

DOROTHA WOOD

Amthor: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of 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 of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Today, March 12, 2009, we're here at the Hopkins Historic Museum, in Hopkins, Missouri, in Nodaway County. We're here to interview Dorotha Wood and she was born on March 28, 1920 and the interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. She is going to tell us about life in the 1940s and her husband also served in the war.

Tell us a little bit about your background; can you tell us where and when you were born, your parents, and what occupations they had, and if you had any brothers and sister?

Wood: I was born in Bedford, Iowa, on March 28, 1920. My Dad was a mechanic most of the time. As I recall, all his life. My mother was a stay at home mother that everybody in the whole country told their problems to, because she would never tell anybody anything, any secret. It would never go any further than her. That's one thing I remember about her. I had three brothers.

Amthor: Did you have any family members in the war other than your husband?

Wood: Two brothers in World War II; my father was in World War I.

Amthor: In what service branches were they in?

Wood: Army.

Amthor: Could you tell us what life was like before the war in 1940?

Wood: Let's see, I had quit college and was working in a store here in Hopkins. [We were paid by the week – not by the hour, and on Saturday nights, too. In summer we also worked on Wednesday nights. There was no extra pay for the nights. We did get time off for meal times.]

Amthor: What occupation were you doing before the war?

Wood: I was working in a store. They had a department in the grocery store that sold candy and pop and things like that and little knick-knack things even, stationery and that kind of thing. That's where I worked most of the time.

Amthor: What did you hear about the war? What were you doing when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Wood: I don't remember particularly. I can remember being at work and hearing the President talk about entering the war. I just don't happen to remember the other.

Amthor: Now when did you get married?

Wood: September 7, 1943.

Amthor: So, was your husband already in the service?

Wood: Oh, yes.

Amthor: Now tell us about his service. What branch did he go into?

Wood: He was in the Army.

Amthor: Okay. Could you tell us where he was stationed? Where did he go?

Wood: You mean originally?

Amthor: Where did he go when he – you said he was enlisted, right?

Wood: Yes, and I know it was in Michigan a lot, and he was in Illinois. One time for a while they were in Missouri and then after we were married, he was in Breckenridge, Kentucky, and that's where they left from there to go overseas.

Amthor: What was his job?

Wood: I know he was in headquarters, but I didn't know exactly what he did early, but he was a Forward Observer during the war in Europe.

Amthor: How long was he over in Europe? Was he in Europe? Was that where he went?

Wood: Yes, he was in Iceland [1 ½ years] a long time, and then he was sent home, and then he was sent to Europe. [33 months in Europe]

Amthor: Can you tell us what life was like at home during the war? When he was in Europe, what did you do?

Wood: Well, I was living with my parents, because he didn't want me to work, I guess. We just did the usual things, taking care of the house and my mother always had a garden, so we had gardening and canning and things like that that they did.

Amthor: Did you do a lot of sewing?

Wood: I did a lot of embroidery and stuff; things like that. [We both, my mother and I, sewed and crocheted. She made a lot of quilt blocks by hand, too.]

Amthor: Do you remember what you did for entertainment? Anything about music or what you did for fun?

Wood: I listened a lot to the radio at home, but I don't – I was trying to think what we did do. [We always attended the Baptist Church and, of course, I helped with children in Sunday School, played piano etc. – sometimes took my little brother to the movies.]

Unknown: Music lessons.

Wood: That was when I was a kid. I always went to church and stuff. We had things at church that we did; things like that.

Amthor: Do you remember getting the feed sacks?

Wood: Oh, yes. Lot of things were made out of those. Of course I spent a lot of time writing letters because I had not only my husband and two brothers in service, but I had several cousins and, of course, I had to write to them too, so it took a lot of time doing that type of thing which doesn't seem important now.,

Amthor: Now, did you have any children during that time?

Wood: No, we didn't have any children until after the war.

Amthor: What was it like when he came home? Did you have any celebrations?

Wood: Oh, yes! Of course, we immediately after we came here and everything, then we went over to his parents over there in Ohio, and they had a family reunion back there too. Is that what you mean?

Amthor: Yes.

Wood: Of course, we always had to do here and over there too; everything like that.

Unknown: You were working over at the school. When did you start that?

Wood: Oh, that was after the kids – after I had kids. But when I first graduated, I worked for the school that summer before I started to college. That's when I was repairing books. [I became secretary in 1963 at the school.]

Amthor: Tell us about that. What was it like repairing books?

Wood: I don't know, it just seemed like the normal thing to do because that's what they had taught us in class. Did you have that?

Unknown: No, I didn't.

Kelley: What class was it that you had? Where was it at, and who did that?

Wood: It was at Hopkins High School up here and that was just one of the regular classes. [It was called Library Economy.]

Unknown: What teacher? You don't remember the teacher? Was that during the WPA time was it? That's when the government put all those projects out.

Wood: I don't know, could have been, I don't remember that part of it. I just sure remember the class. [So far as I know, it was just a regular class.]

Kelley: Where did you get the books to repair?

Wood: It was just library books in school. They didn't throw them away like they did when I was working up there later. You know, that really bothered me, that I would see such things because I had spent so much time repairing books. They didn't know about sewing them together and putting the backs back on and things like that.

Unknown: I was going to say how did you do it.

Wood: That's what we did; we sewed them. We had awls that went through and then you sewed, I mean it was sewed by hand. Yes, we repaired books; that was part of it.

Amthor: Did you do some gluing work on them too?

Wood: I suppose whenever we needed it, yes, to get the backs on. You know, over the spine part?

Unknown: Oh, yes.

Wood: You had to glue that back on like that.

Kelley: How long did you go to college?

Wood: Two years, I guess, anyway.

Amthor: Were you getting a degree in teaching?

Wood: That's what I – but I didn't finish. I quit and I was going to earn money and go back, but I got – [I did go back one semester and later when I worked at school, I took a college course at night.]

Unknown: Sidetracked.

Kelley: Where did you stay?

Wood: I stayed at home. College students used to drive. There'd be one that would be the driver that year and he'd go around and pick everybody up and take us to college.

Unknown: How many of you were doing it at that time?

Wood: Well, it was different; usually four or five at least, or six some times. It was a car load.

Amthor: You went to Maryville to college?

Wood: Yes. Then there was one boy that was from Pickering; we'd stop and pick him up.

Amthor: Was it mostly girls, or mostly guys?

Wood: Both. I guess there were more girls than boys, but it was always a fellow that was driving the car; I mean it just happened that way.

Amthor: So were you still – you were done with college when the war –

Wood: I wasn't in college, I just plain quit to earn money to go back to college.

Amthor: You quit before the war?

Wood: Yes. I was working in the store when that happened, and then after Ralph and I were married and he was in Breckenridge, I went down to Evansville, Indiana, which was just across the river from there, and he would come back at night, you know, and he had to get up in the wee hours and go back to camp. I worked in a meat market which was a real eye opener for me, because I had never been around anything like that. Of course, I didn't do the butchering, I was just the one that was – and that's where I found out that people ate tails, and noses, and ears and – I just was dumbfounded.

Amthor: You didn't eat those at your house?

Wood: I always lived in town; I didn't know anything about that kind of thing.

Amthor: Did you ever watch them actually do the meat packing? Has it changed over the years?

Wood: They didn't have it out – well, we just had to put it in some kind of package, and we had to get it ready for the cashier, I guess. They would go by there to pay it and pay in their ration coupons and everything, and that kind of stuff. We had to mark it and get everything ready for her after the person told us what they wanted - we had to get it fixed up so that when they got over there, they'd be ready.

Amthor: How did they preserve the meat?

Wood: I don't know anything about that part.

Amthor: So, it was pretty fresh meat then?

Wood: Yes, it was fresh meat. Supposed to be, so I suppose. . . but I know that I wasn't the only one there just because their husband was in service. There were other people working there. I know that there was – well, I can remember particularly one, it was a school teacher that was there. Just general people that had come because their husband was in service.

Kelley: Was it hard to find housing then?

Wood: We just had one room. Of course, I was never there, anyway, except you know,

Unknown: at night.

Wood: Just a room and bathroom, like that; that's all.

Amthor: Did you have a little kitchenette too?

Wood: No, we shared it with the owners. These people went to the church where we were going when we were there. It worked out.

Amthor: How was traveling? Did you have a car that you used?

Wood: We had no car. No, buses and trains.

Kelley: How did you get to Evansville then from here?

Wood: Bus. But we went on trains, too, out of here, going on to. . . I can remember we went on a train.

Unknown: How did you meet Ralph? Since he

Wood: Through my cousin; I had a cousin that knew him.

Unknown: In Ohio?

Wood: Yes. It was through them. I can remember one thing that she didn't mention, I don't think, that when you were riding buses or trains, there would be people or organizations maybe that especially for the military that would want to give them a snack or something like that. I don't think she mentioned that, did she? I think she didn't know about it, but I know they did.

Unknown: Well, I kind of remember something like that.

Amthor: When you corresponded with your family, your relatives that were in the military, did you receive much back? Did they write back? How long did that take and so forth?

Wood: I don't remember that; how long it took. Oh, yes, we wrote all the time, but I don't remember how long it took. They were censored, I know that.

Amthor: Did they write back?

Wood: Yes, they wrote back, but I'm saying the letters were censored.

Amthor: How often did you get a letter from your husband?

Wood: I don't know. He wrote every time he could. I wrote every day I guess, but he'd write just as often as he could. I got a lot of mail; and from my cousins and my brothers. It was always censored, of course.

Unknown: Your Dad was in the first war?

Wood: Yes.

Amthor: Was there anything that you can remember about it that stand out in your mind that made an impression on you during that time period during the war or just life in the '40s that kind of made a lasting impression?

Unknown: Did you come here to work after Ralph got out of the service?

Wood: I didn't go back to work; he didn't want me to work. I don't know why, but. . . .

Unknown: Was it Hopkins where he worked then?

Wood: Oh, after he was out of service. He worked here in Hopkins. Then we moved to Ohio for a while; we were there two years.

Unknown: What was he working at, Dorothea, mechanic, or what?

Wood: Oliver Young was doing plumbing, a neighbor of my parents and he had him help in and that's where Ralph learned to do plumbing.

Unknown: That's right; he was a plumber for a long time, wasn't he.

Wood: Yes. I don't remember the years of when he did different things. [He also went to college while he worked.] (College at Maryville)

Unknown: That's my ticket; I don't remember years any more.

Wood: And of course he worked down at the hospital for twenty years, in Maryville.

Unknown: Then he came back here and was custodian at the school

Wood: He was at the school for five or six years before he went down there to the hospital.

Unknown: How many years did you spend up here at the school?

Wood: Over twenty-three.

Unknown: She was secretary to the superintendent.

Amthor: Okay. If there isn't anything else that we can think of right now, I appreciate you coming in and meeting you guys.

Wood: Well, thank you.

Amthor: It's been real interesting.

Wood: I'm sorry I couldn't help more.

Amthor: Oh, that's okay.