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Interviewee

Paul and Helen Hunter
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Interviewer

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Part 1

Cress: Let's start out by you telling me your name.

Hunter, Paul: Paul Hunter

Cress: Okay, and how do you spell that?

Hunter, Paul: P a u l H u n t e r [spelled out loud].

Cress: Okay, and your name?

Hunter, Helen: Helen. H e l e n [spelled out loud].

Cress: All right, so I'll start with you Paul, when and where were your parents born?

Hunter, Paul: My dad was born a few miles east of Parsons and they moved to this community here when he was a year old.

Cress: Oh my. Now this community is?

Hunter, Paul: Center Bethel.

Cress: Called the Center Bethel community okay. And so when were you born?

Hunter, Paul: I was born in 1921.

Cress: Okay and where were you born?

Hunter, Paul: There on the farm where I grew up.

Cress: Okay, and Helen how about you?

Hunter, Helen: I was born on a farm about 5 miles south of Altamont.

Cress: Okay, and when was that?

Hunter, Helen: That was April 15, 1924.

Cress: 1924, okay.

Hunter, Helen: My parents were Arthur and Emma Thomas.

Cress: Okay, Okay Paul what were your parents' names?

Hunter, Paul: Will and Hope Hunter.

Cress: Okay, and how many people were in your family?

Hunter, Paul: I had 1 brother and 2 sisters.

Cress: Okay, and you Helen?

Hunter, Helen: My parents lost 2 boys before my sister Marcella and I were born.

Cress: Oh.

Hunter, Helen: I think that's right.

Cress: So Paul how did you and your family come to live in this area?

Hunter, Paul: Well I grew up here and have spent my life here until I went into service in 1942 and I couldn't wait to get back.

Cress: When did you return?

Hunter, Paul: In the fall of 1945, well August of 1945 but I was still on Uncle Sam's payroll until January.

Cress: So you mentioned that your parents farmed nearby--where did they come from?

Hunter, Paul: Well my dad, as I said was born east of Parsons and grew up there on that farm, down the road here. My mother was born near Lawrence and the big Kansas River flood in 1903, they were up just out of the water but all of their neighbors down in the flood plain moved their livestock into their pens and I guess it was kind of a mess, but anyway my granddad decided he wanted to move away from that flood so he came down to Parsons and bought a farm in the flood plain. It was a half-mile east of the sale barn corner.

Cress: Where the McKee's sale barn in?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: Yes that is part of the flood plain.

Hunter, Paul: There is just a little knoll right at the corner where their house set--it was out of the water when the rest of the farm flooded.

Cress: And how about you Helen--how did your family come to live in this area?

Hunter, Helen: I think that's always been kind of a mystery--my grandfather was born in Ohio and came to southeast Kansas and my dad was born here in southeast Kansas and he lived on the same farm all of his life.

Hunter, Paul: Well your grandmother too was born, grew up in Ohio.

Hunter, Helen: Yes. Grandmother Wilson. Dad was an only child and was born and raised on that farm south of Altamont.

Cress: So have the 2 of you always lived on a farm, other than your time in the service?

Hunter, Paul: She hasn't, but I have.

Hunter, Helen: I moved to Chicago and was there for about 16 months.

Cress: When was that?

Hunter, Paul: 1945.

Hunter, Helen: 1945.

Cress: What did you do there?

Hunter, Helen: I worked for the government--worked in the merchandise mart which was one of the biggest office buildings at that time. I think the Pentagon was the only other office building that was any bigger then.

Cress: So that was during the war time?

Hunter, Helen: I think the war was over about 2 weeks after I went to Chicago. I was there when the war ended.

Cress: And then you came back home?

Hunter, Helen: Came back and taught school again.

Cress: Oh, uhuh, did you teach school at one of the rural schools?

Hunter, Helen: Yes, I taught my first year, right out of high school, you could teach out of high school then if we passed the state exam and taught at Center Valley School, then the next 2 years

I lived with my folks and taught in Janesville School and the government had an air base just across the road from that school so everybody, a lot of people moved out of the area because of the air base and they closed that school then.

Cress: And where was that located?

Hunter, Helen: About 2 and a half miles east of, well it was south of Altamont.

Hunter, Paul: It was 4 miles south on the Edna road and east about a half a mile.

Cress: I've heard about what was called the Edna airport, that would have been the same?

Hunter, Paul: Yes, it was just across the road on the south where the schoolhouse was.

Hunter, Helen: They flew a lot of planes over the school and they made so much noise you didn't get much done while they were flying over.

Cress: Oh, so have you always farmed or have you done other work as well?

Hunter, Paul: No, I've always farmed.

Cress: And how long have you lived on this land? Let's see the address here is 1684 19000, have you been here for a long time?

Hunter, Paul: Ever since we were married which will be 60 years this November.

Cress: So you must have gotten married in

Hunter: 1949.

Cress: 1949, so do you recall whether you or anyone in your family benefited from the New Deal programs of the Roosevelt administration?

Hunter, Paul: Well I've been thinking a little bit about that one. My recollection is that in the winter of 1934 and 1935 which would have been, well FDR took office in January of 1943.

Cress: It was 1933.

Hunter Paul: Or 1933, but it would have been 1943.

Cress: When it was erased.

Hunter, 1933 and 1934 not quite a year after FDR took office and I don't recall what the term was that they called the program, but it was unusual in that some government agencies, whatever, hired farmers around the area with teams and wagons to haul crushed rock from over here where Midwest Minerals are now. On the road east of there they could go over and load and

haul one load a day and that took the day, but they were rocking that road I think the plan was all the way to Sherman.

Cress: Okay, Sherman City?

Hunter, Paul: Yes. Now I don't recall that dad ever drove the team as far as Sherman but he spent that winter at that job and it, well we were feeling how tough times were getting and it meant something to the family to have that income--I have no idea of how or what they paid them or anything of the kind but of course, we, it's not comparable now anyway.

Cress: Right, well later on we will ask you some more about those questions, about the New Deal. Let's talk a little bit more about your farming, now did your parents own their own land or did they rent?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: They owned?

Hunter, Paul: Yes. Well, that farm had been in the family since 1893 and my dad just sort of took over the operation after his father died.

Cress: And when you moved to this farm, you bought the farm?

Hunter, Paul: Yes, well there were several transactions involved, but yes for all practical purposes.

Cress: How big was your parent's farm?

Hunter, Paul: It was 148 acres I think.

Cress: 148, okay, was that larger or smaller or typical for that time.

Hunter, Paul: Pretty typical.

Cress: And how big is your farm?

Hunter, Paul: This farm now is 357 acres and Helen owns an 80 down the road here not very far.

Cress: Okay, now was it that big when you first bought it or have you added on?

Hunter, Paul: No, it was 160 acres when we first bought it.

Cress: So what kind of crops have you raised on the farm?

Hunter, Paul: Well about all of them--corn, wheat, oats, milo, and soybeans.

Hunter, Helen: Alfalfa.

Hunter, Paul: Yes, hay, because we dairied for about 20 years.

Cress: You had dairy cattle?

Hunter, Paul: Yes, so we grew alfalfa then.

Cress: How many head of cows did you have?

Hunter, Paul: We looked at 50 head, but when we decided to get out of the business it was.