

MARGARET OSBORN

Amthor: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories in Northwest Missouri in the 1940s* program. The Nodaway County Historical Society Museum is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support from the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today is April 2, 2009, and we're conducting this interview at the Northview Manor at Tarkio, Missouri in Atchison County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor, and assisting is Margaret Kelley, and we're here – we're going to speak to Margaret Osborn, who was born on December 20, 1918, and she's going to tell us a little bit about her life in the 1940s and her husband's service in the war and we're just going to find out a little bit about what life was like.

Osborn: Alright. Well, we didn't go much in the car; we did a lot of walking. We didn't you know, and then of course we walked three miles to school and in high school we walked ten miles to school and back in grade school. My favorite teacher was Mozela Schooler. Of course we played games at recess and we had spelling bees and all – you know the ordinary things that a country school had. Oh, what else? What – of course everybody took his lunch to school and in the winter time we'd take a potato and we'd put on a pan of water – the teacher would – and we'd cook that potato with the peeling on it and we'd take our own butter. That was our hot lunch to go with what we took cold from home. Then we started to high school and let's see I graduated in 1937. So that's the story of the high school. But that'd be four years. Must have started to high school in 1932 – because you graduate in spring, see. Of course we walked to high school and I took home ec – I liked home ec real well. We all had to have so much English, so much arithmetic and required subjects before you could graduate, so we all took care of that and my Mother and Daddy sent eleven kids through Tarkio High School. That's the only high school we ever went through.

Amthor: What were the names of your parents?

Osborn: My parents were Michael Ryan and Mary Ryan. She was a Gaffney- she was the sister to – my aunt Winnie Gaffney was my aunt and Agnes Combs was my aunt and Uncle John was a Gaffney and Will was a Gaffney and that was about the size of it.

Amthor: Now did you ever go and collect feed sacks for clothing or anything like that?

Osborn: No, we never, but we always sold stamps at Christmas, you know, and between times to you know to the some kind of an organization, like the Easter stamps and the Christmas stamps and we turned our money in at the school and we always had something you could aim at that you could sell. There would be somebody in our school that would win that.

Amthor: Did you have any brothers that went to war?

Osborn: Yes.

Amthor: Can you tell us about that?

Osborn: Uh-huh. Well, my oldest brother was William Andrew Ryan and he lost his life. He wasn't in battle when it happened, but they were shooting off some bullets of some kind and one of them was faulty and they exploded and killed him and a boy from Illinois. It hit them in the back. I suppose you know they turned their backs when they shoot that big thing – gun that they were shooting; it wasn't just a common gun it was a big – big gun.

Amthor: Where were they when that happened?

Osborn: He was in – let's see – he was in oh, back east there that in Georgia I think that was where he was. And he had just gotten married not very long before, just a few . . . He married Verona Lininger.

Amthor: Now was he the only brother you had?

Osborn: No, there's a whole list of us kids, so I'll go on through the brothers.

Amthor: Okay.

Osborn: Okay, then Johnny, he was in a plant where they had him figuring the center of gravity on the airplanes, so they didn't take him to the Army. They used him for that. George, he was a farmer and he thought well, he had a – you know they went by the draft, and he had a early number in the draft, so he decided that he go on and get his time served, so he could come back the next spring and start farming again. Well, it didn't work, because we got into – see we weren't in the war then, we just knew we were going to be; they were drafting them all and so he went – he served five years in there I think it was, and he trained men, you know, was one of the – he was a staff sergeant and he trained men. Then there was – let's see – Bill – did I name Bill? William? He was the one killed. Then there's Johnny and George, and Martin.

Osborn: Martin was a farmer and he had little kids so he stayed on the farm. And Posey. Posey just graduated; he was in the – what they call – you know the service on that in the colleges, do you remember what that was? Anyway, they didn't take him until he graduated and then they took him too and he served on the Burma Trail; in the area of the Burma Trail where the Jap- they prepared the path for the boys that were coming through behind the – see they had a Burma Trail from Burma up through China and that's where he served his time.

Osborn: And Jerry, he was in the service – well, they took him right out of high school and he was in the Army and then he didn't care for that much so he joined the paratroopers and when they had D-Day, he jumped in like they did, you know, in the area there in Germany and he said the Germans came out of the foxholes early than they'd ever gotten there. If they'd have stayed in their foxholes but Jerry never got a scratch out of it. And of course you know that's slow moving down in a parachute so that was pretty dangerous and he kind of froze his feet was about the only thing, because it was so cold there in Germany, it was in the winter time and his feet always bothered him a little bit. They'd get colder than the other. And that's the boys. Alright.

Amthor: When did you meet Dale?

Osborn: I met Dale when I was still in high school at the Fairfax Tournament and

Amthor: You said you got married in 1940.

Osborn: 1940, right before the war. Yeah. Well, it was – the war was – yeah.

Amthor: So tell us what it was like after you got married, right before the war?

Osborn: Well, we farmed two or three years; Dale had bought a farm in Skidmore and we farmed over there and then of course when he went to the service, we got rid of every – our livestock and all that. He was in there better than two years. I don't really remember.

Amthor: You said he went ahead and enlisted. Can you kind of talk about that?

Osborn: He really didn't enlist; he just let them take him. He didn't apply for the Army, you know, to keep out of it. He just let them take him. He went in at Maryville. His name's on the thing over there in Maryville in the Courthouse yard you know where they had the soldiers. Let's see,

Amthor: Now he went into the Army. Where did he go for some basic training?

Osborn: He went to Fort Riley, Kansas, for basic training and he was in that – well, it was the Fort Riley is a big Army and then they had a horse where they rode horses? That's where Dale was.

Amthor: The cavalry?

Osborn: Yes. He was in the cavalry; that's where he got his basic training, but they never ever did send him and the calvery any place, and so I went out there and I worked in the officer's house, helping to take care of the kid that for a little while, and then I met a girl and she told me she said go apply to get into where – the dining hall, so that's what I did. So it paid a lot better, see. And we were there quite a long while and when we left there we went to Camp House, Texas, and when we were down there well over a year, in Camp House. It isn't even there anymore; we've been back down through that country. We had our car quite a lot of the time; we had it in Texas and we had it in Fort Riley. But he didn't like polishing those boots; that wasn't his particular job; he didn't care too much but boy he had to shine those boots, and their saddles; they had a saddle to take care of.

Osborn: Then the war was just about – the seemed kind of the end of it when Dale was transferred to New York and they all thought they were going overseas, see, and bringing some of the boys home that's been over there quite a while and he thought he was on his way overseas. Well, I came home to my parents in Tarkio and he didn't go overseas, but I – the minute I got to Tarkio a rural school called wanting a teacher, so I took the job because I thought, well, he didn't go. They held up that bunch that he was with, and they finally took them down in Mississippi right there on the gulf coast. Down there he was an MP, in other words, he didn't like that job too much because he said, boy, you didn't tell those kids that came back from overseas anything,

you know, just didn't see them. He kept peace with them. Let's see, then, gosh, he was there better than a year and he got out in about the 4th of – no, maybe the 3rd – real early in – let's see, what year did he get – May! He finally got out, was discharged from down in Mississippi, and he so we had our – I had taken my car down there. He had gotten the mumps and the three days measles both down there in camp and I went down to see him. My Mom and his Mother went with me so they came home on the train and I stayed down there – school was just about out and my substitute teacher taught until I got back and then let's see. . . . I think that's pretty well it.

Amthor: So he never did go overseas?

Osborn: No

Amthor: He was always station in . . .

Osborn: They thought they were taking that unit overseas, but see, they were bringing boys home and anyway they pulled this unit he was in up in a camp in New York, up by Buffalo, New York and then he was sent down to Mississippi from there.

Amthor: So what were you doing when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Osborn: Well, my mother – we went up on a Sunday to see my Mother and she was somewhere – anyway when she came home, “Margaret, we're in war. They attacked Pearl Harbor.” I remember that as plain as day. Of course she had four boys in there at that time, because Bill was still alive; it was after the Pearl Harbor deal that he was killed.

Amthor: Now we noticed that you have a flag up on the wall. Can you tell us about that?

Osborn: Yeah, that's a star, for Bill. But the other three boys made it home when the war ended.

Amthor: Shall we show that flag?

Kelley: Let me stop a minute – if you don't mind can I get your flag?

Osborn: Yes! Get it. It's a star, is what it is.

Kelley: . . . star mothers and some people don't really know what it is.

Amthor: Now did you have a star of each one of them that was?

Osborn: No.

Amthor: Just the one.

Osborn: Yes, just this one.

Kelley: Wait just a minute.

Osborn: It's the star.

Amthor: So everyone had those and they showed them in their homes?

Osborn: Yeah, and then you'd have – Mother had some that had more stars on it. But see, this was kind of Bill with just the one star on it.

Amthor: Now you were married by the time the war started.

Osborn: Yeah.

Amthor: Did you teach before?

Osborn: Yes, I taught one year before and then one year that Dale thought he was going over and came back and I took that school then they called me the next day after they found out I was in Tarkio. They wasn't teachers; they were short on teachers and a lot of the women that had – you know long before the war when you graduated from high school you could go teach; but I had to go two years to college to teach and so that's made a lot of different.

Amthor: Now where did you go to college?

Osborn: Tarkio.

Amthor: Tarkio. Okay.

Osborn: I went two years to college to Tarkio College and I taught at Highland School in north west Missouri, up on the highway, it's not there anymore. A lot of those school houses – a few of them were saved and moved in Tarkio – you know where the Barn was? Since the Barn burned, it isn't prominent as it was. They could go to the Barn for a play and different things but they put on plays and then they – now so that after that the school house wasn't as popular as it was. See, they had the desks and everything in it; it's still there.

Amthor: So what was a typical day at the – when you were teaching like?

Osborn: Well, I stayed in Rock Port and rode the bus out, and it was about I'd say probably twenty-something miles out to the school, and there were three of us teachers on there; Dorthine Woolsey, she taught at the first school we stopped at. _____ and I was the next school, and then Georgia Hendrick was the third school, right up next to the Iowa border.

Amthor: You said you had a car?

Osborn: Yes, Dale had a car; we had a car for a lot of the time. Dale's folks brought it down to us when we were in Texas. His brother-in-law and his sister and his Mother.

Amthor: Now did you ever have trouble getting tires and fuel for that car?

Osborn: No. We never. We had quite a few stamps, you know; you got so many stamps, but we didn't spend them foolishly; we didn't waste our stamps, we just, you know, rode the bus out to the camp and that stuff.

Amthor: How about rationing? Did you have to worry too much about that?

Osborn: Well, I didn't, because – shoes – well, people who had little kids did because you know they can go through so many shoes much more. And our food stamps, the officer's wives would take them and use them to buy things to eat and stuff, for the dinners they would have and of course we didn't use them; Dale and I, we just had a real – we ate in a restaurant place.

Amthor: How about – what did you do for entertainment?

Osborn: Well, there wasn't too much on – now the soldiers would march sometimes and you know, there off of this officer's place, down on the big flat and they would parade out there and they'd have those parades out there once in a while, and then we went to Dallas one time; Dale was in the parade down there so we went down there. And then – what else did they have that entertained us? They had what they call the USO. They would have some things along. People donated to that USO for the soldiers. It's an organization that put on the different things.

Amthor: Did you – when you weren't with him, when you were home with your parents, what other types of entertainment did you do?

Osborn: Not much.

Amthor: Did you play cards?

Osborn: Well, yeah, we were a card playing bunch. I and the boys – see the other boys were out before Dale, because they'd been in there longer, they got out quicker than Dale did. Dale was younger than them.

Amthor: How about did you go to many movies?

Osborn: Not many, no.

Amthor: Could you tell us about the music during that time period?

Osborn: Well, I can't even remember the songs. They would just you know a lot of singers like from Memphis, Tennessee, you know, that place down there where

Amthor: Grand Old Opera?

Osborn: Yes. We went to the Grand Ole Opera when we were in Tennessee.

Amthor: Were they a lot of big bands like Tommy Dorsey?

Osborn: Yeah. There were quite a few big bands; we don't have any more. You don't have – see Lawrence Welk,

Amthor: Yeah. Did you go dancing much?

Osborn: Nope. No. We weren't dancers.

Amthor: Did you listen to the radio a lot?

Osborn: Yes, we had a radio, and we listened to it some, but there wasn't really a lot of time, but the time Dale would come in and we'd go get our supper, you know, from the camp, and sometimes he would meet me at the camp, because I would get off at the hospital in the dining room and I would just go out to the first stop there and get on the bus the first place the bus stopped at the closest place and then he'd come on it later.

Amthor: How was the transportation like? Did you have very much trouble getting around?

Osborn: No. We never did.

Amthor: And the trains system all seemed to be fine?

Osborn: Yeah, I – it was my first train ride when Dale went in and he was being sent down to – first we went to – oh, the first station that he was at – what did I tell you it was?

Amthor: Fort Riley.

Osborn: Yeah. There was a boy from Tarkio home from Seneca, and he was in the Air Force so he and I drove out to where Dale was, and then he hitch hiked the rest of the way. It was on just about fifty miles from us, and we wanted to take him but he said, no, no, he wouldn't do that; he would hitchhike, because they could get picked right up when they got out there on the edge. Those soldiers didn't have any trouble; hardly anyone would pass up a soldier. And we didn't have the murders, and you know, like we have to do today. This is bad.

Amthor: Now at the end of the war, did – let's see, how did you feel about the atomic bomb and Truman?

Osborn: Well, it was the end of it. And I think everybody was – you know – we needed to end it, and if it hadn't been for that, we'd have still been there fighting.

Amthor: Now did Dale take advantage of the GI Bill when he got home?

Osborn: Yes, he did. He learned farming. [Laugh] He had so much time coming and he had a teacher up at Elmo- he went to Elmo where several of the boys around, you know, went too and that's where they – it helped us out, the bill did, because you know it was money.

Amthor: Now where did you go after he got back? Did you –

Osborn: We went home and cleaned up our farmhouse and moved right back in there. Then we sold the farm and we moved over to Fairfax to help Grandpa farm. Dale helped him farm.

Amthor: Now is that where you had lived there for quite a while right there at the top of the hill?

Osborn: Yeah. That was Woodford Dunlap's house and Cooper had bought it. He bought that eighty acres.

Amthor: Now his Dad lived where my parents live.

Osborn: Yeah, yes, that's right.

Amthor: Right there on the hill. That's right. So when did you guys get your first tractor?

Osborn: Well, we got it when we came home from the Army. When Dale got home from the Army. Yeah. We got our tractor. It was a Farm All – nothing big; we didn't have big things then. Of course the tractors today are big – huge.

Amthor: How about animals? Did you have a lot of animals?

Osborn: We had cattle, and we had hogs; we raised hogs and cattle and I raised a lot of chickens. That paid our grocery bill. I'd always have a great big flock of chickens and our son has sold as much as \$100 worth of eggs. A guy from Shenandoah came down there and picked them up. He kept them in the cave, so he picked them up every week. So that bought our little kids' clothes, and you know it even went into that period.

Amthor: Now did you have a large garden and did you can?

Osborn: Always. Always had a big garden. Canned- canned everything you could.

Amthor: Now I remember being at your place and you had those – I can't think of what they're called now, but they are big purple –

Osborn: Egg plants.

Amthor: Egg plants! Yes, that was the very first time I had ever seen an egg plant.

Osborn: Well did you eat – did you like the egg plant? Lots of kids didn't like it.

Amthor: You know, I can't remember. I just remember it being purple

Osborn: It was.

Amthor: I'd never seen a purple vegetable before.

Osborn: They were pretty. That's true. And I just loved them with tomato on a sandwich. You fried that egg plant you know; sliced it and fried it and then you put that in your sandwich and you put tomatoes or cucumbers, whichever you happened to have, whichever.

Amthor: Now you probably had that back in the forties, too, the egg plant.

Osborn: Oh, yeah. See, that's when he got out, was in the forties.

Amthor: So what about - some of them were talking about getting their first electric refrigerator about that time.

Osborn: Yeah.

Amthor: When did you get yours?

Osborn: Well, we did, right – well, first when we came home, we had Mother's old ice box and then when family came along we got a refrigerator, because you had to keep baby milk. You didn't run to town every time you wanted milk or anything like that. You just bought it on Saturday and it used to keep over, and then we had cows for milk.

Amthor: Cows.

Osborn: Usually they wanted the kids to drink that - you know - better milk;

Amthor: Pasteurized?

Osborn: Yeah.

Amthor: I still remember the days when we would just go out and strain the milk and drink it just as it is.

Osborn: Oh, yeah and some of the kids would like it just fresh from the cows and some of them would want some put in the refrigerator you know and cooled it before they drank it. Leave it overnight or whatever.

Amthor: I think the kids now a day wouldn't think that was too exciting.

Osborn: No, but you know that homologized milk we quit drinking the whole milk. Of course we still milk the cows for the cream to help with the grocery bills or whatever we needed and yeah, they just got where they wouldn't drink that. They had the other at school, you see, family started at Fairfax in the first grade. The school and then of course a little time went by and they wouldn't drink that.

Amthor: Yeah.

Osborn: They didn't like it and I don't blame them. It usually tasted a little like what the cows were eating, like grass or you know, any kind of rye or whatever you raised and some of it wasn't so good.

Amthor: So after the war was there any threat of Communism? Did people feel like there was a threat?

Osborn: I don't think too much, but see, the boys said when they got out of the service they knew we would have to fight the Germans – or the Russians, I mean, but we never did. They thought they would have Russia – they were just coming home for a while and they thought they would have Russia to fight.

Amthor: Yeah.

Osborn: But we went over there and took up with the Germans and also France but France didn't appreciate it near as much as the Germans did.

Amthor: No.

Osborn: No they weren't too nice to the Americans and they saved them from being captured by the Germans, so I don't know.

Amthor: How about was there any threat of polio after the war?

Osborn: Oh, yes, there was always the threat of polio till they got the vaccination. Yeah. Oh, if your kids ran a temperature the doctor said you ought to bring them in. They'd get mad at you if you did not, on account of the polio.

Kelley: I'm going to start another tape.

Amthor: Okay. If there was one thing that you could remember about the 1940s that stood out in your mind what would it be? Just something that was real important to you.

Osborn: Well, Dale came home from the Army on the 3rd day of May and Stanly was born the next year on the 4th day of May.

Amthor: That'd be neat.

Osborn: That's kind of easy to remember.

Amthor: Now is there any advice that you can give to this generation that didn't live during the war, and that is experiencing the economy today and the war over in Iraq with your experience of when you lived during the thirties and the forties, and through the World War II, what would be your advice to help this generation get through it?

Osborn: Well, I tell you the boys back you up just a bit and just tell them when we would go where the camps where, we had to rent something to live in. Well, if they had kids, they didn't want them. See? Because kids would bawl and you know, and everything they didn't want and they were kind of bitter some of them when they got out. We didn't have any children but some of them were just pretty bitter the way they were treated. They would live – I knew some of them that were living in a dirt basement, you know, the basement wasn't cemented or nothing and they lived on that dirt, to be with that husband, till he went across. Osborn: So they were a little bitter about that. But I had a good place; I lived with an older woman and she was real good to me.

Amthor: Okay. Well I think we've had a nice interview with you today.

Osborn: Yeah.

Amthor: And I appreciate you coming in – I mean letting us come in and

Osborn: Yeah. Well, I wish I could do a better job – see that's been a long time.

Amthor: Oh, yeah.

Osborn: I'm ninety now and I don't remember as well as I did.