

EDDA JANE ROGERS BLACK

Tanja: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri of the 1940's 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's date is April 22, 2009 and the interview is being conducted at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Black in Burlington Junction, Mo, and the interviewer is Tanja Shimak, and assisting is Christy Taylor. The interviewee is **Mrs. Jane Black**, whose birthday is January 16, 1922. She lived during the 1940's and this interview is her story of life during this time period, including World War II.

Tanja: Alright, we're going to start with some background. Okay, Mrs. Black, where and when were you born?

Jane: Clearmont, Missouri, January 16, 1922.

Tanja: What did your parents do?

Jane: Mother really was at home, that was all, but my Father worked in a service station, worked in a hardware, was a guard in the penitentiary in Jefferson City for a couple of years and a farmer. He did them all.

Tanja: Wow! He did?

Jane: He did.

Tanja: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Jane: I have four brothers - five brothers and two sisters. There's eight of us.

Tanja: That must have been interesting.

Jane: It was.

Tanja: Did you enjoy having such a large family - growing up in such a large family?

Jane: I loved it; only I wanted to be a boy, and I kind of drove my brother crazy that was just older than me, because I followed him everywhere. I wanted to play ball and I wanted to be a boy.

Tanja: Well, why don't you tell us a little bit about your life before World War II? What did you - what did you do for fun; education wise; did you travel much; did you leave Clearmont?

Jane: While I was home I really - I suppose you would say I more or less kept house more than anything else. My Mother had osteoporosis we'd call it now, but at that time it was rheumatoid arthritis and so much of the time she couldn't get around, so I took care of kids, and cooked meals and was kind of a homemaker, I guess.

Tanja: Were you the oldest daughter?

Jane: My oldest sister was married and gone when we - I was - I think from ten on she was - when my age was ten she was gone.

Tanja: I see.

Jane: So I was the next girl, and I was the momma.

Tanja: Did you enjoy that?

Jane: I guess so. I would come home from school early on - at noon to get some meal for the kids, you know, because we lived just two blocks from the school house and then I would go back to school so that I could have the gymnasium to play basket ball. I would go down there and throw the basketball. I wanted to play so bad.

Tanja: I see.

Jane: I'd just leave my kids at home eating and I would go back to school and play ball. That's how I met him was playing ball. He saw me before I saw him I guess.

Tanja: Why don't you tell us the story?

Jane: He said the first time he saw me I guess I was sixteen and I was with our cheerleaders in the corner of the gymnasium and he said crying because his team was beating our team. He tells me that all the time. But I didn't notice him then because I didn't want that team to win and I never paid any attention to the players really, but I met him, really met him on my sixteenth birthday - seventeenth birthday.

Tanja: What a nice birthday present.

Jane: They used to have a theatre here in Burlington Junction and back then you just didn't go to things; we never went outside of the immediate territory; but anyway they had a movie at the theatre, and I think it was maybe a quarter to get in and my girlfriend got her dad's car and we came to Burlington and went to the theatre and I don't know how he knew I was there but he sat in front of me and he said - and I'm not going to tell you a lot of it but he said "You could see better if you sit up here." We moved up with him and that fall we were married, so.....

Tanja: That's a lovely story.

Jane: I really didn't have time for boys. I was - I had my homework to do, and I played baseball and basket ball anytime the men would let me play with them, you know, the boys if they were short, I got to play with them, and I really wasn't interested in boys, but after I met him [Laugh] I guess I was interested.

Tanja: So you were married before the war in 1939?

Jane: We were married October 21, 1939, I was seventeen and we were married on his twentieth birthday.

Tanja: Well that's easy for him to remember! Now what did you do after you married - did you live in Burlington or . . .

Jane: No, we stayed with his folks for a while until we got a house over in the - well; it's the Elmo area, I guess, between Elmo and Burlington. And he helped his Dad on the farm, and then he got on a pipe line, Williams Brothers Pipeline in 1940 - I think - '40 or '41, and we started traveling with the pipeline and we were on it until they drafted him in 1943, late 1943 and we went just all over the United States. We got to see so much of the country and we lived one year in Florida City, Florida, and we learned to love it, and we had our apartment owners - they were Italians and Mrs. Torease couldn't really speak English but she was - her daughter and I were real good friends. Her daughter was two years younger than me - I was nineteen when we were down there and Gracie was two years younger and I spent a lot of time in the Torease home. So when we got ready to leave at the end of the year after the pipeline was placed into Key West, why the Torease family just begged us to stay. They said "You'd be just like our children." We want you and Mr. Torease said "I'll put in a number of acres here and give you the farm." and he said "If you don't make it the first year I'll do it again the second year." They wanted us to stay and we wanted to stay but he was an only child, and he thought he should be closer to his folks, and I was home sick for my Dad, so we came back into Texas then and then he got his draft notice.

Tanja: Now you said you traveled a lot. Did the gas shortage - how did that work?

Jane: In 1942 I was homesick for my Dad and Robert's father was a truck driver and he sent us all of his coupons - I forget what we called them - so that we could buy gas to come home and Robert brought me home and just the minute I saw my Dad, I hadn't been able to eat and my throat was - I couldn't eat. I'd never been homesick; I didn't know what was wrong with me. When I saw my Dad, my throat cleared, just the second I saw my Dad. So we stayed just two or three days and then we had to go back you know, because he took off work and they said they couldn't give him a vacation because they needed him and he said "Well, I'll have to quit then because my wife's sick." Well, we went back to Florida and they put him back to work. We really enjoyed the pipeline. He worked all the time; he worked seven days a week; I seldom saw him, but it was interesting seeing the country. Eventually, since we'd been married we have been in all fifty states. I have seen all fifty capitals. Now I didn't get to go in all of them, and I almost missed the one in Juneau because we went on a boat to - a ship to Alaska and when we got to Juneau they were having a high wind and they said we couldn't go to shore so they sent out life boats and they said if you want to take them to shore then you can go in and spend two hours I think it was, because we were late and I said I wanted to go because I had to see that capital. We got in there and he and I walked to the capital from the shore where we got in, and we walked all around it and I took a picture of it so that I got all my fifty capitals. And it was really something to be in all fifty states. Missouri's our favorite.

Tanja: Well, we're glad to have you here. Do you remember where you were on December 7th - did you hear about Pearl Harbor on the 7th?

Jane: We were in Cedartown, Georgia. We had been living in Atlanta two or three weeks, and we moved out to Cedartown when we heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Tanja: Were - how - what were your reactions to hearing it? Did you know - had you ever heard of Pearl Harbor?

Jane: I'd never heard of Pearl Harbor. I don't really know at the time; I don't think I really knew what a war was. Until they started talking about draft and Robert would have to go to service, I didn't really know much about war.

Tanja: That's to be expected though. Were you aware of the propaganda in the United States during the war? Like maybe did you - what kind of TV shows did you watch? Did they - not TV shows, radio shows, my goodness. Did you listen to - did they have a lot of propaganda in them? As far as like maybe how Hitler was portrayed? Did they do anything like that in the radio shows? Or was it mostly just something you listened to, funny stories to kind of forget about your troubles?

Jane: I probably - the one to forget about it. [Laugh] I didn't hear all that you said , so I'm probably not answering right but life for us just went on the way it was. He worked seven days a week, and we did what our - what his boss told us to do and I don't know really the outside world wasn't there.

Tanja: When he was drafted did you go with him to where he had to do basic training and all that? Did you go there?

Jane: They sent him to Wichita Falls, Texas, and I drove down there and I forget how long we were there and then they sent him to - did you go to Lubbock from there?

Robert: Near about.

Jane: Where'd you go? Lubbock, Texas, and he had to go to school over there. He was going to - he thought he was going to be a pilot, and they had to have a college degree, so he was over there taking his college work. I was there with him, and then they washed them all out and sent them to Yuma, Arizona, and I went down there. And then we came back from Yuma to Lincoln.

Robert: Ardmore.

Jane: Ardmore, Oklahoma; that's where his crew got together and remained together then until they came home from the war. I got to stay in Ardmore and then we came here and he went to Lincoln and I went up and stayed until they shipped him out from Lincoln.

Tanja: Now did you stay in - was it in military?

Jane: No.

Tanja: Or did you

Jane: No. I would get a - usually just a bedroom and sometimes there would be a little kitchen, you know, but I stayed - I don't think, I don't know what they called them then, they didn't have all the motels and things.

Tanja: Now were they family owned or were they - because I have heard that when one of my grandparents rented out one of their rooms. Was it like that or did with your husband's crew, their wives, did you maybe live together or were you mostly mainly on your own?

Jane: He could get out so many days but I guess I was mainly on my own, and in Yuma, I was mainly on my own. I had - there was another girl, her husband was there and we became good friends and we would go out to lunch together and he got to come in - we were in a hotel then, this girl and I. He would - he got to come in once in a while but he didn't - I was not with him all the time in Yuma.

Tanja: What did you do? Did you go to the movies, or just?

Jane: I'm a reader, and if I didn't have anything I had to do, I was reading. I can sit there and read a book through and take another one and read it through and I read up until about two or three years ago. My eyes don't like to read anymore.

Tanja: Mine either.

Jane: And our house is just stacked with books, and right now we have two of our church officials coming out and they're going through the books and the ones that are worth saving they're going to take them someplace, but they're going to get rid of the rest of them. But we have books everywhere. They're in the attic, they're in the garage, they're in the basement. I love books.

Tanja: That's something we have in common. I have a lot of books as well. What did you - did you encounter any shortages like sugar shortage, or what was the rationing kind of like? What was that experience like?

Jane: It really didn't bother us too much, but we lived in Del Rio, Texas, and that's on the border of Mexico, and so we did all our shopping over in Old Mexico and we got whatever we wanted. [Laugh] We would always get our sugar over there, and he had to take sandwiches with him most of the time to work and this is back on the pipeline, you know so the shortages never really bothered me except the gas. That was all, you know.

Tanja: That is interesting. That's the first person I've heard that didn't have to worry about sugar; have the processed sugar that wasn't really sugar. Let me see. How did you learn about the progress of the war? Did you listen to the radio?

Jane: I listened to the radio. I heard nothing from him because he couldn't even mention what was going on, but I did know when he was going on a mission, or when he got back from a mission, so I knew how many missions he flew over in Germany because he always told me he was awfully tired.

Tanja: Wasn't there twenty-five missions?

Jane: You went twenty-seven, didn't you? Twenty-seven missions.

Tanja: My goodness! So the next question I want to ask you - did you ever collect any scrap paper or take any part with the metal drives or try to recycle anything like that?

Jane: I don't think so, but I guess.

Tanja: Do you remember that going on, though?

Jane: I remember that you always saved everything you know, but I lived in Maryville while he was gone and I worked nights at the bus depot. They had Trailways Bus Depot.

Tanja: Where was that?

Jane: It was down - you know where the Chamber of Commerce is?

Tanja: Yes.

Jane: Well, I think - no, it's moved, hasn't it? Okay where you get your car license?

Tanja: Yes.

Jane: Okay, right across the street north, that was the bus depot.

Tanja: Oh.

Jane: They've torn it down and rebuilt something there now, I think.

Tanja: Yeah.

Jane: But I was - I would go to work, and I could lock up and leave as soon as my bus left and then I had to be there for the next bus. I'd go and open up again. In between the times that I would lock the place I was down town in the skating rink. They had a skating rink, and I skated two hours almost every night. I loved to skate and I just went down there and skated. Something to do. Otherwise I was in - locked up in the bus depot reading. [Laugh]

Tanja: Now what did you - what kind of songs did you like to listen to? Do you remember? Any songs?

Jane: To what?

Tanja: Music. Did you listen to music?

Jane: I had a little radio. I guess I wasn't - didn't listen to - I was listening more to war things.

Tanja: War things?

Jane: Yeah. And I seldom ever went to a movie. I didn't want to go by myself, and the hours on it didn't agree with my hours that I had to work.

Tanja: I can understand that. We're going to talk a little bit about the end of the war. Do you - did you hear about D-Day, and the bombing of Japan from the radio? Or do you remember how you heard about those incidents?

Jane: Now is D-Day, is that the day the war was over in Japan?

Tanja: No, it's Normandy was D-Day, where they invaded France. Don't remember that?

Jane: No.

Tanja: Okay. After the war, were you and your family worried about the international spread of Communism and Communists in our government movies or did you really not pay much attention to that?

Jane: I don't think I even thought about it really.

Tanja: That's about it - all the questions I have. Are there any stories from World War II that you - stick out in your mind that you would like to share with us?

Jane: I don't know. I've done lots of traveling. In my church, in Red Cross, and in the American Legion Auxiliary.

Tanja: Now when were you involved with the Red Cross? Was that after the war?

Jane: I'm a Red Cross member now, and I have been since 1972 and was very active until the last three or four years. I love to sing, and we would take a chorus, and we'd go to the nursing homes in Maryville every week we went. We went once a week and I loved that and I did some Red Cross work that I could do in the hospital; the coffee cart and things like that. I'm very active in the American Legion Auxiliary; I joined it in 1948 and I've been there ever since. I was unit president many times; was district president once, was state president one, and was a national executive committee woman one year. And I loved all of that. In the American Legion Auxiliary we have what we call Girls State; Missouri Girl's State. I was on the staff down there thirty years and I was director eleven years. I loved that. My church - I'm a certified lay speaker in the United Methodist Church; very active in the United Methodist Women until the last two years and I haven't done anything. But I traveled a lot as a United Methodist Woman and the Secretary of State sent me an invitation to attend the SALT Conference in Washington, D.C. I got to go to that, and we got to go through all of the beautiful buildings and Benjamin Franklin Room in where the Secretary of State is. They held a reception for all of us after the SALT Talks, and I got to go through - all through the Benjamin Franklin Rooms. It was just marvelous; things that I - and we went to New York and went to Brooklyn. We were going up there on criminal charges, you know, that we wanted to see how they acted and then we went to the United Nations, too. But we went out to a home out in a kind of the slums of New York City, and we went early in the morning, and we were there all day, locked in this - it was a - had been a house, but it was more or less into a prison now and there were women there and we stayed until a - taxis took us out and we stayed until nine o'clock that evening and we called for the taxis and they said that they did not run in that part of New York after dark. And so we had to go out and walk. I think we walked two blocks and then they got a taxi that would come and pick a load up and another one would come. It was really an experience. I was scared to death! I've learned a lot about things in the country and I've loved every minute.

Tanja: That's good.

Jane: And I - life's been real good to us.

Tanja: It sounds like it. Sounds like you've had a very full life. A very enjoyable.

Jane: We've had each other now seventy years.

Tanja: Oh, my goodness!

Jane: He's always telling me he thinks we should get a divorce. And I said we're not getting divorce. I said if you want to get an annulment that will be okay; they're cheaper. [Laugh] He's quite a card. But we've had a good life.

Tanja: It sounds like it. Do you remember what it was like for you when your husband came back from the war?

Jane: He was different. He wouldn't talk. He never talked about the war. Never mentioned it and I didn't question him because I don't know, but my brothers, they never talked about the war and it was just something all the men went through. We went back to England in '89. His bomb group was having a reunion and we got to go and they - well, I think he told you in that thing he had, but they took us out to the American cemetery at Cambridge, and they said that everybody could - when we got off the bus, could go into the little chapel room and they wanted you to take a rose and put it on the grave of one of the veterans that you knew or that - anyone you wanted to. Well his co-pilot was killed and was buried there at that - so Robert said, "I'm not getting out of the bus." That was very disappointing, because I wanted him to go, and I said "Do you care if I go?" and he said "No, go on; I'm not going." So I got out and I went in and I asked them if I could take the rose for him to put on John's grave, and they said you sure can, and they handed me a rose and I turned around and there stood Robert. He said "I guess I'd better go." And so he went down and put this rose on there and then from that day on he went home that night to the hotel and wrote that prayer and from that time on, he'll talk to me about the war. It was that long inside him that I never knew a thing about it.

Tanja: That's incredible.

Jane: And I've talked to so many other wives, and they said their husbands never talked about it. And I guess it's horrid, so they don't want to talk about it.

Tanja: Margaret, do you or Christy have any questions you'd like to ask?

Margaret: I like the story about when he came into St. Louis and he came home from St. Louis.

Tanja: She'd like to hear the story about when he came in from St. Louis.

Margaret: When he came home from St. Louis?

Tanja: When he came home from St. Louis?

Jane: Oh, [Laugh] he tells it much better than I do! He came in to Jefferson Barracks, wasn't it? And I got on a train here in Burlington Junction and rode all night to get into St Louis and it was a cattle car train and I had to sit in - it really wasn't a passenger train at all, but it was the only way I could get there and I didn't want to drive it because it was too far for me to go alone and then I didn't know where to meet him, didn't know anything. And I rode that thing all night. We stopped in every town that it went through, because we had livestock on. We got into St. Louis, and I waited at the train depot until he came down. He came in, he went to Jefferson Barracks, and then he went AWOL because he just took out and came to town and went down to the train depot and picked me up and he stayed - we got a hotel room and he stayed that night and then he had to go back out to Jefferson Barracks the next day, and they just - weren't you dismissed from there? I don't remember; they let him come home, anyway.

Tanja: I see. All the way to St. Louis in a cattle car. That was an experience. Oh, my goodness. Well, I want to thank you very much for your time. It's been . . .

Jane: You're sure welcome.

Tanja: . . . an utter pleasure. Thank you very much.