Joni: So how do you feel about the war of today and the war of World War II, what are some of the differences in that?

Virgil: I think it's a war that should never have started myself, that's the way I feel about it. I think it was uncalled for. I may be wrong.

Joni: Is there anything else that we may have missed that you would like to tell us about.

Virgil: I would like for you to read a letter that my brother sent me from a meeting he had, that tells about a battle that he was in. I'll let you have it in just a minute.

Joni: Do you want me to read it out loud?

Virgil: Yeah, that'd be a good idea. Then we can all hear it.

Joni: It is dated 1991. It says:

Dear Kenneth:

On the 29 of September at the annual reunion of the 112th Calvary Association, Claude Rigby told me that he had received a letter from you and that he would share it with me. So a few days later he sent your letter to me. I am thoroughly delighted to hear from you, all be it indirectly. Through these past nearly 47 years I have thought of you often and wondered about you. I remember you as a fine Effective Combat Officer platoon leader who was loyal and supportive to me and whom your fighting soldiers admired and followed. You were wounded and evacuated from us at Hot Corner in Luzon, as I recall. Please refresh my memory regarding the type of wound you received, and the recovery experience. My memory is that you were from Tarkio, in the extreme northwest corner of Missouri, I note that now at Parkville, you are on the Northwest edge of Kansas City. Two months after our Hot Corner fight our first squadron, Troops A, B and C was ordered to make a reconnaissance in force of a so-called wooded ridge a few hundred yards from Ipoh Dam. All three troops seized the wooded ridge after Troop C in our approach and Sgt. Potko and a few others wounded by accurate enemy artillery fire. As we arrived at the objective, word was passed up to me at the head of the long column, that the tail of the troop column received a lot rifle machine gun fire and Sgt. Brinklow had been killed and others wounded. We were nearly exhausted, out of water and very thirsty on this very hot April night, 1945. Hoping to help our men who may be pinned down at the tail of the column, I asked about 10 men to go up with me, back from the trail to where Brinklow had been shot. We knew the Japanese platoons were in several locations in tall grass and bamboo, so while starting back down the trail holding carbines and rifles pointed in firing direction, we promptly drew rifle fire a few yards after starting. The first enemy rifle shot fired at us entered my right arm at the wrist

and traveled inside the arm to the elbow. It was a serious wound in which I lost a lot of blood. Our wooded ridge objective was very untenable ground but very tall grove and huge boulders, automobile sized all over the entire ridge. All three troops had received about 2 dozen wounded and we had determined an estimated 300 Japs were in that area and we were on ground that could not be defended, so General Cunningham and Colonel Miller, via radio, agreed with Lt. Colonel Grant and us that our recon mission had been accomplished. It was about 4:00 pm and we were ordered to defend ourselves and to prepare to withdraw under cover of darkness. My wound and resultant blood loss had disabled me. Capt. Bowland, CO of Troop A had a shell fragment in his scalp, but was still able to operate. The able bodied men improvised litters on which to transport the wounded who could not walk, and after dark we avoided the trail and made our way in total darkness back about ½ miles to Colonel Grant's high ground command post. This was the end of the fighting war for several of us.

Kenneth, early in 1986 the Peters Colony Historical Society of Dallas County asked me to write a short narrative of the Army's service record of no more than 4 pages. They asked that I could include places of assignments, promotions and dates and that most be devoted to World War II experience and duty. After drafting, I had to cut out at least half to reduce it to the 4 pages. I am enclosing a copy of this as it may interest you to see a brief of some of the years of my life since we were together in Luzon. In early 1946 after I had decided to stay in the Army following hospitalization that ended in December of 1945, I was assigned to Ft. Riley, Kansas, and spent the first 5 months as a student in the Cavalry officer's course. One general requirement made each student write a 4,000 word account of a personal combat experience, so I wrote a tactical account of Troop C's week defending Hot Corner. At an annual 112th reunion in about 1973 Colonel Hooper mentioned to me that he had some tactical maps and things we used in combat that he was going to give to the 112th museum. I mentioned my paper on Hot Corner and he suggested that I should give a copy to our museum, so in 1979 I made copies, left one for the museum, and gave a copy to each C trooper at the next couple of reunions who had fought with us at Hot Corner. Accordingly, I am also enclosing a copy that you might like to have since you were one of us in that action. I must request as you read the story, keep in mind that I wrote this only a year after the experience; it was still fresh in my mind that we had to try to wound or kill enemy soldiers who were doing their utmost to kill us. Know that this fact tends to justify places in the story where my words indicate somehow at the time, we took some pleasure or satisfaction in our combat successes. I have stayed well through the years for most of the time except for quad bypass heart surgery in March, this year. I am doing fine now considering I'll be 75 in January. Would love to hear from you.

Sincerely, Frank

Virgil: I don't know if you would be interested in that or not but I ---

Joni: This was a letter to your brother, Kenneth?

Virgil: Yes.

Joni: From someone he served with in World War II?

Virgil: Yes, I think he was the head man there where they were fighting.

Joni: We've talked to a couple of persons who served at Luzon. Sounds like it was a pretty terrible place to be.

Virgil: It was, it was terrible, I know after he was wounded, why, they put him on a ship and he told me how many days it took to get home, the war was still going on at that time and they had to go way around some way or another for safety reason and then they shipped him to Oklahoma to a hospital and when he got able to travel, why, they had a bus in Tarkio at that time and he came in the bus and he tried to get ahold of my folks who lived east of town and of course he couldn't get them and he called Ruth and I up and asked if we'd come and take him out home which we said we would, and it surprised my Dad so much he could not even talk, he could not even say hello. He was just flabbergasted, you know, at seeing Kenneth that he just couldn't talk.

Joni: So did you ever see the copy of his paper that this person wrote to him.

Virgil: No, never did. Never did see that, this is all that he gave me. But he, I don't know how many months he spent, but it was a rough life I know.

Joni: It sounds like the Pacific front was.

Virgil: That's right.

Joni: Did he ever talk about the jungle over there?

Virgil: He got, I forget what he got, he got something where he had to take atabrine and he had fever when he was home and he was just sweating and he'd just shake— I forget what it was.

Joni: Was it malaria?

Virgil: Malaria, I guess that's what it was — I think it was anyway.

Margaret: Joe said that too.

Joni: Did they have to take pills for that, so they were given certain pills?

Virgil: Yeah, I think it was atabrine that he took and then there was another pill that worked too I forget what.

Joni: Quinine?

Virgil: Quinine, that's right. Those things I can't think of anymore.

Margaret: Well, Joe mentioned that, I think, or one other guy that we interviewed from Luzon.

Joni: Sounds like there were a lot of them that got malaria when they were there.

Virgil: Yeah they did.

Joni: Did he participate — a lot of the Japanese would get up in those caves, did he ever talk about that.

Virgil: Never did speak of that, no.

Joni: A lot of them don't want to discuss that time in their life; I know Joe had mentioned earlier too that he saw the Bataan Death March at that point.

Virgil: Yeah, there's a boy from Tarkio in that death march, Rusty Credit, he didn't live through it and after the war was over there's a guy lived up in the Royal neighborhood, he came back, he was a Postmaster General in Midway, I just happened to think of that the other day when I saw Midway on the television. He said not to worry about Japs shooting and hitting Midway, he said their guns won't reach us. He said it was all a mistake; he said the first guns that went off, they didn't get there, but the next ones he said they hit Midway; he said we were clobbered with guns from the ocean, I mean the battleships.

Joni: So when you watch those old movies, are they pretty accurate?

Virgil: Well, I guess they were; I guess some of them evidently were, but I know my brother-in-law, he was about my age, and he carried a tripod and he said I couldn't hardly carry that thing but he said after they started firing at me he said, you ought to have seen me jump over the fence with that tripod.

Joni: Tell us what it was like working with the Rankins'; more about the Rankin farm.

Virgil: She was a nice – she was stone deaf but you could talk to her slow, and she could understand every word you said.

Joni: Now which Rankin was this?

Virgil: This is Mrs. W. F. Rankin; she's the one that lived in the big house at the head of Main Street in Tarkio. I've been all over that house. She would live there in the summer time and in the winter time, she would go over to her daughter's, Mrs. Schaum. She had a special bed that she had to have taken over there, so she'd call me and her helper to move the bed over, and she says, now you boys take your shoes off when you come down stairs I don't want my stairways scarred up and he would look out, and say I don't see her anywhere, we'll go down with our shoes on and she'll never know the difference. But she would take me all over that house and they had a storm cellar to the west side of it, and she was a nice old lady. I know Blain Schaum came out one day at Christmas time and he had a new Buick and he says Virg I couldn't buy a door on this Buick but he says Mrs. W. F. Rankin gave me this here for Christmas, me and my wife for Christmas, but she was a nice old lady.

Joni: Looking back to our earlier interview that I interviewed you four years ago and were there any laws about drafting farmers about that time period during the war.

Virgil: I can't remember that; I know we had—they were all just older men and some of them would come clear from Tennessee. I know help got scarce on time and Blain said why don't you go to another little town maybe they got some boys over there and I went over to a little town of Quitman, Missouri and there were two boys there, I forget what their names were now, and they said they'd come over, they hadn't been drafted yet, they were a little younger, and they were pretty good boys, and Miss W. F. Rankin had a Buick. She let those boys take that car home over the weekend, and them boys thought they were worth a million. They were good help. Later on they got drafted in the service. I think one of them got killed in the service. Let's see,

Wayne Lininger ,I think was his name I believe, and the other one was-- one of them I know was better than the other one.

Joni: What was it you were telling me about the – using the mule, using all those mules, was it threshing or something you used to do on the farm.

Virgil: Well, I know we used to put up silage here at the ranch and it would be sargo and we would cut it in bundles and then we'd bring it in and run it through a silage cutter and that old silo – a I have a book on that of all the help we had – it would take about 14 or 15 men to fill it, and the last time it was filled was in 1944, and I was looking the other day and I'm the only guy left, by golly, that is on that record that filled that silo, and it hasn't been filled since, and I always said, if I get to be a farmer, I'll never have silage, and I haven't, that was something I hated.

Joni: It has a very distinct smell to it too.

Virgil: Oh yeah, only thing good about it was if your feet was cold you got your feet warmed up when you was in there.

Joni: I remember silage, my grandparents used to raise beef and have silage for their cattle and that was one smell you would never forget.

Virgil: I know it and the first year I fed silage, Blain Schaum, he told me, he says give them cattle all the good silage they'll eat, and so many pounds of corn and some cake, some kind of protein cake, give that. Of course the roads were bad in those days and he came out in March and he says Virg, those cattle don't look as good as I thought they would. He said did you give them all that good silage they could eat and I said I had the bunks full all the time, Blain and I give them --- we had scales at that time and I give them just the amount of corn and Earl Bowman says I tell you what the Rankin's don't know how much corn you got, he says give them a little more corn next year. Well, I gave them some extra corn next year, and Blain came out I can see him yet, he stuck his thumbs in his vest and say boy that silage really put it on this year didn't it Virg, and I never did tell him I give them extra corn. But it, it was something you had to do every day and it was an upright silage and I'd have to climb that thing every morning; some times there would be ice on it I don't know however; you'd have to scoop it with a pitchfork, too, and then you had to scoop it out.

Margaret: How many cattle did you have to feed?

Virgil: Oh we would have 100 head maybe, maybe more than that sometimes; then we'd give the mules silage, too, and we'd have 3 or 400 head hogs, of course, they didn't eat silage.

Joni: How many mules did you have?

Virgil: 24.

Joni: Did they do a lot of the work for you.

Virgil: Oh, we used mules all of the time; we just had one tractor at that time and at that time we had one old mule, he was so stoved up he couldn't walk. When we would get the mules outside the barn hook them together to go to the field that old mule would just bray and walk the fence,

he wanted to go with us, and I'm that same way, I know how that old mule felt. Things I want to do I can't do.

Joni: I heard those mules were pretty smart.

Virgil: Oh, they were.

Joni: They could open up gates so you wouldn't have to get off the wagon.

Virgil: I know the first time I run a lister, of course, you used 6 head of mules, I think I was 20 years old, and you'd have to lead 4 and drive 2, to get through the gates. I had one mule, he'd break loose about the time I'd get about ½ way to the field, he'd break loose and back to the barn he would go and I'd go after him, and finally I took a tug off the harness and put around his neck and tied him to a tug and I says come on, Slim, let's go to the field, and we had a guy down there he says, Virg, let me drive that mule for a while, and he said I'll make a mule out of him, he drove him two days and he says you can have him back, he was no good; he was ornery.

Joni: Did they all have names?

Virgil: Yeah. I've got their names around here somewhere. I wrote the names down here sometime and we could take those mules out we would keep about 2 to 4 in the winter time to saddle horse and the rest of them we would turn them out in the field and stalks you know. When they'd come back in the spring of the year they all knew their stalls, by golly, they would go into their stalls.

Joni: Who trained them?

Virgil: I don't know they just got used to it by golly, I guess.

Joni: Maybe they had one trained good one and the others kind of had to fall in line.

Virgil: Yeah there was a few of them that wouldn't get in but most of those older mules they would go in their right stalls, but I know there was one mule that was down there, there was a guy that he farmed in Odebolt, Iowa, and he said all the mules they had up there, he said, there was a team of mules that was the best mules that I ever drove in my life, he was a good mule, he would just put him out in the field and he just paid attention to his time, and of course we had some ornery ones too, but he said he was one of the best mules I ever drove in my life.

Joni: I was told that Rankin had a lot of mules, I mean did he have more so than any body else in the state at that time?

Virgil: Well, he had a lot of land and a lot of mules. I'll tell you about one time, said he met a guy on a farm and he was driving a mule and he said would you sell that mule, and he said yeah I'll sell him, and it was his own mule. That's a tale they told anyway. But my mother's folks worked for the Bilby's he worked there for 36 years until they went broke.

Margaret: I think they tell that same story about the Bilby's, too.

Virgil: Yeah, but he owned –they said the Bilby’s owned more land than the Rankin’s owned at one time, but when they went broke in ’29, I guess the Bilby’s had only a 160 - the first 160 they had.

Joni: They had land all over the place.

Virgil: Oh, yeah, they had land everywhere. I had a copy of that – of the Bilby’s history, Jack Kelly came out here one time and says, I want to get a copy of that, and I never did get it back, but he wanted to get a copy of it, said he had to take it somewhere to get it copied, but it told about how much land they owned and stuff like that.

Joni: The museum they just – they did a presentation on the Bilby’s.

Virgil: Did what now?

Joni: The museum over there did a presentation on the Bilby’s, a program on the Bilby’s.

Virgil: Is that right?

Joni: There were quite a few acreages.

Margaret: Uh hum like 4,000 or something that was just for the Missouri part and they had land in Texas and Oklahoma, too, I believe.

Joni: Yeah because he died in Oklahoma, they had land in Mexico – they had a lot of land and a lot of other different thing.

Virgil: Oh they had a lot of land in Nebraska. I know they said in there that they owned more land than the Rankin’s at one time. But the old gentleman, John S. Bilby, they said he lived in Oklahoma and he got into it he swiped some horses from the Indians or something and said the only way he got out of there, they put him in a box and bored holes in it and put him on a train and shipped him to Quitman. I don’t know if that was true. Have you ever heard of that one?

Joni: Yeah that was when he was in Mexico.

Margaret: To get him out they put him in supposedly it was a coffin.

Joni: A way to get him home.

Virgil: They said that his mark for hogs was cut their ears off, other guys would have their hogs marked with nicks in their ears or holes in their ears, but his mark for ears was cut their ears off.

Joni: Completely?

Virgil: Cut their ears off said the hog got on his land it belonged to him he’d cut their ears off. That’s just tales I’ve heard.

Joni: And this was the Rankin farm right next to you?

Virgil: Yes, that’s Miss W. F. Rankin’s home. When she was first married she lived in the house and J. D. was born in that house down there.

Joni: And that's where the big Rankin barn, one of the barns was still located?

Virgil: Yeah. It had a tornado in 29th of August, 1979. It lifted that roof of that barn over the house, tore the aerial off of the house, the television aerial, and it landed in the field out here north of me here and that was the last Rankin barn of that type, he had several just built just like it.

Joni: He had a lot of the, well, he had the unique of course the mule barn, that unique shape.

Margaret: Were they all roundish barns or different?

Joni: They weren't all round were they?

Virgil: What?

Joni: Not all the barns were round.

Virgil: No, no, no.

Joni: And you made a model of the barn didn't you?

Virgil: Yeah its' down there in the museum. I used to go in the basement, had a shop down there and I'd just pass time in the winter time, but I haven't been down in the basement for, oh, 5 years now. Yeah, I used to make stuff like that, I made some of the homes, by golly, we lived in.

Joni: It's nice to have those models of what used to be.

Virgil: It just gave me something to do.

Joni: Well we have time for one more special story.

Virgil: Alright, what's that now?

Joni: You have to tell us, is there one more special story that you would like to tell us, it doesn't have to be with World War II but any special story that you would like to end our interview with, something that you would like us to remember.

Virgil: How about a Halloween story?

Joni: OK.

Virgil: Well, when I was 19 years old, we was shucking corn down there at the ranch, and there was 5 of us down there, and 2 of the guys said, we got to go in and see our sweethearts in Tarkio. Rest of us we thought we'd go over to the neighbors, he had a bunch of dairy cows; we thought it would be fun to walk through there and put a harness on these cows. Well, then we went over to Ranch 10, and we took all the taps off the farm wagons and put them in a pile of course, they're different sizes, and there's right and left nuts on the wagon, and took the end gate rods off of course, they're different lengths too. We came home the next morning and we told boss down here what we had done. Well at noon he says boys you'd better keep it quite says that old cow you put the harness on got hung up and choked herself to death; he says you'd better keep it kind of quite. Well; boy I'll tell you what we were shucking corn for 2 cents a bushel ;and we

shucked 100 bushels of corn and that old guy wanted \$80.00 for that cow and you could buy any cow for \$40.00 or \$50.00 in those days; and Johnnie Ryan was with us and he said 2 more dollars we can pay on that old cow; and it went on for about a week or two and the boss's wife said you better come clean; she says you won't have any corn shuckers left here one of these days and the old man, he just laughed he said the only gentle cow in the lot the boys picked on said if they'd had any other they couldn't have got her to get harness on. It was just a joke and those guys over at Ranch 10 we'd shucked our load of corn and they were going to the field if they'd of caught us they'd of killed us. But it took them all that time to get those nuts back on the wagons, and I don't know why kids do that, but I did.

Joni: A tale of your wild days

Virgil: Huh?

Joni: A tale of your wild days.

Virgil: That's right. That's the only time I went ever out for Halloween and that was the last one.

Joni: Well, I'm glad that you were able to talk to us today

Virgil: Yeah.

Joni: And participate in our program.

Virgil: That is a very nice program I think.

Joni: We are going to tape our program on the 23rd.

Virgil: What?

Joni: We are going to tape our program on the 23rd.

Virgil: Is that right?

Joni: Maybe we'll have some copies or something that people can watch.

Virgil: I've lived in this neighborhood all my life, by golly. I think I've lived in Tarkio, I mean I've lived longer in Tarkio than anybody around here I think. Course there's older people than I am understand, but they haven't lived here their whole life. This is a good neighborhood and land's good around here.

Joni: We're changing so many land owners

Virgil: What?

Joni: The land is changing hands so fast.

Virgil: Oh I know it, I know it. Well, that's – that's – I know my father-in-law used to say, this used to be _____ farmed a lot. I didn't understand it, I didn't know the guy, but on this

section that you guys live on, the Clerk of the Loss Grove School gave me a book, and said at one time they had 14 homes on that section, 14 homes on that section of ground.

Joni: Oh my.

Margaret: Now there's probably 1 or 2.

Virgil: Now, they buy the land and they just push all the barns in and the houses, they don't want them; all they want is just the land.

Joni: You don't find too many original barns left on the homestead.

Virgil: No.

Joni: They're tearing them down for those big implement buildings.

Virgil: That's right.

Joni: Now if you go to Illinois, they have all the original barns.

Virgil: Oh, they do?

Joni: They are very proud of their barns up in Illinois.

Virgil: Well, you take Iowa last time I was up there, those barns were painted; they were all in good shape.

Joni: I think there are a lot of more dairies too.

Virgil: What do you think the price of that 160 acres there sold for?

Joni: It was pretty high, I know Barry came home and said it was higher than he could afford.

Virgil: I know it. \$4,200.00 for the land, crop acres that is, 150 acres 158 acres but they said the crop land was \$4,200.00 an acres, that's a lot.

Joni: That's pretty high.

Virgil: That's pretty high, right.

Joni: I just wonder if those high prices are going to hurt them with the way the economy is going at this point.

Virgil: Right. It could; they flew pretty high; they could drop pretty quick too.

Joni: Is that the highest land price that you ever heard per acre?

Virgil: Right in this area it is.

Joni: Has it ever got higher in the last – since you've been living has it ever been that high before?

Virgil: I bought this land in '64 and gave \$280.00 an acre and I thought, boy, I'll never get that paid, but it started going up. But I have a nephew, his folks live up around Sioux City, and he said land up there is selling \$8,000.00 an acre in Iowa; unheard of. I don't see how they can make it on that.

Joni: Wow, Yeah I don't know either. That's a lot of money.

Virgil: That's right.

Margaret: I don't see how it could ever be paid for.

Virgil: I don't either.

NOTE*

When Mr. Walkup returned his transcript with his corrections he had added this little story.

“My wife's brother was coming through Kansas City Union Station. We, Ruth's Mom and Dad, Uncle and Aunt went down to see him. As we crossed the street to Union Station Ruth lost her under pants, no rubber in the band only buttons. Somehow the button popped off. Ruth's aunt said everyone gather around Ruth we don't want anyone seeing her pick up her pants and Ruth you keep your dress down.