

## BOBBY AND NORMA CLARK

Joni: This is a portion of the oral histories of Northwest Missouri in the 1940's program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and the support from the National Indemnity Mandate. Today's date is February 3, 2009 and we are conducting this interview at TJ's Café in King City, Missouri, in Gentry County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and the assistant is Margaret Kelly and we are here with Bobby and Norma Clark and Bobby was born June 9, 1930 and Norma, February 23, 1930 and they both lived during the 1940's and they are going to tell us a little bit about life there and life through the war.

Joni: We will start with Norma. Kind of tell me a little bit about your background, your family, your parents occupation, how many brothers and sisters you had, just what life was like.

Norma: I am an only child which I regret now. My father was cashier at the bank here for 49 years. My mother was just a mother at home; she did do some bookkeeping work for the Maupin Feed Company that was prosperous at that time. I went to high school here, graduated in 1948. We walked everywhere, especially during the war, my Dad had no car, we walked to town for groceries, and we walked to town every night, well not every night, but most every night to the Rexall Drug Store to carry home a quart of milk that came from the Berry Dairy that was just located South of town. I had a fairly happy childhood, of course I was an only child and I got my way pretty much. Let me see, I had 5 uncles in the war. We were very much blessed because they all came home. Some of them were in the midst of some of the fiercest battles both in the South Pacific and in Germany. So we felt very blessed. My mother and grandmother were very proud of the five star little banners that they had in the windows with five stars on them. I remember when my Uncle Dan left for the war, he was drafted, and I'm not sure about the others. My Grandmother didn't want her picture taken unless she had her hat on so my mother loaned her a hat, it was a fancy hat; it was kind of funny because it didn't fit her personality at all. She was a lovely lady, she had 7 children, 5 boys and 2 girls and my mother was one of the girls. Let me see, what else do I need to say.

Joni: Tell us about the banners, the five star banners.

Norma: You probably don't remember those. They looked like a little flag and they were about 12 inches square and you hung them in the window and that was to represent that you had family in the war.

Bobby: A star for each one.

Norma: A star for each member and you know life in those days they didn't have the stipulation that all the boys could go. Now, I think they have changed that. I remember one of my uncles that served in Germany. He was in the Hurtgen Forrest and that was one of the biggest battles and he and mother had concocted a code so that he could get back to her where he was and I remember reading the letter and picking out the letters that he had specified specially because everything was censored. All the letters were censored and just wish I had that letter now and some more things. I didn't save things like I should have. It was a growing experience for us, we had a ration card, my dad sold his car and I remember Mother sweetening our iced tea with

lemon drops, she would put the lemon drops in while the tea was brewing and that made it a little sweet. I don't remember ever being hungry and we lived right in town and we could walk wherever we needed to go. I don't remember having a lack of anything, we had shortages but we always had food on the table.

Joni: How did the coupons work?

Norma: Let me see, how did the coupons work? I think I still have some of those in my cedar chest at home that Mother used. I'm not sure I can remember much, I remember seeing them.

Joni: They were in the ration books?

Norma: Yes, but you see in '41 and '42 I was just 11 and 12. A lot of those things I can't remember, I can't put my finger on anything else.

Joni: What did you do for entertainment?

Norma: Well, there was the radio and we had the newspaper.

Joni: Where were you and what were you doing when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Norma: I remember picking up the newspaper off the front porch that day and opening it up and there it was. You know I was a teenager and I don't suppose it made the impact on me that it probably should have or would have if I had been 5 or 10 years older but I knew it was bad and at that time we didn't have the graphics that we have now like on television where you see everything. I just hope and pray we don't have to go through that again. That was no fun. That was a big tragedy.

Joni: What was it like in school?

Norma: I had a good time in school. I always went to King City school and we walked all the way and my Mother would make me wear these long brown cotton stockings, you probably don't remember them, and they wouldn't stay up and they would bag at the knees, so she would put them on me and head me out for school and I would get out of sight of the house and I would roll them down. I hated those old brown stockings, but we walked and either carried our lunch or walked home for lunch. I enjoyed school. I made very good grades. I enjoyed playing in the band and singing. I liked music. We had a good time. I remember we were on a hayride one time, this was when I was in high school and I was sitting on one side and I guess we all sat on one side and the hay frame turned over and I scraped my face on the cement. That was no fun. I remember several of our young men in school, they were older than I was and they left school to enlist in the service. You probably should interview some of them during this time, if you haven't already. We didn't want for anything, none of the basics.

Joni: Did you have any of the clothing made out of the flour sacks?

Norma: My mother did. I'm not sure but I may have one of those dresses tucked away somewhere in a cedar chest but yes she did and she had to match them up so that she could get enough for a dress or a blouse or something. Yes, she made my clothes.

Joni: Did you listen to the radio a lot to get to know what was going on?

Norma: Yes, that was about all we had besides the newspaper.

Joni: How did you feel about the dropping of the atomic bomb, did you think Truman did the right thing? That was a big impact.

Norma: It was a big impact. It was a big decision on his part. I think he did the right thing but I don't think we realized that until later because it did save a lot of American lives. I have a very good friend who was growing up in Japan at that time and they suffered and they were hungry and she would tell about catching grasshoppers and eating them for protein because that's all they had and they suffered. War is never fun, war is traumatic and I just can't imagine having to send a son off to war, I didn't have to do that.

Joni: We will go on to Bobby now.

Bobby: OK.

Joni: Tell us about your family in the 40's and a little about your parents and your family.

Bobby: We lived on a farm, my Dad was a farmer and mother, of course, was a housekeeper, she didn't work out like the women do today, she took care of the house and during the 40's and during the war time we never were hungry or anything, but never did have a lot of money but we had enough to get along real well. I can remember that whenever I got old enough to drive we had an old car and it was war time and we didn't have gasoline, you had to have I think the farmers had a "B" card that allowed them a little more than the "A" card which I think you got 5 gallons a week on the "A" card. He had tractors and we had needed tractor gas and we used a lot of tractor gas in our cars. We didn't have any good tires and he found an old tire in a junk yard and he had it sent off and vulcanized and I can remember yet him telling me whenever you leave, son, don't forget about that tire that's heavy on one side, he said don't drive over 35 miles an hour because we just had the 4 tires. It was a good time; we lived in a good time. You asked Norma about school, one of the things I thought about in war time was all of our teachers came out of retirement. Well we had one young teacher that she had just got out of college and all the rest of the teachers had come out of retirement and the kids didn't have a bunch of subjects they could take like they do now. They told us "This is what we've got and this is what you can take." And that's what we did but they did the best they could with what they had to work with, I guess. We had a good time.

Joni: How about sports, did you continue to have sports at that time?

Bobby: There were sports but they didn't have anybody to be a coach. The teacher that taught Vocational Ag, he was the coach and the boys that were old enough to play football real good they most generally quit school in their junior year and either enlisted or was drafted. So that left a bunch of smaller ones to play but all of the other schools were the same way. We had a good time.

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

Bobby: My mother had four brothers that were in the war and they all came home. One brother was in chemical warfare and he never had to go over seas. The other three were over seas. One brother was in the Philippines and one brother was in supply, he left in February of '42 and he didn't come home until in March of '45 and he had never been home, he had some furloughs but he just stayed and the other brother was in the Marines and he fought on Bougainville, Saipan, Okinawa and he was wounded twice.

Joni: So you were even too young to even be drafted at that time. You bypassed the war.

Bobby: Yes. In '41 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor I was just 11 years old.

Joni: So what were you doing that day?

Bobby: We were at a family get-together and this happened to be at my mother's family and she had 5 brothers and they happened to all be there that day and I can remember one of the boys had been in the house and we were all outside doing I don't remember what, but he came running outside and said "Oh, the bombed Pearl Harbor." I remember it like yesterday.

Joni: Do you remember the coupon books and that type of thing?

Bobby: Oh yes. We bought stamps at school and I think I finally filled an 1875 stamp book which at maturity was \$25.00. War bonds and our school paid enough to buy a P-51.

Norma: That was neat. I had nearly forgotten.

Bobby: Of course I liked airplanes better than you did.

Joni: Do you think if you were old enough would you have enlisted or would you have stayed on the farm?

Bobby: I probably would have enlisted just like the rest of boys did but I was too young and I would have been eligible for the Korean War but when it broke out me and her were married and we already had two kids.

Joni: That kept you deferred.

Bobby: Yes, that deferred me. I was 1-A for about 2 weeks and then they changed me over to a, I believe, it was a 2-C and that deferred me.

Joni: That was probably OK, especially if your had a family. You said your mother had 5 brothers, did they all go?

Bobby: No, one brother was too old. The next brother down was 38 but they still drafted him.

Joni: It is surprising; there was a fellow that said they drafted all four, him and his 3 brothers at the same time. They all came back together. I didn't think they were allowed to draft all of them.

Bobby: Two of my uncles went at the same time in February and the other brother wanted to – he knew he was going to be drafted so he enlisted in the Marines, that was the one that was part

of Iwo Jima and then the other brother was deferred until they got the crops out and then they drafted him in, I think, October.

Joni: Did the farmers have a special compensation to be able to stay home, I don't know what it was called back then where if you were a farmer you were able to supply the food. Was there something special that allowed them to stay home?

Bobby: Well, the United States had to produce food so a lot of the farmers were deferred but most of the farmers that were deferred were over 38 years old.

Norma: But they didn't get any compensation from the government?

Bobby: Not that I know of.

Joni: So what did you think about the bombing, the Japanese bombing?

Bobby: It saved lots of lives. There was no doubt in my mind that they did the right thing. If you don't think so, talk to some of the service men.

Joni: You were both in high school when it happened?

Bobby: Yes.

Joni: How did you feel at that point being a high school student?

Bobby: It was a horrible thing to imagine that 25,000 people were eliminated their tracks and never knew what hit them but still I've talked to many servicemen that said if they hadn't have had the bombs that I wouldn't have been here.

Norma: I remember seeing the pictures in Life Magazine, you don't hear of Life Magazine any more, but that brought it all closer to home because it was such a magnitude of destruction.

Bobby: War is a terrible thing.

Joni: Do you remember any of the songs or movies that happened during the war, any which stood out that made it bigger than life type thing?

Bobby: "This is the Army Mr. Jones," it had Ronald Reagan in it and Joan Leslie. The music was all Irving Berlin and he was in it. "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition"

Norma: Kate Smith and "God Bless America."

Bobby: She was the only one that could sing it until she couldn't do it anymore and then Irving Berlin and somebody else sang it. And then he wrote the song back in the '20s and stuck it a drawer and it came out during the war.

Joni: Did you hear any special stories from your relatives that stand out in your mind that you would like to share with us about the war, some specific story that made an impact on your life?

Bobby: My uncle was in the Marines who fought in three of the worst battles that were ever had. The first one was at Bougainville and he told me that the propaganda for they had given the Japanese they were scared to death of the American people, American soldiers and when they found out that they were going to be on that Island, the women through the children over a cliff and then jumped over themselves and he said that makes an impact on you. He also said that fought the Imperial Japanese Army and he said he had seen on pictures that the Japanese were all small, he said that's a farce because all of the ones in this marines, they were 250 pounders, great big men and he said they would not give up, just keep charging one right after the other. It was Hell.

Joni to Norma: Do you have any stories?

Norma: No, I just remember my oldest Uncle was in the Seabees and he was put on the Philippine islands, where was he put on?

Bobby: He was on Guadalcanal. He helped build the air field.

Norma: The first air field that was built there and there were Japanese all around him. You know they really didn't enjoy talking too much, about sharing too much about it. My Uncle Dan, he served in the South Pacific and they sent him to Europe and then they sent him back again to the South Pacific, so he traveled a lot. He was the one of my uncles that found the Lord, believed totally in the Lord and he was the one that saw the most action. He didn't want to kill but he had no choice. So we are just thankful that they all came back.

Joni: Do you remember when they were coming back, not only your uncles but maybe other town kids were coming back? What was that like, did they all come back all at once, did they all show up within the same year, did they have a big event whenever people showed up?

Norma: I remember, now it is all coming back to me, I was in, a friend of mine, June Kennedy, she's married a Whetsell now, we practiced a song because our church was going to have a service for them when they all came back and we practiced singing a song "When the Lights Go on Again All Over The World." But I don't remember the service I don't know whether that ever happened or not. But we did, we looked forward to them coming back and they were truly, truly welcomed.

Joni: Did you have any concerns about the economy or disease, polio or TB after the war?

Bobby: Of course we were all scared about polio but before we got too \_\_\_\_\_ about it they found they didn't have to get in the iron lung, you know. Things came out that they were able to take care of that.

Joni: So where did this disease – How did it become a concern? What caused it to be a concern at that time?

Norma: Did we have several around here that had it, I don't remember.

Bobby: No, we just saw it in the papers and heard it on the radio. I don't know of anybody around here that had it really. This is a pretty protected community, a lot things that go on away from here we never hear about here.

Norma: We didn't have TV then.

Joni: What type of radio shows did you listen to?

Norma: Oh Amos and Andy. Then daytime we had these serials that were on like, oh I can't remember them.

Bobby: Oh Stella Dallas and Maw Perkins, Pepper Young's Family and of a night Fibber Magee and Molly and Inner Sanctum were some of them and of course Jack Armstrong and Captain Midnight.

Norma: All American Boy.

Joni: So how did that compare to TV now? Did you enjoy listening to the radio?

Both: Oh yes

Bobby: We enjoyed the radio then just as much as we enjoy TV now but I've got a bunch of tapes on Bob Hope's Show and The Shadow and Fibber Magee and Molly. You listen to it and it's entertaining but it's kind of old hat and you wonder why that you thought so much of in those days.

Norma: Well that's all we had.

Joni: Did you have electricity or indoor plumbing that time when you were in high school or before?

Norma: I always, we lived in town but we did not have water in the house. We had the little house out in the back, especially when I was little but when I was in high school we moved into a house that had running water and a bath tub and hot water and things like that but this fellow here he didn't have that.

Bobby: My folks didn't have electricity until I was 17 years old. We had a bath with a path.

Norma: Did you bathe every week?

Bobby: Yeah, we all bathed in the same tub.

Norma: The cleanest one got in first.

Bobby: I most usually got in first; Dad had to be the last. That sounds terrible but that is the way it was.

Joni: Usually the dads were probably the dirtiest. The one with the least dirt would go in first.

Joni: Your tub water was probably the hottest too.

Bobby: We had the teakettle and we had to carry the water in.

Norma: You know I think families were closer together then, than they are now. Neighbors helped neighbors a little more; especially they still do now in desperate situations. But you spent more time with your neighbor, played cards, you visited more. I think that's kind of sad today because we have neighbors but we don't know them very well.

Bobby: The community I grew up in the neighbors all helped one another, they helped one another butcher and then each one would get together and we would go to this guys and cut wood for him because they all burned wood and they would get together in the summer time and all go to the river and seine and then they would have a big fish fry. But nobody has time to do that now. It's a different time. In the hard times in the '40s we had an old car but the only thing that car was for was to take the produce to town and then on Saturday night come to town for a social thing on Saturday night and you'd go back home and you put the car in the shed and everybody walked to where you wanted to go. Nobody thought anything about it because everybody did it. When you went to high school there would be 4 or 5 cars out in front of the high school. You go up there today and you can't find a place to park and they've got a parking lot, two parking lots. Different time, I don't say it's wrong but I'm just telling you the times were different.

Norma: The movie on Saturday night cost how much, do you remember?

Bobby: Well when I was 10 or 11 years old I got in for a dime and it was a double feature.

Norma: And then you got a hot dog.

Bobby: My allowance on Saturday night was 20 cents. A dime took me to the show and I could go to John Deshler's and buy a hot dog and a bottle of orange pop for a dime. I was in seventh heaven.

Joni: Is that what you did on Saturday night?

Bobby: Yes. Except going to the show with her.

Norma: We started going to the show when we were

Bobby: 8 years old.

Norma: But we wouldn't walk in together because we didn't want anybody to see us go in together.

Joni: Then did you have your own 20 cents?

Norma: Yes

Bobby: Oh I wouldn't have paid for her, I didn't have the money.

Norma: Like I say, we lived here in town and Hiram Danbury had the theatre at that time and if I would pay to go to a movie one night then my folks would come to town and they would sit uptown in the cars and the parents would sit and talk and visit and watch the people go by. So I



would go to the theatre and I'd tell Mr. Danver now I saw this show last night and I paid for last night, could I see it free again tonight and he would say yes. You know, you just never know until you ask.

Bobby: You couldn't walk down the street here on Saturday night for the people.

Norma: Do you remember how Harm Danbury and Mary used to sell those extras that were sold in war?

Bobby: Yes. Movie Tone News.

Norma: One of those, one time, my Mother had gone to the movies and she thought she saw one of her brothers. Hiram Danbury showed that film for her again. We were standing in the movie one night and this was when we were a little older and all of a sudden we saw this fog coming toward you and somebody had thrown pepper into the fan out back, black pepper, we evacuated.

Bobby: People came out with their eyes a streaming. Just a little prank that happened occasionally.

Joni: So when you would walk in separately to the movie did you meet inside?

Norma: Yes, we did.

Bobby: We would meet inside and sit together and then when we left, we left separately.

Joni: Did you ever actually talk to each other?

Bobby: Oh yes.

Norma: We've been married 60 years last October.

Joni: So you two were married right after high school

Norma: Yes. 1948, right after, yes. I haven't regretted a day of that.

Joni: How many children do you have?

Norma: We have two sons but we have 7 grandchildren and we are expecting our 13<sup>th</sup> great grandchild. So we can hardly wait for that one to come and it may be twins so that would be 14 and that would make it better than 13. We've struggled at times but the good Lord has seen us through all of that.

Joni: I have one last question?

Norma: OK.

Joni: If you could give advice to college kids today about life in the 1940's, what would you say?

Norma: About the 1940's.

Bobby: It's so different now than it was in the '40s. There probably was maybe less than a ¼ of the class went to college and of course today if you don't have a college education you can't get a real good job, although our oldest son worked for IBM and he said that every year the college kids that would send in their resume to IBM they would bypass the top three and take the ones that were in the middle range but still today without a college education it's bad for them.

Norma: So you would recommend that more of them would have gone to college, back in the '40s, I mean your advice today would be that they get a college education, is that what you are saying?

Bobby: Today, it wasn't so mandatory in our time. There were a lot of jobs available when I graduated from school; of course my dad had all the work for me to do. I never did work for anyone else, we always had plenty of work to do on the farm and then in the later years when just before we were married and after we were married, dad had some of the first hay balers in this area and that is all I did was bale hay from Maysville to Conception until more hay balers came out, then it wasn't quite as demanding as it was in those days but we had my two uncles that was in the service, they came back and started farming with Dad and we run four hay balers and each one of us would bale 100,000 bales a year. I would start baling the 4<sup>th</sup> of June and I'd quit the 15<sup>th</sup> of September and I wouldn't do a thing except bale hay all that time. They do a lot of hay baling now but this was the old square bales, they have the great big bales now. I was able to make spending money by putting up hay and you asked a young boy if he wanted to put up hay and he wanted to know what tractor you used to bale the bales. It's different, it's OK but it's just a different time.

Joni: That's the difference between the family farm and that's important. The changes are not all good.

Bobby: The changes are all good. Those good old days, I'll take today because back in the old days they didn't have pace makers, defibrillators, I mean people just died. I suppose life expectancy in the '40s, a man was probably in the 60's and I think it's in the upper 70's today.

Norma: Maybe more than that.

Joni: Do you have any other last comments you would like to share with us, anything that stands out in your mind?

Bobby: It's great to be alive. God is good.

Norma: God is good and you have to have faith that God will take care of you no matter where you are, what you are doing. Work is good.

Joni: I want to thank both of you for coming today. It has been an honor to meet both of you and listen to your stories.

