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Interviewee

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Part 2

Cress: When was that? (Changed tapes). Okay let's try to pick up where we left off then you sold your dairy cattle in 1972, what other kind of livestock did you have?

Hunter, Paul: I had some beef cattle from there until I was 80 and when I was 80 Helen told me I had no business taking care of those cattle in winter weather.

Cress: Yes that can be hard.

Hunter, Paul: And I kind of had to agree with her so we haven't owned a cow since.

Cress: Did you ever have any other kind of livestock?

Hunter, Paul: When we were first married we had a few hogs, but that didn't last very long.

Cress: Did you have poultry?

Hunter, Paul: No.

Cress: So you've pretty much been a cattleman?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: Did you have a garden?

Hunter, Paul: Yes, we used to.

Cress: How about during the Depression, now you would have still been living with your parents at that time, what kind of livestock did they raise?

Hunter, Paul: They had dairy cows and hogs and at times some sheep.

Hunter, Helen: They had poultry.

Hunter, Paul: Yes, and they always had a flock of hens.

Cress: And did they have a garden as well?

Hunter, Paul: Oh yes, a big garden always.

Cress: Well you said you had 3 siblings so you had 6 mouths to feed in that family. How about did you ever have any wild game.

Hunter, Paul: My dad loved to hunt squirrels--we ate squirrels whenever he brought in some.

Cress: Okay.

Hunter, Paul: And occasionally we'd have a wild rabbit, but not very often.

Cress: Did you process your own food back when you were living with your folks?

Hunter, Paul: Well that was before we had air or refrigeration. Mother canned a lot of fruit especially and vegetables, but she didn't can meat, at least to any extent. They always butchered hogs and cured bacon and ham, but beef didn't fit the pattern.

Cress: So did you take the beef cattle to someplace else to have it butchered?

Hunter, Paul: Well, we just didn't eat that much beef until the locker plant went in we could have beef butchered and processed there.

Cress: Then you kept it at the locker?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: Did you sell the food that you grew or was it mostly for your own consumption?

Hunter, Paul: Mostly own consumption.

Cress: Did you take some of it to market?

Hunter, Paul: Very little.

Cress: Now in later times since you've been farming on your own I suspect you took your cows to market didn't you?

Hunter, Paul: Oh yes.

Cress: Where did you sell them?

Hunter, Paul: The local sale barn.

Cress: There in Parsons?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Hunter, Helen: We sold some dairy cows later.

Hunter, Paul: Yeah, but they were sold to other dairymen.

Cress: I see. So how did you get your crops to market?

Hunter, Paul: Helen drove the truck.

Cress: Helen drove the truck. So you would harvest your crops out here and then where did you drive them to Helen?

Hunter, Helen: Well, either Altamont or Parsons' elevators.

Cress: Whichever was paying better?

Hunter, Paul: Or more convenient.

Hunter, Helen: Or closest.

Cress: Which one was the closest?

Hunter, Helen: I think Parsons was a little bit the closest, wasn't it?

Hunter, Paul: Well, yeah it would have been at least from the north end of the farm it was, maybe not from here.

Cress: Yeah you're kind of right in between there aren't you?

Hunter, Paul: Yeah.

Cress: During the Depression do you remember if your family changed the kinds of crops they were growing or the livestock they raised or did they just keep things about the same?

Hunter, Paul: Well they tried to keep things the same but hogs got down to \$2 and something a pound or 100 pounds and, but they still had hogs. As far as the crops were concerned we grew corn to feed the hogs and cattle. And one of the first things I remember in my childhood there on that farm was that dad built a silo in 1927. I would have been 6 years old but I do recall it and it is still standing down there, but that changed the pattern somewhat in that we always had corn for silage.

Cress: So you were able to stock up a little bit more?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: Do you remember your parents ever using horse-drawn or mule-drawn equipment?

Hunter, Paul: Yes. My dad did all of his farming with horses until 1937 when he bought his first tractor.

Cress: Do you remember what kind it was?

Hunter, Paul: John Deere.

Cress: A John Deere, okay. How many teams did he have?

Hunter, Paul: Two teams plus a spare usually.

Cress: Yeah, so what do you remember about farming with horses?

Hunter, Paul: Well, I don't, my dad was a horse lover. He loved good horses. I was never that fond of horses so I didn't enjoy that part of it like he did.

Cress: Did he train his horses or did he buy them already trained?

Hunter, Paul: Usually he trained his own.

Cress: Do you think there were any advantages to farming with horses?

Hunter, Paul: Well you grew your own gasoline I guess. That's what oats and corn were for.

Cress: Were there disadvantages?

Hunter, Paul: It was slow getting things done, yes.

Cress: So you say you switched, he switched to mechanical machinery in 1937.

Hunter, Paul: Yes

Cress: Do you remember why he made that change?

Hunter, Paul. Well it was something he'd looked forward to doing for a while and finally was able to.

Cress: He got a little bit ahead?

Hunter, Paul: Yeah, a few dollars ahead. Sold, I think he traded some horses on that deal too, to buy his first tractor. I know there was a tractor trading involving horses back in there somewhere.

Cress: Now you didn't use horses on your farm?

Hunter, Paul: No, we never had a horse up here.

Cress: Over time it sounds like you increased your acreage?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: So you could produce more or have more cattle?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: How did that happen, did you just add a little bit at a time?

Hunter, Paul: Well some of it was in the family, but it joined this to the north so, well that was all we added until Helen bought her an 80 down the road here.

Cress: And when did you do that Helen?

Hunter, Helen: *I don't remember the exact year.*

Hunter, Paul: About 1974 or 1975.

Hunter, Helen: It is just my sister and I involved. I bought that with part of what I got from my folks.

Cress: Oh, I see.

Hunter, Helen: We've always just kind of kept it separate, don't know why.

Hunter, Paul: It all belongs to the trust now so, but that's still her farm.

Cress: And what do you, or what did you do with that 80, was it crop land or pasture?

Hunter, Helen: Well some of it was crop land.

Hunter, Paul: Most of it is.

Hunter, Helen: But we went in and built terraces and waterways on it, that was one of the first things we did. It has lots of different types of soil, parts of it is not very good soil.

Cress: Well I've been talking to Paul about what he remembered, let's switch over and ask you about your family farm--do you remember what were the primary crops they grew?

Hunter, Helen: About the same, he never did grow any wheat, I don't think he ever planted any.

Hunter, Paul: Very little any way.

Hunter, Helen: Mostly corn, he had hogs and sheep and guineas, lots of different poultry. My first job with a horse was to carry water to the hay hands. They had a glass gallon jug, wrap it in a wet burlap bag to keep it a little bit cool and hooked it over the saddle horn and take it around.

Cress: Now did that water come from a well?

Hunter, Helen: Yes. Some of it, they did have a cistern, was it charcoal they used to run it through?

Hunter, Paul: Charcoal filter, yes.

Cress: I've had some people tell me that the water out of their cistern was better quality than what they got out of the well.

Hunter, Helen: I think that could be true. That well was very hard water.

Cress: So did they raise their livestock and crops mostly for your own consumption or did you take some of it to market?

Hunter, Helen: Well dad would sell some hogs occasionally.

Hunter, Paul: And lambs.

Hunter, Helen: And lambs.

Cress: Where did he take them when he wanted to sell them?

Hunter, Helen: Well there was some place in Parsons that he sold those lambs, I think. I know he hauled the wool to Parsons. I should recall that name of the place that bought wool.

Hunter, Paul: Degarnette Hide Company.

Hunter, Helen: I think that's right, Degarnette.

Cress: Degarnette, do you remember how to spell that?

Hunter, Paul: I'll take a stab at it.

Cress: Okay, take a stab at it.

Hunter, Paul: D e g a r n e t t e.

Cress: And it was called the Degarnette Hide Company, is that right?

Hunter, Paul: Yes, they bought any kind of hides through the winter season, skunks, muskrats,

anything, but they did buy a lot of wool in the spring.

Cress: So in your family, Helen, did you have a garden also?

Hunter, Helen: Oh yes, my grandfather lived with, after my grandmother passed away, grandfather lived with my folks. I was 13 when he passed away, but he would walk with one crutch, limp lopsided, and would garden all he could and he'd watch my sister and I to see what we were doing.

Cress: Make sure you didn't do something wrong?

Hunter, Helen: They sold sweet corn to people and one lady in Altamont particularly liked her's at just a certain stage and we'd get up, daddy would get us up early in the morning to go pick sweet corn. They always had a lot of fruit, lot of fruit trees.

Cress: So did you process, did your family process your own food?

Hunter, Helen: Mother even canned some beef, but we had what we called a smoke house that had cured ham.

Cress: So did you sell some of that food that you processed or was that just for your family's use?

Hunter, Helen: Mostly for the family's use.

Cress: How did your folks get their crops to market, do you remember?

Hunter, Paul: Actually your dad didn't sell much in the way of crops.

Hunter, Helen: No, he didn't.

Cress: He fed the crops to his livestock?

Hunter, Helen: He fed it to the livestock. They hauled, what did they haul to have ground for flour?

Hunter, Paul: Wheat.

Hunter, Helen: He did grow some wheat then--I didn't remember he ever grew wheat but.

Hunter, Paul: I don't think they made flour out of anything else.

Hunter, Helen: No, my memory never was very good.

Cress: Oh well, you're doing fine. You're doing fine. So if you did grind your own, if you had somebody grind your flour did your family bake your own bread then?

Hunter, Helen: Oh mother baked bread, she bought sugar and salt and that's about it, she didn't buy much out of the grocery store. She pretty much canned. Mother didn't actually work a lot in the garden, my sister and I and grandpa. Dad would plow it with one horse and I can remember after he got the bed ready it was up to my sister and I and grandpa to do most of the planting. Lots of hoeing.

Cress: Lots of hoeing. So your father was using horses?

Hunter, Helen: Oh yes.

Cress: How many teams did he have?

Hunter, Helen: He had two, some people may have had more but I don't recall it. We had two teams and like he said a spare.

Hunter, Paul: If they were on a 160 acres they usually had two teams. If they just had an 80 they might farm with just one team.

Cress: Now was that so the horses could get a break?

Hunter, Paul: Well at plowing time or a few times like that they used four, not just two.

Cress: Four on just one piece of equipment?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: So Helen do you remember whether anything changed during the Depression as far as the crops you grew or the livestock you raised?

Hunter, Helen: No I don't really recall. I remember we had a drought and we were fortunate enough to have a spring on the farm and dad built a concrete tank so that four different fields would, the livestock could drink out of that concrete tank. My sister and I learned to swim in it. One job of ours was to usually ride the horse to turn the windmill on or off to fill that tank.

Cress: Oh you used a windmill?

Hunter, Helen: Yes.

Cress: I'm trying to picture this, that tank must have been in a corner in order for four different fields to drink out of it?

Hunter, Paul: Well it was about in the middle of the corner section.

Cress: Okay.

Hunter, Helen: A long ways from the house, but they built the water line from that spring to the house or well to the barn, I don't think they ever put that water in the house. I drove a team to pull the hay fork, to pull the hay into the barn. A lot of people hayed that way.

Cress: You had a hayloft above your barn?

Hunter, Helen: Yes.

Cress: And you got to drive the horses?

Hunter, Helen: As soon as I got big enough to switch the doubletrees and get the team turned around.

Cress: Sounds like you got started early on.

Hunter, Helen: Dad bought a Jersey cow and taught my sister and I how to milk when I was 5.

Cress: How many dairy cattle did you have then.

Hunter, Helen: Well, that was the only one I milked for a long time, but he had shorthorn cattle and I don't know, one summer I think he had 19 cows maybe, but that's all.

Cress: Milking cows?

Hunter, Helen: Milking cows, yes.

Cress: And you did that all by hand?

Hunter, Helen: Oh yes.

Cress: Do you remember when your family switched to mechanical?

Hunter, Helen: About the same time as his parents. Do you recall that Paul?

Hunter, Paul: I was thinking probably it was earlier than that. Your dad had a Ferguson tractor but when he bought it I don't know.

Hunter, Helen: I don't recall either.

Cress: A Ferguson you said?

Hunter, Paul: Yes. That was predecessor to the Fords--you may recall.

Cress: Yes. Did your family's farm grow, did they add land as they went along?

Hunter, Helen: Well when they inherited some money they bought 40 acres and I think that was

all that was ever added. They had 160 and then they bought that 40.

Cress: Was it adjacent to the?

Hunter, Helen: Catty-cornered, but just barely.

Cress: Okay, for now I'm going to switch over and ask some of these New Deal questions and then we will come back to hearing some more about life on the farm. I'm going to ask you about some of the programs that were part of the New Deal and see if you have any recollections. One of these was the Agriculture Adjustment Administration and one of the things they did was to pay farmers to either cut back on the amount they grew or to stop growing certain crops and, of course, the idea was to try to get the prices up by eliminating the surplus. Did either of your family's take part in that do you know?

Hunter, Paul: Well, I guess you could call my dad a die-hard Republican--he had no use for FDR or any of his programs.

Cress: There were people who felt that way.

Hunter, Paul: So he didn't take much part in it, in the early New Deal days.

Hunter, Helen: My dad didn't either. He was like Paul's dad, pretty much die-hard, I don't think he ever took a dime from any of the government programs.

Cress: Another program that came about during that time was the Federal Insurance Deposit Corporation, the FDIC, now maybe you remember before the FDIC some of the banks failed and people lost their money and a lot of people lost faith in the banking system. The idea of the FDIC was to try to give people more assurance that if they did put money in the bank that it would be safe. Do you recall did that have any effect on your family's attitudes toward banking?

Hunter, Paul: Well I know there were times in that period when my family didn't even have a bank account, but I know the widow who owned this farm at that time was a shareholder in one of the banks in Parsons and in order to pay out the depositors the shareholders not only lost their money, their stock, but they had to dig up an equal amount. And that was when she mortgaged the farm and they eventually had to sell it. So it didn't directly affect my family but certainly we had neighbors who were directly affected by it.

Cress: Okay the Public Works Administration, I'm not sure, I know you mentioned earlier about the winter that your dad hauled gravel, crushed rock, and I don't know whether that would have been part of the Publics Works?

Hunter, Paul: I don't think they'd gotten around to them yet.

Cress: Yeah, that may be.

Hunter, Paul: But I'm not sure.

Cress: I've heard that the Public Works Administration did some things in this area. Are you familiar with any of their projects?

Hunter, Paul: Well, I recall some things like the Marvel Park. The fence along, that rock wall along the highway, that was a PWA or WPA project. And I think there was a similar fence in Forrest Park, but I'm not sure that it's still there.

Cress: I don't know. I know some people have said that one of these programs would come out and dig up ponds for farmers, build bridges, and that sort of thing, did you know of anything like that in this area?

Hunter, Paul: Yes, there were some ponds built under such a program, I don't recall what letters it went by, but there was such a program and it was utilized some. That was your dad's one exception, wasn't it?

Hunter, Helen: I didn't realize he had an exception. Did he build a pond under one of those--well that would have been after Allen started doing the farming wouldn't it?

Hunter, Paul: Oh no, oh no.

Hunter, Helen: Long before that?

Cress: This would have been in the 30s.

Hunter, Helen: Oh my, no I'd forgotten that.

Hunter, Paul: Well that's the way I was told.

Cress: Well as I understand it there was no charge to the farmers. They just had to request it and when their name came to the top of the list well they'd come out and dig a pond.

Hunter, Paul: I sure don't recall that kind of details about it, but I do know there was a program that dug quite a few ponds.

Cress: Now the Farm Security Administration gave people loans so they could buy equipment, tractors, and that sort of thing and from what I gather neither one of your families would have taken part in that. How about the Rural Electrification, I have a hunch that probably had some impact on your lives?

Hunter, Paul: Yes, it certainly did.

Cress: Well let's talk about that a little bit, when do you remember getting electricity?

Hunter, Paul: I was still living at home in the fall of 1947 when that line by there was energized. We moved up here in late 1949 and there was no line from the road up here and the rules they

were going by then were that the Twin Valley Electric didn't build that much line to reach a customer. You would have to go on contract with some others, so we lived here late 1949 until May, 1950 before they got that line built and energized.

Cress: Now are you referring to the line out on the road or just coming back down your driveway?

Hunter, Paul: Well what had to be built was the one down the lane.

Cress: Down the lane, yes. So what do you remember, what was the first thing you did once you got electric?

Hunter, Helen: Well, I never had cooked, I'd always worked out, well I'd mashed a lot of potatoes and stirred gravy and things like that but as far as being responsible for planning and cooking a meal, I told him all I could do was boil water and that was about it. So my, I don't know where that little two-burner oil stove came from but

Hunter, Paul: I think it was from your grandmother Clark.

Hunter, Helen: Probably grandmother Clark. And I tried making some biscuits and you couldn't get one of those hot enough. The dog would hardly eat it.

Cress: A two-burner oil stove, kind of like a hot plate only it was oil?

Hunter, Paul: With a little square oven to sit on it.

Hunter, Helen: That's what I cooked on for the first, how many months?

Hunter, Paul: Well until May when the line was energized.

Cress: So then you got an electric stove?

Hunter, Helen: Yes. I've had an electric stove ever since.

Cress: What other appliances did you get?

Hunter, Helen: Oh a washing machine.

Hunter, Paul: A fridge.

Hunter, Helen: A fridge, refrigerator. I didn't get a dishwasher yet.

Cress: You had to wait a while for that?

Hunter Helen: Had to wait awhile.

Cress: Did you get an iron?

Hunter, Helen: Yes, we had an electric radio. Of course our home was only 20 x 28, a story and a half. We lived in it for what 18 years, 7 of us, we had 5 children.

Cress: So the house I'm sitting in now was built later on?

Hunter, Helen: Yes, considerably later.

Hunter, Paul: We built it in 1948.

Hunter, Helen: This house was built in the summer of 1968.

Cress: 1968.

Hunter, Paul: Yes, I said 1948--that had to be wrong.

Cress: Okay so you had a small house, you had 5 kids you were raising, so you quickly got some of these modern conveniences to help out. Did you use the electric out on the farm at all?

Hunter, Paul: Oh yes, we dairied for quite a while--we used a lot of kilowatts.

Cress: You used milking machines?

Hunter, Paul: Oh yes.

Cress: Well I guess if you had 50 milk cows you would have had to.

Hunter, Paul: Coolers, and the whole works.

Cress: Yes that electric really made dairy farming a little bit easier didn't it.

Hunter, Paul: It sure did.

Cress: Now before that how did you get your milk, how did you sell your milk?

Hunter, Paul: Well they picked it up every day and, well actually for a while we separated the milk and sold cream, but there was always a truck to come by and pick up what we had to sell.

Cress: I see. Do you remember what company that was?

Hunter, Paul: That was Neosho Valley Creamery.

Cress: Neosho Valley Creamery.

Hunter, Paul: Out of Erie.

Cress: Out of Erie. So would they pay you on the spot or did they run an account?

Hunter, Paul: A month later, twice a month, one or the other.

Hunter, Helen: We didn't start out with 50 cows.

Cress: Right.

Hunter, Helen: Did we start registering right away?

Hunter, Paul: We had some registered cattle, yes from the stock.

Cress: So that would have been one of your bigger cash crops--the milk?

Hunter, Paul: Oh yes.

Cress: Did you use electric any other way on the farm besides the milking machines and the coolers?

Hunter, Paul: Well we moved some grain with augers.

Cress: So that's one of the programs that probably did have an impact on your farm?

Hunter, Paul: Oh it had a great impact.

Cress: Okay another program was the CCC, the Civilian Conservation Core--did you know anybody who was in the CCC?

Hunter, Paul: Well we had a neighbor over here who was in it, yes. He was a little older than I was, but he was in it.

Cress: Did he stay in this area or did he go somewhere else?

Hunter, Paul: Well his camp was over around Weir or some such place.

Cress: Okay so he didn't have to go too far. Some of them went out of state I know.

Hunter, Paul: Yes, yes, went quite a ways.

Cress: That's the only one you knew

Hunter, Paul: Well, yeah I think so.

Cress: How about you Helen, did you know anybody?

Hunter, Helen: I didn't know anybody. I've heard of the program but to know anybody that was in it.

Cress: So this fellow you knew Paul, do you feel like it was a benefit to him to be a part of that program?

Hunter, Paul: Well it probably was. He was kind of a wild character any way, but as I recall one of the requirements was that the few dollars out of his pay went to his family rather than directly to him and it certainly would have been of benefit to them.

Cress: Yes, that's how it worked, the money went back to the families.

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: Another program they had was the Social Security Administration. Did you folks get, take part in that?

Hunter, Paul: Well, when we could. Farmers were self-employed, weren't eligible when we were first married, it was 2 or 3 years after that when we became eligible so we've been involved in it ever since.

Cress: So once you had the opportunity you started to pay into it?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: Your folks were probably too old to be involved?

Hunter, Paul: No they weren't, but what they didn't pay into it very long before they started drawing it. I think my dad only paid in 2 years and started drawing benefits from it. Your dad would have been a little older, I'm sure.

Hunter, Helen: Probably. I don't recall what year.

Cress: Was that a benefit to them do you think, the fact that they got some?

Hunter, Paul: Oh yes, it made things easier for them in their later years.

Cress: Has it had a benefit to you as well?

Hunter, Paul: Well it certainly has and we may have benefited even more from the Medicare part of it, because I've had many of thousands of dollars worth of medical care that Medicare and our supplemental took care of. It would have broke us by now if it wasn't there.

Cress: You're not alone in that. Okay so overall you've told me what your father thought about FDR and the New Deal program, what did you think about it?

Hunter, Paul: Well I think FDR was in a spot where he had to do something and something spectacular looked better so. Actually the effectiveness of a lot of those programs was questionable to me anyway, but they were there and really it was getting into War II, or preparing for War II at least that put people back to work. It didn't happen in the 30s.

Cress: So your overall feeling is, do you think it was the right course of action for that point in time?

Hunter, Paul: Well, it may have been the only thing FDR could find to show some light at the end of the tunnel, so he took it.

Cress: Yeah. Okay do you have any different feelings about that Helen?

Hunter, Helen: No.

Cress: You're with Paul on that. By the way we're not trying to prove one way or the other, we really just want your honest opinion about these things. It just happens to be the 75th anniversary of some of those programs, the New Deal programs, they started in 1933, so that has been one of the questions that we ask people about but it's not like we're pro or con, we're just interested to know what it felt like and what your opinion was for those of you who lived through it. So let's digress a little bit, how did you two meet?

Hunter, Paul: No one had ever introduced us yet.

Cress: Well Helen, this is Paul.

Hunter, Helen: We get asked that question a lot and we don't have a specific answer. We did not go to high school at the same time, he skipped a grade or I would have been in high school with him 1 year but I really don't know just how and when we did meet. I knew of the Hunters and I think they knew of my folks, but didn't know each other, lived in different communities and they were two different communities. The Center Bethel church community was quite different from where I grew up.

Cress: Did the area you grew up have it's own name, you mentioned that it was south of Altamont?

Hunter, Helen: No. I don't think so.

Hunter, Paul: Unless it was just the school district?

Hunter, Helen: A lot of the rural areas I think were known by the schools.

Cress: Yeah, I think so too.

Hunter, Helen: Of course this wasn't Center Bethel School but it was Center School in this area and I went to what was called Noble School.

Cress: Noble, n o b l e [spelled out loud].

Hunter, Helen: Yes, and then I taught at Janesville for the 2 years that was next to the air base.

Cress: Over by Edna?

Hunter, Helen: Yes.

Cress: How did you get back and forth from your home to the school where you taught?

Hunter, Helen: I rode a horse a lot.

Cress: Okay.

Hunter, Helen: The roads were not graveled, I rode a bicycle once in a while, but the roads just weren't smooth enough and we had a horse that we grew up with you might say and dad would get the horse ready for me in the morning and then had some older boys in school, lots of time got him ready for me to ride home so I didn't have to worry about taking care of the horse.

Cress: Did the kids come to school on horseback also or were they within walking distance?

Hunter, Helen: Well some of them weren't within walking distance, but that's how they got there, was to walk. No my dad had ridden a horse into Altamont to go to high school, but of course they had stables for quite a lot of the pupils rode horseback, they had the stables for them to hitch them up during the day time.

Cress: There at the high school?

Hunter, Helen: Yes.

Hunter, Paul: Of course, that's been about 100 years ago now.

Cress: Oh no, not quite that long Paul.

Hunter, Helen: Both of my parents graduated from that high school and he and I both graduated from it and all 5 of our children graduated from it. In fact I'm getting ready for an alumni banquet for my class as a part of the regulars on the banquet, it will be 67 years.

Cress: 67 years. Are there very many of you left?

Hunter, Helen: You know I'm surprised there are quite a few left but they are in rest homes or not able to come. I've gotten quite a few letters.

Cress: Are you in charge of sending out the information?

Hunter, Helen: I'm afraid so.

Cress: Looks like you have a list and some envelopes and things over there.

Hunter, Helen: He was in the hospital for 5 days week before last and that kind of put a kink into getting done some of the things I needed to do.

Hunter, Paul: I believe it was just last week, I haven't been out a week yet.

Hunter, Helen: I guess not.

Cress: I know when I talked to you last Friday I believe you said you'd just recently gotten out of the hospital. Hoping everything is going okay for you.

Hunter, Paul: Well, it's looking better any way.

Cress: Good, good. Well let's see when you were teaching school I suppose you had to, did you have a wood stove to keep the school warm.

Hunter, Helen: We had coal.

Cress: Coal, no electricity.

Hunter, Helen: No electricity, no phone, no janitor, quite different today. I taught the 3 years in rural schools and then my girlfriend and I (phone rings).

Cress: Here, I'll just put this on hold here.

Hunter, Helen: I forgot what I had said.

Cress: Well you mentioned that during the school year when you were in high school you lived in town at your grandmother's in Altamont and your dad brought a cow in.

Hunter, Helen: Yes, a cow in town for us to milk and my grandmother rented out rooms to people who were building the plant and it was quite a little distance from where she lived to the high school, but we come home for dinner occasionally, not every day.

Cress: Home to the farm you mean?

Hunter, Helen: Home to my grandmother's.

Cress: Home to grandmother's. So then you moved back out to the farm in the summer?

Hunter, Helen: Yes.

Cress: And then you were saying that you had a lot of educators in your family?

Hunter, Helen: Yes, both of our parents taught school. He had 2 uncles on the high school board and then in 19__.

Hunter, Paul: When you were in school the last time.

Hunter, Helen: When I was in school the last time.

Cress: And you said you and your sister both taught school, and now how many of your children?

Hunter, Helen: Two teach school. Bill, our oldest son, teaches Jr. College agriculture in Pratt, KS and our oldest child, Kay teaches school in a little town called Grainger, TX. It's a long way down to Grainger.

Cress: And then you said your grandfather had been on the school board at Altamont?

Hunter, Helen: Yes, my Grandfather Thomas was on, he lived to be 90 and my Grandmother Clark that I roomed with all 4 years going to high school lived to be 90.

Cress: You've got some long-lived genes.

Hunter, Helen: Yes.

Cress: So I still haven't figured out how you two met each other, but you had to have seen each other some time before you got married.

Hunter, Helen: Well it was during the war and my cousin was taken prisoner in India and he

Hunter, Paul: In Japan.

Hunter, Helen: Clark was in, when you met him, in Calcutta wasn't it.

Hunter, Paul: Yes, but that wasn't where he was prisoner.

Hunter, Helen: He was prisoner in Japan?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: It's okay. If you want to fight about it I'll turn the recorder off.

Hunter, Helen: Well anyway he was a prisoner of war and my aunt and uncle knew that my cousin and Paul had met in Calcutta, India so they thought maybe Paul might know a little bit about how he come to be taken prisoner. Well mother and Aunt Cora encouraged me to write to Paul and see if he knew anything. So I did and I guess that's more or less how we met.

Cress: Oh, I see.

Hunter, Helen: He was--you can take the story from now.

Hunter, Paul: Well when I was ready, I had finished my tour of duty and ready to come home when I got that letter so I didn't reply to it and in fact I didn't know what to reply, but I was able to contact a couple of men at least who might have had some idea about it and they weren't very encouraging, they thought that probably that crew was lost. So after I got home I went down to Thomas' what word I had. Well, by that time Helen had taken off for her job in Chicago and they had gotten word some how that Clark was being released from POW camp so that made it a lot easier for me.

Cress: And he was your cousin, is that right?

Hunter, Helen: Yes.

Hunter, Paul: Yes, he had followed me through high school. I knew him well and when we just happened to be in Calcutta we were both on temporary duty (3-day pass) whatever you want to call it.

Cress: So after you came home from Chicago you must have bumped into this fellow?

Hunter, Helen: No, I think he bumped into me.

Cress: You must have written a nice letter.

Hunter, Helen: I guess so.

Cress: Okay what did you guys do for fun when you were growing up?

Hunter, Helen: I loved to be outdoors and I loved to roller skate, of course we didn't have any smooth place to roller skate, loved to ride a tricycle, so mother and dad didn't get electricity until after we did so when I was growing up mother would take her ironing into her mother's, my grandmother's, to use the electric iron and I could take either my roller skates or my tricycle to ride on the sidewalks.

Cress: Oh there in town where they were paved?

Hunter, Helen: Of course grandmother had electricity in Altamont and I can remember we'd have a stick with a thing on the bottom of it that would roll, iron rings, didn't you have that too?

Hunter, Paul: Roll hoops.

Hunter, Helen: That was pretty standard entertainment for kids.

Cress: Rolling the hoops.

Hunter, Helen: And dad made my sister and I, wooden guns that you had a clothes pin on them somehow and an old piece of inner tube, weren't they usually to make, stretch it on this wood gun and then you could shoot those rubber bands quite a ways.

Cress: Sort of a fancy slingshot. Did your families have a lot of social activities?

Hunter, Paul: Well, my family were always active in church as her's were, but, and my mother always belonged to a neighborhood club that met once a month, but that was the extent of organized social activities.

Cress: Did you have any informal kinds of barn dances or anything like that?

Hunter, Helen: What did they call that organization that put on plays. Of course, box suppers, you probably have heard of box suppers in connection with the school was something that people looked forward to going to.

Cress: Now is that when people bid on the boxes?

Hunter, Helen: Yes the girls from Grade 1 up or whatever grade would have a box and people would bid on them. Sometimes one of the boys, more than one boy might like the same girl and they'd get to bidding against each other.

Hunter, Paul: Only problem was the boys didn't have a lot of money.

Cress: Now I've heard that you decorated those boxes?

Hunter, Helen: Oh yes, I never did enjoy the decorating part. Still don't have any artistic abilities.

Cress: Well I'm with you on that. I have heard one woman tell about putting little doilies on her box to try to make it more attractive.

Hunter, Helen: Through the years they kind of learned who would have more food that they'd like in the box. Some people were just poorer than others and couldn't afford to buy what it took to make the fancier boxes.

Cress: Yes, but it's what was inside that really counted.

Hunter, Helen: Right, that's right.

Hunter, Paul: No, what really counted was whose box it was.

Cress: Oh, tell me about that side of the story?

Hunter, Paul: I'd better leave that alone.

Hunter, Helen: There was rivalry in who bought whose box.

Cress: I see.

Hunter, Helen: You got to eat then with whoever bought your box.

Cress: So if you had a sweetheart or somebody you had your eye on you'd want to buy that person's box. How about in high school, did either of you participate in sports or music or?

Hunter, Paul: I wasn't in any sports. I took part in several school plays, that sort of thing.

Hunter, Helen: And I played the Clarinet in a marching band and in the regular band. Took piano lessons.

Cress: I see there's a piano in your living room so some of it must have stuck.

Hunter, Helen: Three or 4 of our children took piano lessons. We virtually had two families, had 4 before the oldest one was 6 and then skipped 7 years and had a son. It was just about like two families. The children were all in music, singing groups. The boys still do quite, well I wouldn't say a lot, but they have sung at funerals, weddings.

Hunter, Paul: Well the oldest son is in the choir in his church, I think he leads the choir quite a bit. And the second son has been in the Messiah productions that they do at the Nazarene College in Olathe. He and his wife both this year, but Bob's been at it for several years.

Cress: Well as we wrap things up are there any other things you remember about the old days that you'd like to share?

Hunter, Helen: Was it literary that they called all those that came to the rural schools.

Hunter, Paul: Kind of a community meeting that they had a program of some kind.

Cress: Different speakers would come?

Hunter, Helen: No I think it was more.

Hunter, Paul: It was pretty much local talent.

Hunter, Helen: I can remember the neighbor coming by with his sled to take us to one of the literary at the school and when I crawled into the box wagon I stepped in the pie that one of the lady's prepared to take. I never will forget that. Oh I hated that.

Cress: You didn't know it was there.

Hunter, Helen: No I didn't.

Cress: Now was that a horse-drawn sled?

Hunter, Helen: Horse drawn-sled.

Cress: Must have had some snow then.

Hunter, Paul: But he'd taken the wheels off his wagon and attached runners and that's what he drove to literary that time.

Cress: That's how he got around. Could he switch back and forth then, put the wheels back on?

Hunter, Paul: Yes, I'm sure he could.

Cress: Well, that's pretty ingenious. Do you remember were the winters worse or milder than now?

Hunter, Paul: They had to be worse than we've had recently.

Hunter, Helen: I never did ice skate but we knew quite a few people who did quite a bit of ice skating.

Cress: Now Helen you mentioned a drought at one time, did the drought ever have an impact on your farming operations?

Hunter, Helen: Oh yes, I would say yes.

Hunter, Paul: Cut yields greatly in the drought periods.

Cress: Because you didn't have any irrigation?

Hunter, Paul: No.

Cress: Do you remember did you have some dry years back during the 30s?

Hunter, Paul: In 1934 it was an extremely dry year.

Hunter, Helen: What year was the dust storm that I know?

Hunter, Paul: 1937.

Hunter, Helen: Sometimes it was bad enough that we would tie wet handkerchiefs over our noses.

Cress: Right here in Labette County?

Hunter, Paul: Yes it blew in from west, but the dust was still that thick when it got here.

Cress: How long did that last?

Hunter, Paul: Oh it would blow in and blow out in a day or 2, but the threat was always there.

Hunter, Helen: There were quite a few farmers moved from Western Kansas here during the drought.

Hunter, Paul: Yes, to get out of the dust storms.

Hunter, Helen: Farmers south of Altamont, there's a lake called "Idle Hour Lake" and farmers would go past our home heading for the lake to haul water, they had no water, their wells went dry, no water for the cisterns, no water for their livestock and they hauled water from Idle Hour Lake.

Cress: Did you know personally any of the people that moved here from Western Kansas?

Hunter, Paul: Oh yes, but some of the families I went to high school with in the 30s.

Cress: Did they buy land when they got here or were they more likely to rent?

Hunter, Paul: Some of both.

Cress: But they kind of went bust out west?

Hunter, Paul: They gave up making a living out there.

Cress: I can't blame them. It was tough. Yeah one of the New Deal programs I didn't even ask you about because I could tell it had nothing to do with your circumstances, but there was a resettlement program where they would help some of the farmers who were from the dust bowl to get resettled somewhere where they were more likely to make a go of it. I don't know if any of the people you're talking about?

Hunter, Paul: I wasn't aware that that's how they came to move in if so.

Cress: So overall it sounds to me like your families made it through the Depression in pretty good shape?

Hunter, Paul: In pretty decent shape, yes.

Cress: Because toward the end of the 30s you say that your father was buying a tractor and continuing to farm successfully?

Hunter, Paul: Yes.

Cress: Any other things you remember that you would like to tell us about?

Hunter, Paul: I think we've covered quite a scope here.

Cress: Well if that's the case I thank you so much for sharing your stories wit