

OPAL FISHER

Amthor: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri* in the 1940's program sponsored by the Nodaway County Historical Society Museum 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 March 11, 2009, and we're here at the Worth County Senior Center in Grant City, in Worth County, Missouri. We're conducting an interview with Opal Fisher and she was born on November 3, 1923.

Fisher: Correct.

Amthor: The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. Opal's going to tell us a little bit about her life in the 1940's and life during World War II.

Amthor: Opal, could you tell us a little bit about your background? Tell us about where you were born, when and a little bit about your parents, and if you had any brothers and sisters?

Fisher: I was born Opal Gray to Boyd and Gladice Gray, up in Taylor County, in a little town know as Athelstan, and I am the oldest of ten; there's five girls and five boys, so I've taken care of a lot of kids during my lifetime. I taught school before I was married, and then had five children and then I went into teaching head start and had that for twenty-seven years. Now I'm very involved in the Senior Center here, so I've been around people all my life.

Amthor: Could you tell us a little bit about your life in the 1940's, prior to the time we entered World War II?

Fisher: Well, I graduated from high school in '41, from Parnell, and went to college at Northwest Missouri and that's what I was doing when they bombed Pearl Harbor. I remember being at home that day, it was a Sunday, and didn't know anything about it, as we were very isolated out - and went down to school that evening and heard about it at that time. Then while I was in college there they brought in a lot of the service boys. I think they were Navy, out to the Armory, so they kind of overtook the school at that time. I went to school there that fall, into the spring, and then into the summer and that next fall I started teaching school. You could teach practically out of high school by taking a test and getting approved.

At that time we lived north of Grant City here and I taught a rural school there. Rode a horse, across through the fields, and had a boy that helped to build fires of a morning. After the first of March, most of the families moved away and there was just two left, and I boarded at their house, so we sometimes had school at home. I think I got sixty dollars a month for that school. Then my folks moved over between Sheridan and Parnell and I taught school over there east of Hopkins for three years. Then my husband's folks lived south of us and he was in the service, and I didn't have any idea who he was at that time. Knew his brothers and sisters and one of his

brothers was a real good friend of my brother and they talked about their brother that was in the service, but I didn't know anything until he came home then in '45, then we started going together and we were married then in December, '46, and I was teaching school back over here north of Grant City at that time. I taught that year. Then we moved to a farm down by Gaynor and we've lived around different places on farms until - let's see, Kevin was four, I think, when we left the farm.

By that time I was teaching Head Start and then my husband worked at the Chevrolet garage and he also worked out to the school. He was sick a lot of the time from I think after thoughts of things of the service but we didn't realize it was, so we had kind of a rough time with the kids and our - but like a lot of the rest of them, we raised a big garden and always milked cows and had chickens, eggs, - survived.

Amthor: So do you remember any of the rationing? Do you want to tell us about that?

Fisher: I do, when I was at home; that was before the forties. Yes, I can remember that my grandmother and my aunt lived with her and they never used their shoes - that was another thing that was rationed. So with that many kids they would give us their shoe coupon - you could trade with whoever you wanted to. I don't think they ever used all their sugar and I think maybe coffee was one of them too. My Dad was a big coffee drinker and used the sugar. But I guess we got along' we didn't have a car for a long, long time either. Then my husband had a car while he was in the service and the younger boys about ran the wheels off of it; his brothers.

Amthor: What did you do for entertainment - for fun?

Fisher: We didn't really have too much; my cousins and my aunt and uncle lived not too far from us when I was growing up and we had kids, they had a bunch of kids and we did too and we'd go there a lot in the summer time. We played a lot of games at school. I walked about a mile and three quarters to school when I was starting to school. We played ball and games and hide-and-seek and I learned to play pitch when I was real young and we did that a lot even after I was married - between my brothers and I we did; we played a lot of pitch. I guess we're like some of the rest of them said: we didn't have time! We didn't do a lot; you were tired by the time evening came.

Amthor: What about music?

Fisher: I didn't grow up in a musical family. My husband did. He'd have sold our last cow I think to have my kids in band, which they were. But his family would get around the piano and sing in the afternoons, but we were not; as my family were not a musical family. We had a radio, and listened to the music. A limited amount when you had batteries in the radio.

Amthor: What did you listen to on the radio?

Fisher: Well, we always had to listen to the news and music and Fibber - like some of them said, Fibber McGee and Molly and Amos and Andy, those.

Amthor: Did you have any other family members that participated in the war? You said your husband was in the service - did you have any brothers or anybody else that went to the war?

Fisher: My oldest son was in the Navy in Vietnam. I think he was the first one from Worth County that went. They were going to be drafting them and he was on the first of the list and so he just enlisted. But Jerry was in - well, he was in - most of the time he was in Hawaii; he didn't see too much. But my husband saw a lot of service, which he didn't talk about. [My brother was in the Army.]

Amthor: Now where did he -

Fisher: He went from Australia and on up through the Philippines and Admiralty Islands and hop skipped across to Japan. He was in Japan when the Armistice was signed. He could see the ship from where it was signed when he was -

Amthor: Was he in the Navy?

Fisher: Army.

Amthor: What did you hear about propaganda on the radio?

Fisher: I don't really remember hearing anything really much about that. Of course the Communists were - hated or - but I think we were just kind of isolated from a lot of that.

Amthor: What about sewing? Did you sew a lot of your clothing?

Fisher: I sewed a lot; I sewed for my girls and made about all their dresses and I made some suits. My daughter taught school and I made some of her suits and skirts and I've done a lot of sewing. I made her - well I made the dresses for Judy's bridesmaids. Her sister was a bridesmaid.

Amthor: Now did you use any of the feed sacks?

Fisher: Mom did; and I've worn a lot of those clothes. I don't know that I did that much with the feed sacks.

Amthor: Did you keep any of the fabrics?

Fisher: No, I don't have any. Well, I have - my grandmother gave me some quilts, which I've later passed on to my daughters that were made with those.

Amthor: How about movies? Did you go to town to watch any movies?

Fisher: We didn't get to go to town very much at all. Well, in the forties I guess we went to probably Saturday nights to take our cream and eggs and buy our groceries. We went to some movies when we were going together, in Sheridan. I don't remember much. They seemed to me, like when we lived up here north of Grant City, they had free movies in the park out there and we would come as a family and then always had a continuing one so you had to go the next week to see it and we'd take our blankets and sit on the ground and watch the movie out there.

Amthor: How about after the war? How did you feel about Harry Truman when he dropped the bomb?

Fisher: Well, I think it was probably the only thing to do. I never really thought I guess, right or wrong it was just done.

Amthor: You said that your husband was there to see it.

Fisher: Right. So I'm sure that was a good feeling for them to - and as some of them have said, you know, to save the boys.

Amthor: Were you ever threatened by the thought of Communism?

Fisher: No, I don't know that I really thought that much; of course you didn't like it, but I don't know that it was really on our minds. I think we thought more of surviving in our own little home place than we did of what was going on overseas. You didn't have the communications that we do now, and know what was in the rest of the world. Maryville was a long ways from our house.

Amthor: How about the threat of polio?

Fisher: I never thought too much about that either, but I have—one of Judy's real good friends had a son that had polio and she's talked a lot about that, and I know it was a terrible thing that was taking place. I can remember when they gave the first polio sugar cubes to my kids when it, that was first discovered, but I had no personal relationship with it.

Amthor: So how do you feel about what you lived through - the 1940's economy wise, to what is going on today?

Fisher: Well, they - we did with what we had and I think that they spend money that they want instead of just what they need. They may be coming to the place where they're just buying what they need instead of what they want. I think the wants have been - I think they spent a lot; overspent as far as the family's concerned. I know my grandkids want things that we wouldn't have dreamed of asking for.

Amthor: Is there any story that you would like to share with us? That stands out in your mind that you think that's important to share with us - about life in the forties?

Fisher: Not really, I guess not. There were good times and bad times but our families - and my family is real close now and all my kids have a good time together, which I am very thankful for compared to a lot of families. They just have a good time.

Amthor: Margaret, do you have any comments?

Kelley: When you were teaching country schools in the early forties, did the neighborhoods have "Support the war projects?" Was that going on?

Fisher: Not that I remember. No, I don't remember that they did have any - you know buying ration stamps or war

Kelley: Or war drives or whatever, war bonds?

Fisher: Right - no we didn't have that. I had about all the eight grades - [laugh] quite a challenge.

Amthor: Well, we really appreciate your coming and interviewing with us. It was good to meet you.

Fisher: Well, same to you.

Amthor: I'm glad we had the opportunity to make it over here today.

Fisher: I am too. I think it's been a fun day.