

MARGIE CONARD

Joni: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri in the 1940's* program. The Nodaway County Historical Society Museum is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council with support from the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today, March 11, 2009 we're conducting interviews at Worth County Senior Center in Grant City, Missouri, Worth County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. We're here to interview Margie Conard, and she was born on July 5, 1924, and she lived during the 1940's and she's going to tell us a little bit about her life and life on the home front during World War II. Margie, could you tell us a little bit of where and when you were born, about your parents occupations, and if you had any brothers and sisters?

Margie: I was born on what was known as the Weigart farm east of Grant City on July 5, 1924. I came from a family of eight children: four girls and four boys. My dad worked quite a few years with the WPA work so we moved around quite a lot. I went to eight different grade schools, nine different schools in eight years in the grades, so we moved quite often. He liked farming, he liked to farm, he liked the animals and he worked on the Lou Cart Farm, ranch they called it around Tarkio when I was a kid, and they worked cattle all the time. He loved to ride the horses, and he was always riding the horses and they were always separating cattle and moving them around and everything. He just loved the animals and the farm work. He was really born on a farm, you know, and raised that way. My mother was from around. She's related to the barber here in town, and their birthdays were just two days apart, so we always celebrated their birthdays together. Out of my four brothers, three were in the service at different times. The youngest was too young to go, so he never got into service. My husband-to-be, he was in the service three and a half years. He was in Japan and the Philippine Islands and mostly he drove a supply truck which carried supplies to the boys on the front. They were bombed several times; the Japanese tried to blow up the fuel depot all the time. He said, "Well, they weren't very good shots, because they never hit their target." He was lucky that way. They'd jump in their foxholes during the raid, so he was lucky he never really got hit during the war.

Joni: Could you tell us what life was like in the 1940's before the war?

Margie: Before the war?

Joni: Before we entered the war.

Margie: Yes. Well, I was working; I started working at 16 at the restaurants around town. Up until that time I was kind of loaned out to relatives when they needed me. I was the oldest girl in the family, so I was nominated as a second mother. My mother loved to get out and work in the gardens and do things, which she didn't get a lot of chance to be out with eight children, you know, you'd be pretty busy. So I was nominated to take care of the younger ones while she wanted to do other things. At sixteen then I started working at the restaurants and making a little bit of my own money, buying a few clothes of my own, you know. Then I worked for a school teacher, Reva Waldier, at Worth, for quite a while. She was a school teacher; she had this one daughter. I lived there through the week, took care of the little girl, did the housework through the day, cooked the meals for the family, while she was at school and then on weekends I'd go home, and go back on Sunday night. I had a room of my own, and felt like I'd moved out on my own family when I left. During the war I worked; I was working in Maryville at Woolworth's Dime Store when I was there. I lived with my aunt, Juanita Dickey. Her husband went at the same time that my boyfriend went; beg bunch of them went together into the service. She didn't want to live alone, so she sent for me so I went to live with her, and I got my job at the Dime Store and worked during the war. That's where I was at when the war over. It was a lot of hoopla when it was over, I'll tell you. We knew this guy that had this little restaurant, and he had a nickelodeon, and when they heard the war was over he rolled the machine out into the street and played records and they just danced all night, out there in the street. They blocked it off and let them dance. That's what happened when the war was over. It was really a thrilling time for everybody.

Joni: So could you tell us what it was like during rationing, or the clothing, or gardening? What did you do during that time?

Margie: Well, you know, I was a pretty good sized girl before I started buying my own clothes so I wore my mother's quite a bit, too. We'd change off and on with our clothes that I didn't buy a lot of clothes till I started working and making money. When I worked - helped my relatives I didn't get paid anything for it, it was just a loan, you know, more or less. I was pretty happy to make my own money, though, and more independent. Clothes weren't too easy to find, either. I mean, if you had your mind set on what you wanted you a lot of times didn't find it. That was like when I first got married, you wanted some way to wash clothes, we didn't have a washer. I couldn't even find a dishpan to wash dishes in, you know, they quit making a lot of those things. They just didn't make a lot of them, and it was hard to find a wash tub or a wash board or anything to wash your clothes.

At that time we did it the old hard way. We had a terrible time finding things to keep house with. It wasn't easy.

Joni: Now, did you use any of the feed sacks for clothing?

Margie: Oh, yes, we did. My mother made clothes out of them, a lot of them. She sewed for all of us kids when we were small. She made our own clothes, and she knew how big to make them, and she just cut out her own patterns even. She used to look in the catalogs and pick out a dress she liked, and sit down and cut out a pattern and make her a dress every once in a while. She was real talented that way; a little more so than I was. I had to have a pattern, but I could do it from patterns, which I made my own clothes when I first – when I was fifteen, sixteen, a lot. Made sundresses, skirts, and tops, and even maybe a suit one time, a jacket and everything. Yes, it'd be pretty hard for me to do right now, but I did it back then. You know it's hard to find material too that you like anymore, too.

Joni: Now did you have an electric machine, or did you do it by hand or how did you sew?

Margie: Well, you know when I was first married I didn't have – I did it by hand. I made sundresses by hand, you know where they used to make a cross stitch and they'd get checked colors that you used to make the squares in the little squares to make a cross stitch. I made all kinds of them; I had different colors, and I put different patterns on each one, different things around the bottom of my dress, you know, and around the top. I made a lot of them when I was fifteen, sixteen. I had my own hope chest when I got married, all kinds of things I had made while I was growing up. I used to – I did a lot of sewing, and I crocheted, and I knitted some, I wasn't too – I wasn't a big knitter, but I like to do small things.

Joni: What did you do for entertainment? What did you do for fun?

Margie: For fun? I don't remember. I didn't hardly date at all, because I was too busy and my grandmother Round used to call me an old maid when I was fifteen, because she got married when she was fifteen, and she used to call me an old maid. But I just didn't care much for boys; I had four brothers in the family, and I wasn't crazy about boys at that age. I was 21 years old before I got married. I didn't have a whole lot of dating because I was working all the time. I loved to do different things, gosh, did a lot of housework, take care of kids; I was just a housekeeper most of my life, it seemed like. Then I did a lot of babysitting when I was – after we were married, moving around too with different ones, then they'd want to leave their children with me, so I would keep them for nothing. I just kept them because I liked kids.

Joni: Now did you have gardens, like the victory gardens?

Margie: Yes, the first one, the first year we were married, we had a great big garden; I am telling you, we couldn't possibly eat everything. We had a muskmelon patch that never stopped. I tell you we had muskmelons until it was just pitiful how many we grew. We didn't know hardly how to plant it, really, for two, you know what I mean? We just over did it. But yes, I used to raise all kinds of vegetables, and we used to can some, and do all of that. When I was a kid growing up, you know, we always had big gardens, always raised a lot of beans, potatoes, because we cooked a lot of potatoes and beans, and I was raised on cornbread and beans and potatoes. We used to work together gathering them in the fall. All of worked at it. Beans – we had all kinds of beans.

Joni: How about rationing? How did you handle the rationing when they rationed gas and shoes, and sugar, coffee; how did you....?

Margie: Oh! That was kind of bad, because we had a big family. We just had to make it go as far as we could. I know we had to stretch it out quite a bit because that was kind of hard to do that. You know that a family of ten can eat quite a little bit.

Joni: Do you remember any of the music that was popular during the time?

Margie: Yes, we – I remember we used to have a nickelodeon in the restaurant while I was working, and the boys liked to play these songs over and over and over. They pretty near wore certain records out. Let's see, I trying to remember the name – *Green Grows the Lilacs*. Oh, Max Green played that over and over and over – he wore that record out. He loved that song. I know there were a lot of them that were popular, but...I love music, but I'm not much of a musician in playing or anything, but I used to pick out hymns on a piano when I was with my Grandmother; she had a piano – we never had anything like that at home, so in the summer I used to stay with her when school was out and I'd pick out songs on a piano out of the hymn book, because I took music in grade school a little bit of it. We had two different teachers that taught music in the grades. But I've always loved it.

Joni: Now did you play a lot of games or other types of recreation at times with you large family?

Margie: Yes, we used to play ball a lot. Different – we'd make up our own rules a lot of times, so we'd have enough to play. That's when I was in school, in the grades. A lot of times the boys were short of boys and they always picked me to be one of them to play with the boys. I wasn't too good at hitting the ball, but I was a pretty good runner. I ran the bases pretty good, but I wasn't real good hitting the ball. I used to play ball at school a lot with the boys. I really wasn't a tomboy but they talked me into playing with them because they didn't have enough sometimes in school. And of course some of them were just little bitty schools where you didn't have a whole – just have one room for all of them. It was – sometimes there wasn't enough boys come to school to make out a good team, so you have to choose two sides, and every once in a while they'd quarrel about who was going to be on certain sides, and they had a time deciding that.

Joni: Did you listen to the radio a lot?

Margie: Yes. Well, not a lot – didn't have a lot of time but we always gathered around it at night, in the evening, and we had certain programs that we'd listen to – that's how we heard about the war and everything was on the radio. After supper and everything was cleaned up, we'd all sit around the radio.

Joni: What programs did you listen to?

Margie: Oh, we used to listen to that – oh, there was a comedy – we used to like Fibber McGee and Molly and all those – can't recall some of them.

Joni: Amos and Andy?

Margie: Oh yes! Andy was real popular. And we always listened to the news. My Dad always had to get the news in you know. He worked on radios and TV's quite a bit too, for a while when he kind of lost out of the – he ran a caterpillar several years – he did construction work but when he got through with that he went in and took a course on TV's and radios and he worked on them for people for a little while. So he was kind of a jack-of-all-trades throughout his life. Made out with whatever was handy that he could do.

Joni: Did you see very many movies during the war time?

Margie: In the, - no, I didn't go to the movies an awful lot. I used to – we used to come to town on Saturday night and there was always – we had a movie theatre right here in town and I'd meet my boyfriend here and we'd go to a movie. But

when ten-thirty came, they shut it off and you had to go home because it was curfew. See, there was a curfew – and they really stuck behind it here in town in those years. If you – couldn't be on the street after ten-thirty, unless you were a certain age, you know. They shut the video off at ten-thirty and it was time to go home.

Joni: We talked about the radio. Do you remember Pearl Harbor – what were you doing? Did you listen to that on the radio?

Margie: Yes. Can't remember exactly what I was doing; we were at home. Gee, it was bad. I remember – I don't remember what I was doing at the time, when it came on the radio. I used to have the radio on quite a bit – playing it when I was doing my work and everything and – I don't even remember if my husband was home or not, or whether he was out working. I can't recall that. But it was very sad.

Joni: Do you remember any of the propaganda that was being said on the radio about the war? What the news people were saying about Hitler, Germany, or China at that time?

Margie: Well, they talked quite a bit about Germany and about the concentration camps and all that, and I don't remember a whole lot about what they talked about really now, I don't –

Joni: Were you aware of the prisoner of war camps that were in the area? Do you remember?

Margie: Yes. Well, I knew that they had them, but I didn't hear a whole lot about them until the war was over. After the war was over, you heard more about them than you did while the war was going on.

Joni: I think they had one at Clarinda, Iowa.

Margie: I don't think they talked a lot about them until the war was over. After the war was over I found out more about that than I did while the war was going on.

Joni: Do you know if a lot of them stayed, or they were shipped back?

Margie: I don't know. That would be very interesting to find out.

Joni: Well, I know that the one in Clarinda, Iowa, some of the prisoners would come to Atchison County and work on the Tarkio College.

Margie: Some of them stayed?

Joni: Someone said some of them stayed, but I didn't know if most of them were shipped back. About the end of the war, what did you think about the atomic bomb and did you think President Truman was right in doing that?

Margie: I remember it felt like my heart stopped whenever I heard that they had dropped that bomb, and I don't know if it was the right thing or not, I know we were all glad it was over, but a lot of those people probably suffered a lot. My husband was – my boyfriend then – they flew the boys over the area where they dropped it, and I don't think that was a very good idea. A lot of the boys came home and died from cancer, and I'm wondering if they weren't in the wrong place. Several of them died with cancer, including my husband. Some of them died shortly after they got home and I don't know whether it was because they went over ther, that soon, or not. I don't know, but -

Joni: Other than that cancer was there other concerns about the economy or TB, too, or during that time period?

Margie: Well, I kno9w that's when I started hearing more about cancer and was about the time you'd hear more and more about it. A lot of the men from around here died from cancer and I think it's farming using a lot of insecticides and sprays and things they used. They think that's what a lot of it is and I do know that some of them right now that's got big growths on them – knots on their arms and their legs and they think it's from using insecticides and sprays on the farm.

Joni: Was there a threat of polio around the area at that time?

Margie: I don't recall anybody around our area with it at the time, but I expect there was, but I don't – wasn't anybody that was close to me that had it, but I think everybody thought about it a lot.

Joni: How about the spread of Communism? Were they afraid of the Soviet Union at the time?

Margie: Yeah, yeah, there were a lot of people that talked about that. And there's still a lot of that – I mean, it will always be that way, because a lot of people – I don't know, they just have their own thoughts about it, I guess.

Joni: What was it like when the war was over, and the veterans were returning home?

Margie: Very exciting for a lot of people; a lot of the boys were gone from here. There were a lot of them – some of them never came back, which is very sad. My brother was in the crossing to England – which was the English Channel, and they were crossing on three ships, three different groups of boys, and the one ahead of him got bombed, and some of the boys on it died from here and he was on the second ship, which got through alright, but he got lost when he landed; he got separated from some of them and couldn't find his way, and a German family took him in and hid him from the Germans; kept him hid. They had a little 5 year old girl, and he said every time a plane flew over, she ran and crawled under the bed. She was afraid of the planes. But they hid him quite a long time before he found his way back to his crew. He lost his gun and everything when he landed. He was kind of alone for a while.

Joni: I bet that was a little scary for him.

Margie: Yes.

Joni: Is there anything else during that time that stands out in your mind that maybe we didn't cover that maybe you'd like to tell us about?

Margie: During the war? Not that I can think of right now.

Joni: How about the economy of the 1940's – and if you compared it to today, what is something that we could learn? Our generation can learn from your generation of what you know, what could be coming with the economy that might help? Since you lived during a specific hard time in the past, what is something that you learned from that period that we could utilize now?

Margie: Well, I know that we had rationing of certain things, you know, we had to stretch them out and make them go as far as we could, and that's something that we ought to think about too, because you know more and more people all the time and food is getting kind of dangerous to you, you have to watch what you buy anymore, you have to be very careful. You have food that's contaminated that's

making people ill again. I haven't heard them say what it was. It was peanut butter before, and now it something else they're saying. It's sprouts? Sprouts are coming from Omaha? They say there's several people sick now. I don't buy those, so I guess I'm alright [laugh], but you know, you do have to be careful. You know you have to be very careful. Just a few days ago they were telling about this lady they caught, somewhere in a store. She was injecting something into baby foods in the little jars of baby food? She was putting something in them, and they arrested her and they were going to send it off and get it – find out what it had in it. And last night on the news they were telling about these peppers – a woman bought some peppers and took them home and cut them open and she couldn't believe it! She took them back to the store and they found out it was cocaine – somebody was shipping peppers in with cocaine in them. Isn't that something?

Joni: Well, we all might have to go back to growing our own food.

Margie: Well, you know that could be. I always loved to grow gardens - I like to watch anything grow. I used to plant – I mean I was always planting seeds to see if they'd grow, see what they looked like, and one time I planted a plum seed and when it came up, it had thorns all over it. I thought now I don't want that because I get infections in my fingers from thorns pretty easy. I can't have cactus because of that, you know, getting an infection from them, but I plant all kinds of seeds and watch them grow. I think they make pretty plants.

Joni: Well, I don't have any more questions for you, and it's been really great to meet you and hear your stories.

Margie: It's been nice to meet you. Really nice.

Joni: I think your story will be a nice addition to our collection.

Margie: Well, there's another lady out here – would you like to talk to another – do you have time for somebody else?

Joni: I think we do.

