

HELEN HATCH

Amthor: This is a portion of the oral Histories of Northwest Missouri of the 1940s Program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support from the National Endowment of the Humanities. Today's date is March 27, 2009 and this interview is being conducted at the Tiffany Care Center in Mound City, Missouri, in Holt County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley. We are here today to interview Helen Hatch and her birthday is May 10, 1907, and she lived during the 1940s and she's going to tell us a little bit about her life. Okay, Helen, could you tell us a little bit about your background, where and when you were born, and tell us about your parents and what occupations they had?

Helen: Well, I was born two miles west of New Point, Missouri. And we lived on a farm. And I worked real hard. We didn't have too much money, so we had to work.

Amthor: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Helen: Yes, I had two sisters and three brothers.

Amthor: Did any of them participate in the war – in World War II?

Helen: What?

Amthor: Did any of your brothers or sisters participate in the war?

Helen: Yes, my brother was in the war.

Amthor: And what area did he go into – what branch of the service?

Helen: He was in the – let's see –

Amthor: Was it Navy, Army?

Helen: He was in the Army, but I can't think what he was in – my brother. Oh, let me think. I'm thinking.

Amthor: Well, we can come back to that, maybe. Maybe after a little bit you'll think of it. Okay, well, tell us a little bit about life before 1940, before the war, how old were you and what was life like at that point?

Helen: Well I went to school at New Point and I graduated in 1925. And then I went to Missouri Business School in St. Joe for a couple of years. Then I started working. I worked for 42 years.

Amthor: When did you get married?

Helen: What?

Amthor: When did you get married?

Helen: Get married? October 10, 1945.

Amthor: Okay, so you got married during the war.

Helen: Yes.

Amthor: Was your husband in the war? Did he go to war?

Helen: Yes.

Amthor: What did he do?

Helen: What?

Amthor: What was his branch of service?

Helen: He was in the 6th Division, Headquarters Battery.

Amthor: And that's Army?

Helen: Yes.

Amthor: Did he serve overseas?

Helen: He was in New Guinea and the Philippines.

Amthor: Could you tell us a little bit about his service?

Helen: Well, he was – oh, what do you call it – electrician. I don't know – don't remember too much about it. He would write to me every day. Sometimes they would censor the letter, you know.

Amthor: Did he try to give you hints on where he was?

Helen: What?

Amthor: Did he ever try to give you hints or a code where he might be located? Did he ever try to do that through the letters?

Helen: I didn't get that.

Amthor: Well, sometimes some of the men would try to put a code in the letters to their loved ones so they could tell them where they are without it being written out. Did he have anything like that with you? So you never really knew where he was?

Helen: No, I don't remember.

Amthor: So, did he get drafted into the Army?

Helen: What?

Amthor: Did he get drafted into the Army?

Helen: Yes.

Amthor: So, were you married before he went to the Army?

Helen: No.

Amthor: No, you got married while he was in service?

Helen: He came back. He was in the hospital at Springfield and when he – he had a ruptured disc in his back and after his surgery, why, he came back and we got married.

Amthor: Okay, do you remember where you were or what you were doing when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Helen: Pearl Harbor?

Amthor: Yal.

Helen: Uh, I was working at the ASCS office.

Amthor: So, you heard that on the radio, the attack?

Helen: No, we didn't have a radio there. People just started talking about it, you know.

Amthor: Do you remember any of the propaganda, what they were saying about the war in the United States or about Japan at all? What was maybe on the news reels or the radio about the war?

Helen: No. I didn't have time to listen to the radio.

Amthor: Can you tell us now a little bit about what you were doing while your husband was in the service? Did you – you were working. Is that correct?

Helen: Right.

Amthor: So tell us about your job. What did you do while he was in the service?

Helen: I was working for the USDA. And I worked for them for 26 years.

Amthor: And what was your job?

Helen: I was what you call the administrator.

Amthor: And what did your duties consist of?

Helen: I wrote out checks for everybody and did book work?

Amthor: How about cooking and gardening? Did you do a whole lot of that?

Helen: Oh, yes.

Amthor: Tell us a little bit about that.

Helen: Oh, I always like to garden and I did a lot of canning. I liked that.

Amthor: Uh-huh. Do you remember the rationing? Was there anything in particular that you couldn't get very much of?

Helen: Right! Sugar and flour, you know. It was really – we had to be careful what we did use.

Amthor: How about clothing and shoes? Were they hard to get, too?

Helen: Yes.

Amthor: Did you have to make any clothes out of feed sacks?

Helen: My sister was a seamstress and she made a lot of clothes for us.

Amthor: So, you yourself didn't sew, but she did? You didn't sew?

Helen: What?

Amthor: You did not sew? You did not sew clothing. Your sister did.

Helen: No, my sister did, but I didn't do too much. She made suits and things.

Amthor: Wow! What did you do for entertainment during the 40s?

Helen: What?

Amthor: What did you do for entertainment?

Helen: Entertainment?

Amthor: Yal, did you go to movies, did you play cards – what did you do?

Helen: Now, what year was this?

Amthor: The 1940s, during the war.

Helen: What did I do in the 40s? Well, I was working for the SCA and, oh, we did square dancing and just ran around and danced a lot.

Amthor: Do you remember the music of that time period?

Helen: Oh, I don't know. I don't know what you call it.

Amthor: Did they – big band – was it big band, swing?

Helen: Yal. We'd go to the Frog Hop.

Amthor: The Frog Hop! I've heard of that. Now, where was that located? Was that located around here?

Helen: What?

Amthor: Where was the Frog Hop located?

Helen: St. Joe.

Amthor: St. Joe. You had a lot of dances? We have another question for you.

Cathy: Hey, Helen, during the music or the dancing, was it country music like Hank Williams and Tennessee Ernie Ford, or was it more like Tommy Dorsey and the Glenn Miller Band?

Helen: Yal, that's what it was.

Cathy: Okay. Did you get to see any of these?

Helen: What?

Cathy: Did you get to see Glenn Miller or Tommy Dorsey at the Frog Hop – did you get to actually see them perform or did you just listen to them on record?

Helen: We just listened to the music.

Cathy: Okay, that's what I was asking. What was your favorite dance? Did you do the jitterbug or were there different names of dances?

Helen: No, I liked to waltz. My husband was a good dancer.

Cathy: A really good dancer? That was my question.

Amthor: Did you go to any movies?

Helen: What?

Amthor: Did you go to the picture shows or the movie theaters?

Helen: I didn't get that.

Amthor: Like movies or picture shows. Did you go to any of those for entertainment?

Helen: Oh, we'd go to the – what do you call it – the one that just burned.

Amthor: the Missouri or....

Helen: The Electric Theater. They used to have a theater in Oregon.

Amthor: Is there any movies that you remember seeing that stands out in your mind during that time?

Helen: Oh, let's see.

Amthor: I think "Gone with the Wind" came out during that time period.

Helen: What was that name, though, that – Joe – I don't remember names. I can't come up with it.

Amthor: Well, I'm sure you've seen a lot of movies. It's probably hard to remember back.

Helen: We sure did.

Amthor: How did you find out about the progress of the war? Newspapers? Radios? Did they tell you what was happening in the war?

Helen: Well, just word of mouth, I would say.

Amthor: At the end of the war, were there a lot of celebrations when the men were coming home?

Helen: What was that?

Amthor: At the end of the war, were there lots of celebrations?

Helen: Oh, yes. Yes everybody was really thrilled about it.

Amthor: What were you doing when you found out your husband was coming home?

Helen: What'd I do? (Laughs) I was just overjoyed.

Amthor: Did you have a celebration for him when he came home?

Helen: No, I didn't have any celebration. Just glad he was home.

Amthor: How did you feel when Truman dropped the atomic bomb?

Helen: Oh, I don't know what you'd call it. I just – I don't know. I thought – I don't know how I felt. I just felt like – it was too bad it had to happen.

Amthor: Do you think he was right in doing so or.....

Helen: Well, yes I do.

Amthor: Were you worried about Communism after the war – the threat of Communism with the Communists – you know, Communist Russia? Were you worried about that after the war?

Helen: Not really.

Amthor: How about polio and disease? Were you – had any threats of polio?

Helen: What?

Amthor: How about disease after the war – like polio? Were you worried about polio and other types of diseases?

Helen: Polio?

Amthor: Yal, were you concerned about polio? No? So what did your husband do when he came back after the war? Did he find a job?

Helen: He went back to his old job – barbering.

Amthor: He was a barber?

Helen: He was a barber.

Amthor: Did he take advantage of any of the programs that the government had for veterans?

Helen: No he didn't.

Amthor: So, is there any one thing that you can think of that you can tell us about what life was like in the 1940s that's different than today that you'd like to tell us about? Maybe the economy – how the economy is different than it is now?

Helen: Oh, my, there's a lot of difference. I'll tell you. Well, I could tell you more about the 30s than the 40s.

Amthor: That's okay. Tell us about the 30s.

Helen: Well, at that time I was working for Dr. Whetler as a dental assistant. And times got so hard that people couldn't afford to have a tooth pulled or anything, so Dr. Whetler let me go. He never did get another assistant. But – so I was out of a job, so we took trips in our old Model-T Ford. I'll tell you, that was something.

Amthor: Tell us about one of those trips. You must have good memories about some of them.

Helen: Well, I don't know how far it is to Shenandoah, Iowa, but there was five of us went to Shenandoah in our Model-T Ford. We sure had a great time. We had mud roads, but it didn't rain while we were gone.

Amthor: How long did it take you to get there?

Helen: Oh, about a day.

Amthor: A whole day! Wow!

Helen: We were there about five days. Let's see. Well, some of the entertainers, you know, at KFNF. We went to the – to watch them entertain, you know.

Amthor: It sounds like a fun trip.

Helen: It was.

Amthor: So, how was the transportation? Was it pretty easy going other than the mud roads?

Helen: What was that?

Amthor: The transportation getting back and forth. Other than having mud roads, was it pretty easy to get around?

Helen: Well, no, because we had mud roads. It was kind of hard to get around.

Amthor: Did you have electricity or running water when you were growing up?

Helen: No, we didn't have electricity. We had – oh, what do you call it – a machine that – oh, what do you call it?

Amthor: A generator?

Helen: Generator. Yes.

Amthor: I don't have any other questions unless there's something else that you can think of that we didn't ask you that you'd like to share with us about that time or if you had a....

Helen: Well, let's see. Oh, my, so many things happened over which to talk about.

Amthor: Something that stands in your mind that really made a difference?

Helen: What?

Amthor: Is there something that really stands out in your mind that was different during that time or.....

Helen: Well, we used to have – uh – meetings, church meeting, you know. And, of course, we didn't have any transportation, so I'd walk two miles to the meetings. I just really enjoyed living, you know, doing that.

Amthor: Well, I think if we don't have anything else to ask you, I think this had been a great interview. Thank you for coming in and sharing with us.

Helen: Well, you're.....

Amthor: We've enjoyed listening to your stories. You had some fun because you enjoyed remembering them. We can tell.

Helen: I'll tell you there's so many things I could tell you about that it'd fill a big book.

Amthor: Are you writing these things down so you can remember?

Helen: No.

Amthor: Well thank you for coming in.

Helen: Well, you're sure welcome.