

MARGARET D. FLOREA

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 from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Today is March 12, 2009, and we're conducting this interview at the Hopkins Historic Museum in Hopkins, Missouri, located in Nodaway County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley and we're here to interview Margaret D. Florea. She was born on November 17, 1916 and she is going to tell us a little bit about her life in the 1940s and also of family members that served in the war.

Margaret, could you tell us a little bit about where and when you were born, about your parents' occupations, and if you had any brothers and sisters?

Florea: I was born here at – east of Hopkins, on the farm that I lived most of my life on. My grandparents had lived there to start with, then my parents married, and they moved there afterward, and I had an uncle and an aunt that lived there, so there's been several of the King family lived on that one farm. I moved to Hopkins in 2001. We had a storm here that tore up the house out on the farm, and I had in the meantime I had sold the farm to my son, my youngest son, and he said to me, "Mom, would you want to move to town?" I said, "Well, if that's what I have to do, I will." So that was my reason for moving into Hopkins in the first place. I'm a little bit tongue tied like everybody else, I guess, because it doesn't come as easy as you might think it would to you.

I have a brother, and he wasn't born there on this farm, he was born about a half a mile west of there on a farm. I was told that I stayed with my grandparents that lived on this farm when Edwin was born that night and that was July 4, 1920. Grandpa took me home with him, but for some reason or other I got home sick and so he had to take me back to my parents. He shoved me in through the bedroom window to my dad.

I was married in 1935 and I didn't go to college. My granddad wanted me to go to college. He said he would pay for my college if I would go to college, but I took the other route, and I married instead. I was married just four days of it being fifty-seven years to my husband, Orlin Florea. We have two boys, and a girl, the girl's the youngest. My oldest boy was born in 1941, and this was when Pearl Harbor was hit and I can remember where I was that day. I was having a family dinner at Neva and Roy King's which was - Roy was a first cousin to my dad, Ray King. They have one child, Marion Belle, and she married Earl Rosecrans, who was the Chevrolet garage man here at Hopkins, in later years. We were there for dinner, and I was standing next to the table. It wasn't dinner – quite dinner time when we got the word. I don't know how we got the word, I suppose they must have had the radio on, evidently, or we wouldn't have heard it otherwise. But I was standing next to the table when the word came. I can recall that very much and I – when was the Pearl Harbor? Was it in 42 or was it . . .

Kelley: December 7, 1941.

Florea: Oh, Larry would have just been real young, see; Larry was born October 6, 1941. So he would have just been from October to December that year. He was just a baby. Well, let's see; trying to think. My kids all went to this Unity School where I went, country school. I started to school here in Hopkins. I stayed with my grandparents and went my first and second year; not all the time, I was just here during the week to stay with them, and I went to school here starting in the first and second grade here. Third grade we moved to Bedford and I spent half of third year in school up there and half of the fourth grade, and then we came back to Hopkins and moved back on the farm. I graduated from Unity out of the eighth grade, came here to Hopkins and graduated from high school here.

Like I said, I was married – I graduated in 34, and I was married in 35 and we moved to a farm about a mile north of where I was born when we first started housekeeping. We were there a couple of years. That was during the time that everybody had lost their farms. Ritterbush had the looking after of those farms that was loaned out, and we rented from them, some of that government ground at that time. The place that we lived on was pretty thin ground. We didn't raise much that first year. Orlin went out to shuck the corn and he had the lower bed on the wagon and didn't have it even full. It was just nubbins of corn that year because it was so dry. It was during the drought. We had during those years we had grasshoppers and we had chintz bugs. I can remember my dad working with that he got used oil and made ditches around the fields, and poured that used oil in those ditches, thinking that those chintz bugs wouldn't crawl across that. I don't remember whether they did or didn't. Then we spent one year down near Pickering on a farm out on Mozingo at the north end of Mozingo is where we were which now the big lake is down there. We moved back then to the farm where I was born, that was in '39, and I lived there until I moved to Hopkins in 2001. You were talking about what did we do during the war time, like we had coupon books just like everybody else did. I have some tokens here were used during the time that we had coupons. If somebody needed some sugar for right now, you might trade them some of their stamps so that they would have enough to go ahead and do their canning. Then they would maybe trade back to you for something else, and maybe it was tires maybe this way. Shoes, we had to have coupons to get a pair of shoes, that sort of thing.

I can recall one time an older couple that lived east of us about four or five miles, maybe six miles east of us; they came along, that was in the hot summer, it was a Fourth of July time. They drove a car. She always sat in the back seat, he was the driver, and nobody else in the car. They had four flat tires between our driveway at our farm, and the road just down west of us, and that was back when you had to take the tire off and patch it, pump it up by hand, and go on. So he had quite a time getting that far.

Our fun that we had when our kids were growing up was the neighbor kids all got together. We had a large yard at our house, and the kids all gathered in our yard. We would have parties, maybe one time we'd have sandwiches and fruit; maybe the next time we'd have cookies and fruit, or maybe we'd have a picnic dinner, and they played ball, we had a place down east of us in a pasture that was pretty well ate off – it was pretty good place to play, and the neighborhood kids all gathered down there and we had ball games down there. That's where I met my husband was at that ball game. I didn't play, my brother was too young at that time to play, or wasn't playing, anyway. Maybe he wasn't – I don't recall if that was in the years while they were in

service or not. Anyway, the neighbor kids were all down there – it was while my folks lived on the farm there too, come to think about it, because we had parties.

We had a big pond; a pond that had been there as long as I can recall, even back in the 1900s, I have pictures of that pond. My Dad took a small tank- water tank, and put it on the pond. He had a rope around it, and some of the kids would get in the tank, and he'd walk on the bank and pull them around over the pond instead of acting as a canoe or anything like that, why he pulled them around over the water. He had lots of fun. We made fun for ourselves. We played "Ring around the Rosie" and "Andy Over." Kids don't think of doing anything like that now days. They have to be entertained. We made our own entertainment. I helped my Mother cook for threshers; we had threshers. That's when the neighbors would change things with their neighbors, you know. They would go help them put up hay, or they'd help them thresh, and the neighbors would stay for dinner, and I helped my Mother cook for the thresher hands. There was to start with, they came and stayed for supper, also, but they finally got away from that. We talked them into going home and doing their own thing, so we didn't have to cook at supper time.

Amthor: How about sewing?

Florea: Well, I learned to sew. My grandmother always sewed for me. She made a lot of my clothes out of used clothing. I was just as proud of those clothes as I was if it had been bought out of the store and she was a good seamstress, so I always had plenty of clothes. I didn't want for clothes that way. She even made our coats. She would take an old coat and rip it up and turn it wrong side out to make over. I remember one in particular that I had; she made the tam to match it, and it was turned wrong side out – the material was, so it looked new to you. It didn't look worn. I learned to sew then from WPA time and that's when we had lots of feed sacks, that sort of thing that we used.

Orlin and I raised turkeys for eighteen years. We had chickens to start with, and we had a small brooder house, and that's where we raised our first turkeys. I think we had fifty to begin with. That first year wasn't very profitable because it happened that there was three or four dogs that were roaming the country and they got into our turkeys and they killed a good many of them that first year, but one of the men that owned up that it was his dog that was among them, and he did pay us some money for some of those turkeys. It was Vern Melvin. I thought that was an unusual thing, because you wouldn't very ordinarily find somebody that would come by and say that it was my dog and that I will pay you for – we raised as many as - I think the last that we had was about 2500 turkeys.

They're something else to learn to take care of because they can spot an airplane before you ever detect that there is an airplane anywhere near. They'll cock that head up to the air, that eye up to there, they'll see that plane, they'll hear it, and you can go by that there is one around, but you may not hear it. If it storms, lightening real hard, or anything like that, you've got to – we had just roofs out open – they'll gather in under that and they will bunch up; they will smother themselves.

At one time, we raised them on wire, and we had what we called the sun porch out here, it was wire also. We had let the turkeys out on that sun porch, and for some reason or other, something scared them and they all started going back into the building, and they began to pile up in the corners, and they would just keep piling, one on top of the other and my husband said he hollered at me. I didn't hear him, but by the time he got to the place where he was worn out - he was trying to keep them from piling up and smothering - he came in to tell me then we both went out there, but he went in there and started throwing them back, but they didn't have any more sense than to run back up in the corner and pile up again. We didn't lose very many of them as it happened, because they were on wire, and they could get the air from underneath as well as from the top. It was an interesting 18 years that we raised turkeys though.

Amthor: How about music?

Florea: Well, my mother had one sister and that was all there was in their family; she was sixteen years old when she lost both of her parents. They both died within six months of each other. My granddad and this was a Remington; he stepped on a rusty nail, and back then they didn't give them shots for tetanus, shots you know for lock jaw, or anything that way and he did get lock jaw and died from that. My grandmother had Bright's disease, which is kidney trouble and that's what she died from, so that left my mother and her sister without parents to look after them. So, they moved in with their grandparents and lived there. They went to school here in Hopkins; my aunt graduated from high school.

Mother didn't graduate from there; her uncle was an old bachelor, lived with the grandparents, with his folks, and he posed to her that she could either go take lessons down at Maryville to learn to play the piano, or she could go to high school and finish. She went down and took piano lessons and that was down at the old Normal School house down there. Then she gave lessons here in Hopkins and she also went to Bedford; she rode the train and went to Bedford and gave lessons at Bedford.

The last few years I have been secretary and was treasurer of the Methodist Church here and there was some old books there and I was looking through the books and in the front of the book was the fact that my mother, Lois B. Remington was pianist at the Methodist Church and that was before she was married. She played at the church after that for several years and then in - I think it was in the 1940s I substituted for piano - well, I took lessons from my mother. My mother gave me lessons. When I first started out, my hands were not wide enough to reach an octave, so she gave up on me until I could reach an octave and I took lessons from her. Then in 1940 I substituted for Leta Wiley which was the organist; she played the organ. Then I substituted for her. I taught myself to play the organ after I had already knew how to play the piano. I have been organist at the Methodist Church since then. I'm still organist every Sunday as long as the weather permits me to get there.

I had a brother that sang and I've had children that sang. I've had children that have gone to state with music. My son - my youngest son went to state with the tuba, and got a first in it. I think he's the only one that has got a first. I can't remember what Paula got. Paula has been in music - she has gone to college and she had - here at Maryville - she graduated there with a B. S. degree and taught in Center, Missouri, for about three years in vocal music, and there was a

teacher over there. They both went to summer school at Kirksville and this teacher heard her sing and she asked her to go with her. She was going to be moving to Boston that next year in school, so she asked Paula if she would go out there with her, that she could live with her and go to school out there.

So, Paula went to Boston and went to the university there and got a Master's out there, and then she was secretary to a custodian in the New York City School. Their schools out there are governed by the city themselves. All those schools belong to the city, and she was there for over seventeen years as a secretary to this custodian. There was one or two of them that took her with them. They moved them from one school to another quite often, and they didn't give her up, because she would do things that other secretaries wouldn't do. So, they wanted to take her with them, and she went with them several times. She finally here just in the last – well, it's been in the last three years, four years, something like that – she changed from being the secretary, to going back to college and getting another master's in music therapy.

She is now on her own – she has gotten a job; she had one job with a nursing home, I guess it was, and they had – its own company, it's not just a separate thing. They had group homes as well as nursing homes and things this way, and these people that she taught there were from day care; people would bring their family there to stay for the day while they worked, and she taught them music from – well, like Sound of Music, such things as this. Those people learned the words to those and performed them.

She had them give a program at the tail end of her teaching there. That's the first one they had ever had and they were so pleased with it, they have asked her to come back, and they got grant money to do this. She had one lady in particular that had not spoken any time that she was there, and had not uttered a word, and she began to sing and was singing and that brings out things like that among people that are not capable otherwise of doing. So, she has been asked to come back again to this same place and the people there have other teachers there that help out and do these things. She was just there just three days a week, and other times then the teachers there themselves would help teach this. She has to have something for her own musical instruments. She has told me that now that she has invested in a few more instruments that she has to take with her to do these things. She does in the summer time usually when everybody else is on vacation.

Amthor: Could you tell us, now, about your family members that participated in the war? What branch of service were they in, where were they stationed, and so forth?

Florea: Well, my brother – you'll be interviewing him this afternoon; he'll be here. He was in the Army. Hopkins had a gentleman here that was a mechanic and he welded – I don't know how he got started in it, but he did teach welding to some of the boys that wanted to learn. In particular there were five boys, my brother included, that went to school to him to learn welding. When they got through, they all went together to Portland, Oregon, and he'll tell you about it in his interview.

We had a son that volunteered for Vietnam and he wasn't over there about a month till he was wounded and came back to the states. Thank goodness he was able to come back, and has

carried on since he came back. He has a limp once in a while; he was shot through the leg, and bullet went clear through his leg. It didn't touch a bone; that was the miracle part of it. It didn't touch the bone, but when he gets tired, he limps, and it did take muscle from his leg, but he's been real well, I think. I don't know exactly where all he was in the service.

My other son was in National Guard for several years, and he was doing this while he was in college, down here at Maryville. He went in to study forestry, was what he was studying. About the second year he was in down here in Maryville, he developed Rheumatic fever and had to drop out. He had just started his second semester. I had to go down and get him out of all that. He was laid off until the next year, and then when he went back he went to Columbia and finished up his schooling in Columbia, and when he went there they tried to find anything that would be wrong with his heart, you know, that would cause trouble with his heart, and they couldn't find a thing so Dr. Dunshee, he was a very good doctor, he brought him out of it. He's never had any trouble since then, but he did – he was in forestry then, assistant forest ranger for seventeen years, and then he got out of that and came back to Missouri; his wife's folks – she was an only child, and they were elderly, and they came back to see about them. So then he took a position in the post office and he worked there for about seventeen years I think, something like that. Anyway, he is retired now.

The other boy is still working. He's in banking business, in the loan department. The daughter is in the east, you know, she's in Teaneck, New Jersey. Her husband is a custodian in one of these schools. When he first started the school that he worked at had four furnaces that were run by diesel, and the fifth one by propane. Those diesel furnaces once a year he had to crawl inside those things to clean out the flew to see if there wasn't any soot in them. It worried me to death to think of him crawling inside those things. They've had somebody since then to stand beside the thing to know that they were in and could get out alright. Since then he's perfected a broom that he can reach in there and clean and doesn't have to crawl in to the thing any longer. He's still working as a custodian. There they have to paint the walls about every day because of graffiti. There the yard that the kids play in – he's now at an elementary school. The building is about five or six stories high, so it houses quite a few children. There at the place where they play outside is all cement and it's fenced in and they have a security officer that sees them when they come in and when they go out.

Amthor: If there's one thing, or something you could say about the time period of the 1940s, with the economy and the war, and if you could compare it to what's going on today with the war and the economy, is there any advice or any comments that you would like to say in comparison?

Florea: Well, it's nothing like it was back then because it's entirely different. We didn't have electricity – we didn't have a lot of things back then that they have now days to combat things with. No one had anything. You didn't think a thing about it. Just everybody was in the same fix. You made do with what you had, or if you didn't, you would divide and help somebody else out. This is the thing about living back in those years, if somebody was ill or something, they came along and helped you get your crop in and get it out and everything. They went to help you get your crop in, like two or three farmers would work to mow a hay field down, and then they'd come back and put it up.

That doesn't happen so much now days. Once in a while we do have benefits. They have benefits for people when they do have a catastrophe happen, but it's quite different I think in the two eras. I don't know hardly whether you could even hardly compare them because you have so many more things to work with now days. We know about things that are going on now days that we didn't back then. Word didn't get around as fast. There wasn't a way of getting word around like you have now days. I have seen an awful lot of change in my lifetime. I said I didn't know whether anybody for as many years on ahead could see as much change. I've already seen several things happen just in the last year or two that you wouldn't have thought about happening at all.

I'm not computer literate by any means. A few years back, when the processors came out, Opal Eckert was a person that kept up to date, and she was a teacher, and I was at the same place she was; we were talking about computers and processors. At that time, she got a processor. I said if Opal can do it, then that's what I will do. So, I got the processor, and I never got a computer then so I don't know much about a computer, but I do like my processor. I wouldn't do without. It was something that I really have enjoyed. I of course took typing while I was in high school, so it was very handy when I got the processor, because I could type on it and that's the way I write all my letters anymore.

Amthor: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us today about the 1940s and the war?

Florea: No, I just – I don't think of anything especially. I do – at the time the war was going on, of course, you were drafted, and Orlin was a 4F, because we lived on a farm, but if the war had continued, he would have been in the next draft, I'm sure, which I was very thankful for that he didn't have to go. I think that's all I can think of.

Amthor: Well, thank you for sharing today. It was nice meeting you.

Florea: Thank you.