

Carole Oberhauser

Amthor: 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 Council, and with support from the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today's date is March 12, 2009, and this interview is being conducted at the Hopkins Historic Society Museum in Hopkins, Missouri, in Nodaway County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley and we're here to interview Carole Oberhauser and she was born on October 1, 1936 and she's going to tell us a little bit about life in the 1940s and that her husband participated in the war as well.

Amthor: Carole, could you tell us a little bit about your background; could you tell us where and when you were born; a little bit about your family, your parents, what occupations they had, and if you had any brothers and sisters?

Oberhauser: Yes. I was born here in Hopkins on a farm, raised on a farm and there were two sets of twin boys and three girls in the family, and there was twenty-two years between the oldest and the youngest. By the time I and my younger brother came along, most of them were all gone from home. When we were four, we lived on the west side of town. We moved over to the east side of town into a great big farm house and that's of course when the war, was going on, kids pay attention, and back then neighbors visited neighbors – you didn't have TV. That's all they talked about was the war, then you went home and you worried about it. I hate to say this but my biggest worry back then from just listening, when we'd get home I'd say to my mom, "Are the Japanese coming to get us?" But it was a worry – that's what they talked about and things that are being done, and then I think probably when I was about six in '42 or '43, we had a lot of close neighbors and there were four boys within two and a half miles radius of us that got killed during the war and of course whenever that happened the neighbors all knew about it because everybody called everybody on the phone. That was a worry, too. Then the rationing came in, and the shortage of rubber and sugar and all that. I have my coupon book where we had to go take it if we wanted a pair of shoes or you were allowed so many and you'd have to borrow off your sister or brother if one needed it worse than the other. I remember, too, I don't know the year, but I suppose it was in that time period – bubble gum. We use to have to sign up at the grocery store; put our name down, and they'd get one big box of bubble gum then. You were allowed so many pieces. So that was always the day we wanted to get to town when the bubble gum came in, we'd ride our horses. I remember, too, that rubber being so short, neighbors and farmers would bring their used tires to one farm, near one place, and several of them would come and switch and swap to get a pair of tires that was the same size. Then it was always a big deal to get to – of course usually all the farmer's milked their cows and sold their cream and gathered the eggs and sold the eggs and that was their money. Just like folks have jobs today. It was a big deal to get to go to Peve's Produce and pick out your feed sacks. They were printed and they used those to make clothes. I had several dresses and skirts made out of them. Then the ladies would wash them and take them to club meetings, and if one had one that matched one, they'd trade around with them till they got enough to make their dresses or aprons, or whatever. Some of them, I guess, made shirts.

Oberhauser: I remember, too, they used to take the cigarette packages and scrape the tin foil off of the inner wrapper and ball it up because there was a shortage of that. They'd send it in. I can remember seeing people do that. I'm sure it was hard back then, but I'm not really old enough to

Amthor: How about the cooking? Or did you have to substitute different things for sugar?

Oberhauser: Margaret called me last night wanting to know if I had found that recipe for that sugarless cake. I have it; she thought maybe my mother-in-law or maybe my mom would have had it, and I do have some of their cookbooks, but I don't remember, though, we had a great big strawberry patch Mom usually canned about 100 quart of them every summer. Anyway, I remember we used white syrup on the strawberries and I thought that it was really delicious to dip that strawberry in the white syrup I don't ever remember being short of food, I'm sure my mother had a hard time with that many kids there, trying to feed them, but I don't – she was resourceful.

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

Oberhauser: We visited the neighbors; maybe one night a week, or they came to our house.

Amthor: Now, when the war started and we entered the war with Pearl Harbor being attacked, do you remember what was going on at that time in your house?

Oberhauser: I don't. I'm sure we heard about it and all that, but I don't remember.

Amthor: Do you remember any of the propaganda that was being said on the radio? Did you listen to the radio a lot?

Oberhauser: My folks did, and I'm sure I heard some of it. I think that's why I thought they were coming over but I couldn't really relate any of that.

Amthor: Did they use the radio to listen to the progress of the war?

Oberhauser: Oh, yes!

Amthor: How about the farming or the school at that time? What was school like?

Oberhauser: Well, I went to a country school, all eight grades there. We had the largest school in Nodaway County, I think every year I was out there; Unity School, district 4. They had community meetings once a month. They would either have a supper, or a pie and coffee. Our school had a basement in it, which was kind of unusual. We could have a little stove down there, and people if they wanted to take something – we used to boil eggs at noon. That was some very good years. Of course, then I had these twin brothers that were seven years older than I were, and they were basketball players, so we got to go – of course we didn't go out of town, but we got to go in here with my folks to the ball games. That was probably was the biggest entertainment.

Amthor: Now did you go to any movies?

Oberhauser: Not till I probably got eleven, twelve years old.

Amthor: How about music? Is there any popular music?

Oberhauser: Mersie Doats and Sioux City Sue and all those were coming out back then when I was probably ten, eleven years old.

Amthor: Did they have a lot of dances for the older kids?

Oberhauser: Quite a few. They all liked to dance. I was a Morehouse and Morehouse's like to dance.

Amthor: How about the end of the war? Did your family have any fear that there might be Communism and maybe a fear of polio or anything like that after the war?

Oberhauser: I can remember something about the polio, but I don't remember it well enough, but I do remember people being kind of upset about it; worrying about it, yes. But I don't - I think the worst thing that happened during the war was - let's see, it would be my mom's brother's wife, the lady he married had a son that was in the Navy and he had written his mother a letter and he asked her to save that stamp for him for when he got home, so she thought she'd take that stamp off and put it - I don't know what she was going to do with it to preserve it and under neath the stamp he had written that they'd cut his tongue out. I think that was when it probably hit home with us that he was a prisoner.

Kelley: Was he a prisoner of war? [Yes he was a prisoner of war.]

Oberhauser: I can't even tell you that; I just remember about that stamp deal that he had asked her to save it in the letter. Back then they censored all the stuff that they wrote home, and before they'd even mail it.

Amthor: And did he make it home okay?

Oberhauser: To my knowledge, he did. It's been so long ago, and I wasn't too old, but I think he did, but I don't know. I don't remember what happened after that. He just - that's the way he told her about it.

Amthor: He just wanted to make sure that she knew -

Oberhauser: Something had happened if he didn't and I just can't say he did or he didn't make it home, but I just remember about the stamp, and him writing that under the stamp: they've cut my tongue out.

Amthor: Now did any of your family members go to war?

Oberhauser: Not in the Second World War. My Dad was in the First, and my brothers in the Korean and my nephew in Vietnam.

Amthor: Is there any other memory of your life that you wanted to share about the forties before we move on to your husband? Some other thing that might have stood out that you can remember?

Oberhauser: They weren't bad years. They were coming out of the Depression, too. I have to always marvel at this: my folks bought this farm in 1940 and gave 66 dollars an acre for it. I always thought, you know, through the years, now that's progress, and it's still the same farm; still the same ground. We had good times; we rode horses and bicycles, and I wish the kids today could have part of that. Time's change.

Amthor: Okay, tell us about your husband and his service in the war.

Oberhauser: His first wife died when his daughter, Marla, was born. I'm getting ahead of myself. He was drafted, I think, in '41 or '42. I brought the wrong paper with me. He was with the 13th armored division and he was in Fort Knox, Kentucky, for quite a while and then he was shipped overseas to Germany and he was a gunner on a tanker when they took the Rhine River. I brought a map if anybody wants to look at their path. He kept in contact with about six of them until he died; they would write or call back and forth. After Marla is our son Shane, and he's a reader; we'd go to the library when he was about fourth, fifth grade and Norm had always said he was in the Second World War but Shane knew more about it than he did! He was a history buff. I tried to get him to come with me, because I knew he could remember more than I could, but I didn't succeed. He lives next door to Margaret. He never- he didn't talk too much about it.

Amthor: How long was he over there?

Oberhauser: I can't tell you just how long he was overseas; I suppose a year or two. He was in the service a little over three years. He got home I think the last of '45 or '46. I'm not sure about that.

Amthor: When did you guys get married?

Oberhauser: In '61.

Amthor: It was quite a few years later.

Oberhauser: Yes. Because he got married to Marla's mother right after he got home. She died in childbirth.

Amthor: So, did he tell you anything about his training or anything, if he had any special training?

Oberhauser: No, not really. I mean, he just didn't talk about it too much. Somebody would ask him, he would.

Amthor: So what do you think is the difference between what happened during the forties and the war and the economy and if you could make a comparison between that time period and now, with the war that's going on and the economy, how would you describe that, or do you have any comment about that?

Oberhauser: Well, I would say probably say that people were a lot more resourceful back then than they are today. But I'm sure they had the same problems, basically, that they do now. You bought a farm back then, it went through – lot of times FHA and they came around maybe every two months and visited with you. I can remember this lady coming – can't remember her name, but I can remember seeing her – it must have been about every two months, and you had to can so much food, and all that, and she always tried to come when it was dinner time, because my Mom was a good cook. They got to be real friends and Louis Ritterbush, was the head, I think, of FHA at that time, when they bought the farm, he helped my Dad get that. He was called to war and I have a Christmas card that he sent my dad while he was over there. They were good to my parents and helped them a lot. Like I said, she would can a hundred quarts of beans or corn and you know, fruit, and we don't do that too much anymore. I think we've gotten used to the comforts, but why wouldn't we? The women have gone to work and they don't have time to do a lot of that we used to do. Therefore, the kids probably miss out on learning a lot too. We've made these changes for them, so we can't blame the kids, I don't think. That's about all I'm . . .

Amthor: Did either one of you have a question for her before we quit? Okay. I'm glad you came in – I really enjoyed your interview.

Oberhauser: Thanks. It's nice that Margaret told me where you were.

Kelley: That was a good interview.