

Homefront SD

Gladys Unruh

(Interviewed by Abe Unruh of the Agar-Blunt-Onida School District)

October 16, 2007

What were times like then?

During that time? It was getting to be the better times. You mean, the farming and such? It was getting to be better. It was really getting better after the dirty thirties. But there wasn't much help around because everybody was drafted, more or less. It wasn't the big tractors we have now, so there wasn't the man-power. In a lot of places horse power!

Do you have cars?

Oh heavens, yes, we had cars. We had a Model A. Aggie drove it once and didn't stop in time and almost drove through the garage door. Ma hollered, ohh! Didn't have the cars we have now, but oh, they were a big improvement over the Model T.

Did your family do anything for the war?

You mean, Uncle Spike and Uncle Joe were in the war, and Uncle Dave. I didn't have any brothers in it, no. I don't think any of Dad's brothers were in it, but I know three of Ma's brothers were in it.

What did you do during the war?

Well, we had rationing. We could only get so many stamps. We had sugar stamps. Those things you got according to how much you farmed, and every time you went to buy gas, you had to have a stamp, and when you run out of stamps, you were out of stamps until the next month.

How many stamps did you usually get?

Oh, that I don't remember. Ma and Dad handled all of that, but I remember the sugar rationing especially. We couldn't bake the way we wanted to.

Was about everything the same in Onida, or were there different shops and stuff?

Oh, Onida was a lot bigger than it is now. We had several stations that bought cream and eggs, and we had several grocery stores. It was a lot different. Saturday night we'd go to town and park on Main Street. They'd come out and get your cream and eggs, Ma went and got the check. Oh no, people parked on Main Street, and you had to be in town fairly early to get a parking place on Main Street.. They had a good movie theater at the time; we went to movies a lot. Gosh, you bought a hamburger for a quarter. For a dollar you could buy your movie ticket and a hamburger and a pop afterwards.

Did you lose anything important during the war, or because of it?

No. Not that I remember.

What did you and your family think about the war? Did you think it was good, or bad, or what?

I don't think anybody thought any war was good. We were waiting for it to end. Course we didn't have the coverage that you do now. Maybe that's a good thing, I don't know. I think sometimes we see too much.

Did someone die that affected you really bad, like anyone you knew really well?

No. Really about the only casualty I remember is Benny Gross coming home without an arm. Well, then, Gene Westphal was killed and lost. There was a few of them, yeah. But I don't know—we just never—I guess we just weren't as aware of it as you are now.

Did anything good come out of the war for you or anyone else?

Umm. Not that I can remember especially. Life went on just the same. Makes a difference who you've got in there fighting. Course then once the war got over, things just kept getting better. Once it was over you could buy, used to be if Dad would have needed a tractor or a binder or anything like that, he had to put his name down and then when one of them come in, that depended who got it—the one they figured needed it the worst would get it.

Oh, it didn't go down the line?

No, it was supposed to be, but it really wasn't. Money talks, you know. I remember once Dad was supposed to get, what the heck was it, he signed up for something, and somebody else come and wanted it, and Dad informed him as long as the bank at the corner borrowed him his money, he was hauling home his equipment. There's no way.

How did you get keep track of the war? Did you listen to the radio?

Not much. It wasn't ...like I said, we weren't near as aware of it as we are now. Once in a while you'd hear something, but...Of course, well, I went to school through part of it.

What was that like? Did you have any drills or anything?

No, we never had drills. They had what they called blackouts in places in cities and that where they had to turn out all the lights, you didn't dare have lights so if they would fly over they wouldn't know it was a city, but, out in the country, no, we never.

Did you make any new friends with soldiers passing through?

Yeah, see they had an air base in Pierre. [Abe: I didn't know that.] Oh yes, they had a very good air base there! That's where the air port is now. I remember Sonny Winkler hauled home, when they broke up, he hauled home some of the barracks, he bought them, and hauled them home and used them for sheep barns and that. Yeah, Saturday nights there would be a lot of soldiers in town.

What kind of news was in the paper or on the radio?

They didn't touch on the war like they do now. It was more or less, well there was some in, but it was nothing like now. There was just one radio, and Ma always wanted to listen to "Ma Perkins" and such.

What did you do during the war—were you most of the time in a job, or were you in school?

I was in school, and when I graduated from school, there wasn't much probability of me going to high school, cause I could run the tractors, I could work with the horses. Dad stuck me out the field. That was like I said, you couldn't hire anybody, and I doubt he could have afforded somebody, so that's where I spent, that's how come I didn't go to high school because he had to have help. And like I said, it was getting to be the better years, so that was my education—the tractor.

Do you feel any difference once the war started—were you scared more or anything?

No. It was way, way, way overseas. That seemed a, could no way figure out how it could bother us here.

Was the food any different—did they have better food?

Oh, we had good food. It wasn't near as plentiful as we now or the variety we have now. We didn't have, the stores of course didn't have the fresh fruit in like they do now. I remember Shorty Forrest going to Colorado and coming back with bushels and bushels of peaches. But we planted big gardens. Them days we didn't buy near the stuff we do out of stores now.

Was it weird having the soldiers come home? How did you deal with it?

They never made as much of a fanfare then as they do now, and they should have. It was mentioned in the paper, and that was about it. There were no people lining up the streets you know, to wait, to follow them into town. Other than that it was none of that.

Do you remember anyone coming home really well?

Yeah, I remember Uncle Spike. Oh yeah, Uncle Spike used to send us, see Uncle Spike was in California. He used to send us all kinds of things from California. Yeah, I remember him coming home. He spent a lot of time at our place. In fact, him and Grandpa were only, they weren't that far apart but they didn't know it. They could have got together out there.

Did you know Grandpa back then?

I knew Grandpa as long as I can remember! He just grew up over there, and I just grew up over there! Oh yes, they visited back and forth. They all come from down by Marion and that, so they knew each other before they even come here.

Did the war change your life any?

Well, I said it did—I didn't go to high school. And, I don't know, they had the air base, they were around town a lot.

Did the planes ever fly over from the air base?

Oh, the planes flew over. I think that's when I remember that trail behind. What do they call that—vapor? That one landed, or crashed, up north someplace by, umm, I want to say Polo, but it wasn't that. It wasn't too far north here by in there where Heasley lived and that that one crashed in there.

Did you go up and look at it?

Yeah. It was out in the field, yeah. The wing was gone. I don't know why it crashed, but I remember it crashing.

Did everyone make it out all right?

Yeah, they were all right. I remember that about that airplane. They weren't near as plentiful as they are here.

Do you remember what you were doing when the war started?

No, I don't remember what I was doing when the war started. Like I said, there was...out here in the country it was nothing that we...we'd see the soldiers, and hear some of it when we went to town and that, but now, you know, it makes headlines. I remember when Eugene Westphal was killed, they never did find him. When one would be killed, it took forever for the body to come back. Now they come back so fast. But that seemed to be a long, drawn-out affair from the time they were killed until they came back to the States.

Did you go to the funeral for Eugene?

They never got him, never found his body.

Oh, I didn't know if they just had a funeral for him.

Hm um. Hm um. Not that I remember, but I know they never found him. And then see, there was quite a few, you heard about them, POWs. Elmer Ripley was one, and there were quite a few prisoners of war through here. And you'd hear about how they were treated and that, and how they mistreated the Jews. That kind of stuff come through. But the war from day to day like it is now, hm um.

I can't find any more questions to ask. Thank you, Grandma.