ELIZABETH RINGOLD

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's date is November 6, 2008, and this interview is being conducted at the Nodaway County Historical Society Museum, located in Maryville, Missouri. The interviewer is Cathy Palmer, and assisting is Margaret Kelley. The interviewee is Elizabeth Botkin Anderson Ringold and she lived during the 1940s and this interview is her story of the life during this time period, including World War II.

Cathy: Elizabeth, where were you born, and when were you born?

Elizabeth: I was born in Skidmore, Missouri, on January 13, 1918.

Cathy: Oh, that's a cold birthday!

Elizabeth: Yes, usually, very cold.

Cathy: Tell us about your family, your parents.

Elizabeth: My parents were – my father was a farmer but formerly had taught for several years, and my mother had been a teacher too. I had one sister, who was eight years older than I, and our family was small, but very close. It was the kind of family that because my parents were teachers, expected a lot. They expected you to do well in school and if you couldn't make anything but a B, that was alright, but they really expected you to make that A. If you didn't – if you came home and said you had trouble with your classes, they sat you down at the kitchen table after supper and you worked on whatever your problem was until it was solved. I remember those days very distinctly. Math was my problem, so my poor father labored on me quite a while.

Cathy: Lot of time at the kitchen table?

Elizabeth: Yes, a lot of time.
Cathy: Tell us about your life before World War II - before 1940. What were you doing?

Elizabeth: I finished high school in 1935. I came to Northwest and was enrolled for one year and one summer, and then began teaching a country school with forty hours. I look back and wonder about that – how could I do that on forty hours of work, but I did. Everyone was doing it then. The pay was 55 dollars a month and it was an eight month school, so I came back to short courses and summer school in the summer. I was asked to teach a nine month school, so I went there. It was a more modern school, just over the line in Atchison County, so I had a different superintendent, different county superintendent, a different set up, but I enjoyed the rural teaching. These schools were both close to my home, so I stayed at home while I was teaching. I saved my money and came back to school in 1939 and finished my degree in early childhood education. I finished one year and one summer, so by 1940 I had my degree. I had done student

teaching in the second grade with Mary Ellen Horan, and I had done two quarters – we went by quarters at that time – and I had done two quarters in the first grade for Marion Peterson. She was an especially charming person. I just loved her, and I liked working in that room. I'm sure that she was the one that recommended me to Miss Millikan, Mr. Phillips, who was in placement teacher tried to send me to South Missouri to a school down by Branson, and it was a very good school, and paid well. He was so aggravated with me that I wasn't interested in doing this, but Miss Millikan had said to me, "Now Elizabeth, if you get any offers, you turn them down. I want you to teach first grade." Since I was already engaged and did not want to leave the area, I was glad to accept the first grade at Horace Mann. They didn't pay well; remember this was a training situation, and that was their excuse for not giving you very much money. Evelyn Piper came in at the same time; she taught third grade, and Velma Coss was in nursery school, Barbara Zeller was in kindergarten. I had first grade and Mary Ellen Horan had second. Horace Mann was a different teaching situation. You not only had twenty-five children, but you had numerous student teachers. At that time no student teachers were sent out away from Maryville. All the teaching was done at Horace Mann and Eugene Field so you might have four or five student teachers; in the summer time you would have ten or twelve and you had to find some way to get them to have a meaningful situation so they honestly learned something about teaching. At the same time, you had to keep the twenty-five children on an even base. We had a music teacher and she had a student teacher, art teacher, and she had a student teacher. We had a phys ed teacher and she had a student teacher, so you see; you guided them around all these other teachers and held the thing together so to speak. We went out to visit the parents before the school started; we visited in every home and that way they knew me, and I got a chance to see their home. Miss Millikan was very particular about who attended Horace Mann. It was a limited number, and she was very particular about how she chose the students. Needless to say, most of the children came from the upper class from Maryville, but she mixed in a few from rural areas and also from less wealthy locations. So you had a mixture of children. It was prized to be able to go to Horace Mann. I did a lot of demonstration lessons; that means that Miss Millikan would bring her classes down, and we would give a demonstration. I think one of the best ones I ever did was writing. We were planning to have a party, so we were writing invitations to the mothers, and it all went beautifully that morning; everything fell into place, the children said what they were supposed to say. It all went well. I can remember Chloe left me a little note on the desk that said, something very complimentary, and I was really proud of that.

Then there was the time that I tried to explain something. People were studying to fly planes here. I attempted to tell how an airplane stayed in the air. That was not one of my better lessons. I remember it very distinctly. You took the children on a lot of little field trips, and then you wrote stories about them. I didn't really approve of the way that Chloe wanted us to teach reading but I did it. It was called the sentence method, or the phrase method. I don't know how they do it today. The children learned to read and I never will forget one mother. When I sent the first book home with the child to read, she made the child read all the words that were listed in the back of the book – not in context, just read them. She wanted to be sure that the child really could read. So you encountered all these funny little things as you went along.

The war, what I remember about the war was that we had limited amounts of paper and so on. We had this one program in the summer that we gave to raise money. We had these old costumes we had to use. Of course we worked the student teachers hard on that production. We

made up the story and used the costumes and the children performed. This was outside on the bank where the union building stands now; there was nothing there then, that was my children's playground. Horace Mann was out there by itself at that time. We dreaded it. We teachers would have rather donated part of our salary than have to go through this again. You had to create something, and use all these old costumes, and produce this play. When it was time for rationing, they dismissed school and we signed people up for ration books. That was our job that day. Now you'd be surprised the number of people who came in who either would not tell you their age, or lied about it. Our supervisor, Chloe Millikan, was one of them. She would not tell us her age. I also had a good friend who lived with my aunt as I did, Mable Clair Winburn was secretary to the president. She gave me a number, and then she said, "And you know that isn't correct." We were conscious of the war. The teachers had to ride the buses to help establish the bus routes at the beginning of every quarter. We would be riding for several days until the student driver knew the route. Most of those boys who were driving the bus were also in here to learn to fly. I had a first grader who's father, Captain Schulz, was head of the flying school down here. I never will forget, every time we stopped in front of Schulz', who were Southerners, the mother would come to the door and drawl, "We're late, they've lost their shoes." We would eventually get the Schulz kids on the bus, but it would take a while. One driver that I knew from Skidmore was Earl Bassett. He learned to fly here and was in the war as a pilot, and then flew commercially after that. I also had several children whose parents were teachers at the college, and one man spoke about the war effort and said to me, that he could see that his son's vocabulary grew so much because of the things we discussed. We had an opening tune each morning. If the children brought something from home, we discussed it. Lots of times it might be that the little Schultz boy with something pertaining to his dad, or the occupation of flying. So the children's vocabulary did grow. I think that's about all that I can remember about the Horace Mann years.

[Elizabeth made an insertion that read: Because the children heard so much about airplanes and the new flying program, we decided to make one in our room. We re-arranged the tables and chair. The children used the set of large building blocks stored in our room. It was large enough to accommodate several chairs. We wrote a play imagining we were taking a trip. We had to think about the duties of the people who flew the plane – we had parts for pilot, co-pilot, stewardess, cleaning crew and passengers. Each time we played it – different children filled the parts. It was fun for the children to change parts. We invited the other rooms in our section to see our play and that meant writing invitations. This was fun for the children and hopefully taught the student teachers to be more creative.]

I left at the end of three years – not because I had to, but because the man I was engaged to had had his physical and passed, and was ready to go to service, and his father died suddenly, and he was exempt. Now we took a lot of static about that, because here you are at home, farming. A lot of the boys your age are in the war. My daughter was remembering this part that I had said, oh, yes, there was a lot of resentment, and there was. We were married in August, in 1943, one of the hottest days in the summer, and I had wanted to be married in October, and my husband said, "Well, no," and I said "why not?" He said "Because I'll be feeding cattle. I'll have cattle on feed and I can't be away then." So we got married in August. We spent three or four days in Kansas City. The only way we had gas to get to Kansas City was because he had a supply of tractor gas. Then we started farming, we were of course fortunate in that we had our own

vegetables. We raised a large garden, we had our beef and our pork that we had butchered. We had to put it in a locker plant in town because we couldn't keep very much at home in the refrigerator – we had an ice box at that time. We lived in an old house. I had come back to this house that had belonged to my ancestors – my great-great uncle had built it when he came back from the Civil War in 1868 and here I was living in it. There was a rose bush in the yard that one of the aunties had carried in the covered wagon from Illinois – I was back on the old stomping ground, and I was just half a mile from where I was born, I was back home. The church was right up the hill – Burr Oak Church, where I'd always gone. With rationing – sugar was the hardest thing, of course, and you'd look for white syrup. To this day, I don't want any part of white syrup. We made all kinds of cakes and cookies, and all kinds of sweet things using white syrup, white syrup went out of the store immediately; as fast as it came in. In 1946 our daughter was born in December, our only child, and then in January of '47 we got electricity. We'd had the house wired, we built on a bathroom, we were just waiting for the electricity and we were lucky enough that we had a good dealer there at Skidmore that got us a new refrigerator, goodbye to the drip pan and the old ice box. But, and I don't remember where I got a second hand electric stove, but that meant that the big old stove went to the wash house. By the way, you washed in the wash house with the gasoline motor on your washing machine. Then after we had electricity, that was great – you could go in and plug it in anytime you wanted it. I remember going to a sale and I knew the woman that was having the sale had two electric irons , but for some reason or another she was carrying them. I followed her all day long, and at the end of the day, I went home with a used electric iron. This was *something* to be able to find an electric iron. In 1947 or '48, my husband got his first corn picker. He had small hands, and he hated to shuck corn; he said "I just can't do it. I just can't – I can snap it but I can't shuck it." So he got a one row – of course it's an antique, now – a one row corn picker; the only trouble was we had to go to the ration board to get tires to go on it. I remember that that was a problem. He had a bout of sciatic rheumatism and the neighbors came in that year and shucked his corn and then since they had been so nice to help us out, we loaned the corn picker to everyone around in the country. It got used alright, we were glad to share it because this is the way neighbors do – they come in and help you out when you really have trouble. I remember that Barbara was still small and I was thinking "How am I going to fix enough food to feed all these people?" And my mother and my mother-in-law – they had helped me so much with the baby – were both obligated to stay in Skidmore that day because they were having their own Methodist Bazaar. My sister was ill, but like all good neighbors, Laura Barrett, who was one of my dearest friends, came to my rescue. I had a big, big chicken, I remember, all dressed and ready, and she took it home and made chicken pie. All the women who came to help brought food, so I guess we fed them all alright. I can remember worrying so about "Oh, how will I ever do this?" I really didn't have enough experience at feeding a large group of people.

We went to the movies, we visited with the neighbors. You visited with your families, you didn't do a lot of going, we were pretty saving. My husband had purchased this land for sixty dollars an acre in 1942 and then we were married in 1943 and we lived in this old house, heated two rooms and did without all we could possibly do without. By fall of 1946 we had it paid for. This is 320 acres. We still have this today. Barbara is really reluctant to sell it. I can also remember that 60 dollars an acre for land, but you're getting 3 cents a pound for cattle, for calves; yearling calves. We had fifty head of registered Hereford cows and of course we bought good bulls. We sold a lot of those calves for 4-H club projects. They usually they did very well.

I know one girl at Graham won everything in Northwest Missouri with hers; they had numerous shows at all those little towns. She took the calf to the AkSarBen in Omaha, and it did well up there that fall. My husband had shown cattle, but he didn't ever permit our daughter to do so. He said she would be too attached to the calf; it would be too hard to part with it when time came to sell it. We stayed at home, we had small families. My husband had one sister and I had one sister. We visited with them, we looked after our parents. His mother was by herself and she did a lot for us and we looked after her of course, we didn't take any trips of course; you didn't have the money or the gasoline, tires or anything like that. You didn't do that. Even the trips to Maryville were not as numerous as they were later on. We just saved – but it was something that we had fun doing. We wanted to get that land paid for. That was our goal, so we were happy when we could get through it. You didn't buy very many clothes – I remember I wore my wedding suit for a long, long time. Back then I didn't gain any weight, so I could still fit into it, and my husband was the very same way – he wore his suit he had bought for the wedding. All those little things didn't really matter to us at that time. Everyone else was saving and getting by and we were too. I didn't do any volunteer work, as far as the war went. You did church work, and we had bazaars, and we raised money, you quilted, and you did things like that. I was just staying at home and taking care of the farm and the family.

I wasn't a very good farm wife. I didn't like chickens and we got rid of the chickens in a hurry. My mother-in-law left some chickens, but I was better feeding the pigs or the hogs or helping chase calves than I was with chickens, and I did not milk a cow. My husband milked for the first seven or eight years, and then he quit. I remember later on one of these women I taught with, Mary Ellen Horan and her husband came from New York. They brought their children to the farm, and when I got a box of milk out of the refrigerator, they said "Oh, we thought your milk came from a cow." And I said "Well, not here it doesn't." I did have a large garden, and I canned a lot, and we set out a lot of fruit trees, so we had fruit to use. As soon as they came on the market, we had the first freezer in the country. My husband was for the freezer; he was tired of going to town to the locker plant to get meat. So it meant numerous trips and finally we lost the locker plant in Skidmore, and that meant we had to come to Maryville, and you not only – we froze corn, of course, strawberries and cherries and all these other things, so we had a good sized locker. We used the one down here on the corner of the Methodist Church lot, that one; I can't remember the name.

Cathy: McFarland's.

Elizabeth: McFarland's, that's right. We had things at McFarland's. Well, that's about all I can remember, Cathy.

Cathy: How did you get your news about what was happening in the war?

Elizabeth: Oh, we listened to the radio, and the newspapers. We took – I don't remember, we took some magazines, I can't remember – *Good Housekeeping* I know was one I always took, but it was the newspapers and the radio. And you'd listen to things on the radio at night, too, that was part of our entertainment, because we listened to serial things that were on the radio, but we listened to the news always. We listened to, everyone listened to, Frank Field at KMA at

7:15 in the morning, and no one in the neighborhood missed that! We all listened to that to see about the weather, and his comments.

Cathy: What were some of your favorite radio shows?

Elizabeth: Oh. . . . I don't remember. I don't honestly remember. I can tell you about the music – I loved Guy Lombardo music; I loved that, and also the one up here from Clarinda . . . .

Cathy: Glenn Miller?

Elizabeth: Glenn Miller. Glenn Miller music – I loved that. We'd listen to those, and you heard during the war, you heard *White Cliffs of Dover* and *Red Sails in the Sunset* was before that; I know we listened to a lot of music. I don't remember the programs. I honestly don't. I think my husband paid more attention to that than I did. Then, I know he laughed and said when he got his first tractor radio that – of course that was later, but he said "Well, I'm good at listening to the homemaker programs; they always come in well." [Laugh] Which was funny, because I didn't listen. That was a joke.

Cathy: Well, do you remember the reaction in this area when Pearl Harbor was announced?

Elizabeth: Oh, yes, we were horrified. We were just simply horrified. I remember the day before that, Elvin and I had gone to St. Joe, and he had bought me my Christmas present; we couldn't wait until Christmas, and he bought me a coffee set – a silver coffee set. Why he decided to buy me that that year, I could never understand, and the thought went through my head the next morning when I heard about Pearl Harbor: "I may never have a house or home to put this in." Everybody was just – well, they just never dreamed that something like this could possibly happen to us. We didn't have any foreigners about, so that wasn't a problem with us, but I expect that if I had seen a Japanese person, I would have been a little upset! I wouldn't have understood their side of the story, or the people that were here, that were living here. I wouldn't have understood. I did bake cookies and send overseas. One of the boys that had previously worked for my husband, ended up on Iwo Jima, and I remember sending him cookies, and my mother-in-law fixed a box of cookies and sent to him. I don't whether he ever got them or not. I did send cookies to a cousin of mine that was in France, and when the war was over he got to Paris and sent me a bottle of perfume. But when it came, it was empty. I think the stopper had gotten pushed ajar and it had all evaporated. Of course I never told him it was all gone, but it was the thought, he was trying to remember me with something special. I didn't have anybody any closer in the war; I wasn't that affected that much since I had no brothers, and these two men were the only ones I sent – one of our best friends, Dick Haynes, lived right across the road from my husband. They were long time buddies, and good friends. He ended up in India, but we never could get him sent anything; it didn't go through; I don't know what happened. He was gone a long time.

Cathy: Did things change after the veterans came back after the war? What was life like?

Elizabeth: Oh, yes, so many people came back to our community, and you could say life picked up a whole lot, even in our small community. They married, and begin to have families, and

whereas there had just been just one or two people living here, all at once you had three or four again. Of course as things became available, and you could buy again and people began to expand. I don't know that the prices on things went up as far as agricultural products – they didn't go up correspondingly, but we were still plodding along, we mostly fed our corn to the livestock as we fed cattle. Some years we didn't make much money at it, but my husband liked to feed cattle, and he was brought up that way, so we kept right on doing it. As Barbara got older, I began to do more, 4-H and Sunday School. I had always been the gopher person; I could run to town and get the repairs while Elvin stayed in the field. I could go to Maryville and buy oil from Elmo Trimble. They knew me at the implement places because I always insisted that my husband write it down, or draw me a picture so I don't seem like I'm a total idiot when I get in there asking for the repair, I went Oregon, and I went to Fairfax, Maryville, and Mound City, I went around to different places, and I did all those things, so he could keep busy, you know. I said – there again, I was probably using tractor gas again, too. We wouldn't have had enough gas. The tractor gas was the thing that saved us, as far as that goes.

Cathy: Anything you want to add?

Elizabeth: No.

Cathy: Thank you very much for coming and talking with us, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: Oh, it's been fun.

Cathy: It's been great. Quite a different time from today.

Elizabeth: Oh, absolutely. And I think that people; I think that children growing up today have no conception of what we went through, just as we have no conception of what our grandparents did, but that was a different era, hopefully we will never have to go through that again.

Cathy: Yes.

Elizabeth: It was a time – but it was – there were some pluses along – all these times of doing without. We learned to do without, that some materials things didn't matter much.

Cathy: The neighbors were all closer than we are today.

Elizabeth: Oh, our neighbors were wonderful. And you know, this old house I lived in didn't have a lock on it. We couldn't lock the door. Elvin's sister lived on the highway between Mound City and Craig, and of course she locked everything up very carefully every time she stepped out the door. She just couldn't understand why I would put my silver coffee service up on the buffet in the dining room and leave the door unlocked. And I said, "Well, nobody ever comes in." She just couldn't understand that. And I said, "We've never lost a thing." We had this shop that Elvin set up in this old chicken house and it was a large one. He had taken all the doors off the front, and he had a lot of tools out there. Neighbors came and borrowed things and brought them back, and you didn't think anything about it. It was all open; he didn't have anything under lock and key. Now, every time I go out the door, I lock it, but back in those days,

you never thought of locking anything; you couldn't, but then it didn't bother you any; you felt very comfortable with the thought that no one would hurt you and no one would bother you. We didn't lose a thing; nothing was ever stolen, or taken.

Cathy: They knew they could count on your husband to have the tool they needed.

Elizabeth: Oh, yes. They knew they were free. Just the way life was then. You just trusted people, and they trusted you.

Cathy: True.

Kelley: Thank you.

Palmer: Thank you very much.