

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

NARRATOR: Ira Strawn

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION: Ira Strawn was born in 1918 and lived near Cimarron, Kansas for his entire life. He had two younger brothers. After his service in World War II, he returned home, married his wife Margery and continued to farm for the rest of his life. He now has three children and continues to live on a portion of his father's farm near Cimarron.

DATE OF INTERVIEW: January 11, 2003

INTERVIEWER: Jaime Cohoon

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Cimarron, Kansas

NUMBER OF CASSETTES: 1 video cassette
2 audio cassettes

LENGTH OF CASSETTES: 60 min.

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 1 hour and 20 min.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Farming in the 20's, 30's, and 40's; trains; milking; entertainment including the swimming pool, trapping skunks, and movies; Dustbowl; Farm harvest; his experience in the cadet training program in World War II; Schooling in the 30's; descriptions of Cimarron in the 30's; rationing; jackrabbit drives; weddings in the 30's; the division of the Strawn family farm.

**Ira Strawn
Narrator**

**Jaime Cohoon
Interviewer**

**January 11, 2003
Cimarron, Kansas**

Ira Strawn -- **IS**
Jaime Cohoon -- **JC**

(Side A, tape A)

IS: Did you want my dog in the picture?

JC: Uhm, actually he's not.

IS: Huh?

JC: Actually, he's not in the picture. You're just in the picture.

IS: He's not. Alright. Well, ok uh, I'll tell you a little bit about myself. I, I was uh, three years old when I, my father and mother and my brother, Carl, moved over to this place over here. And that's where, where the family's lived since 1921. And uh, let's see, I was just a regular farm boy and uh, we had, we farmed on the, first came out and my father farmed with horses and we didn't have very, very big acreage because you had to raise feed for the horses in the wintertime. The cows, you had to raise corn and you had to raise hay for the horses and the cows so that you could farm in the summertime. And we also made a living by milking cows and separating the cream from the milk. You know what that is? You run it through a separator, a machine, separated the cream from the milk and then you put it in a five gallon can. And sometimes if you didn't have two many cows you could have a two-and-a-half gallon can but . . . Then you used to . . . your mother raised chickens and we had hogs and we had beef cattle so we had most of our food there, you know, and in the garden, big garden. And what little cash you needed for sugar and flour and maybe shoes now and then, and cloth to make a dress and uh . . . You had, you got from, either from selling a horse or a cow or had a cream checks. You'd take your cream in town and they would test it up there and they'd put it in a bigger can and put it on the railroad, on the train. It stopped everyday here at Cimarron. Sometimes two or three times a day. Trains. Didn't have many big trucks or anything like that. You had some small trucks but very few people could afford those. We used wagons and horses. Uhm, but you sold eggs, took your cream in town and you left it at the cream station. They'd have two to three people that bought cream and uh, then you would go, uh, take your eggs to the grocery store, maybe, and they would candle them out and give you credit for your eggs and sometimes you sold butter there. Sometimes

your mother would churn butter and put it in pound blocks and, and square blocks, and uh, so consequently that's uh . . .

Then, if you had crops, you raised some wheat, well you would have, uh, some cash there because your cash crops were usually wheat, uh, cattle, beef, cattle, all kinds . . . Those days you didn't have any auctions sales, you know. The neighbors would go together and maybe one neighbor would have two or three steers. The next one would maybe have a half-dozen. The next one would maybe have one old cow they wanted to sale and they'd all get together and uh, on a certain day. They would all cut these cattle out and the person who was the furthest away would start out with his horse. Maybe he had to borrow a horse or a saddle but he would start out with whatever he had. His neighbor would catch up as he went through, as he went by, he'd put his in there and they'd all march. So time they got to town well they'd had quite a group of cattle and so they would, uh, at that time, the stock yards where they loaded cattle was right up, uh, right west of, uh . . . well, it's south of the, uh, Cimarron City, uh, Fire station and uh – you know where that's at?

JC: Yeah.

IS: That was where the stockyard was. And they'd be driving right up the street, right in there. Sometimes they'd get away and they'd run down in, in where people lived, you know, down there. Running across the lawns, all the, it made the women so mad at them for the farmer letting those cattle get away, you know. But they loaded them, they would, uh, pen them put there – and they already had a cattle, a cattle car now, not no semi but a cattle car, similar but it's on tracks – and they'd load those old cattle in there. And they had one man that especially, that had the experience, they allowed on man to go with that cattle, cattle car in the caboose. You know what a caboose is?

JC: Part of a train.

IS: It's the last, that little . . . Have you ever seen those little cars on the backend of the train?

JC: I don't know.

IS: Well, it was a little car for the brakemen, used to ride back there, and he would uh, he would uh, move the, the switches, when they switches [unclear]. He had what they was suppose to do, you know, where there'd be so many grain cars here at Cimarron, one at Ingalls, on at Pierceville or something like that. He had, and uh, if you ever had it, had it, a piece of, a tablet with that on there that he knew where those cars were suppose to do and the brakeman was suppose to throw those switches so he could get off. Drive off and then he'd unhook them, hook them back up or whatever they were suppose to do. And uh, then they would uh, that, that's our transportation. That's how you got, well, you got just about everything from the railroad back in them days. And uh, I guess that's about all of it. Any questions?

JC: Well, uhm, yeah, I just made some questions that maybe bring up some memories and stuff. Uhm, my first question is: When were you born?

IS: I was born the fifth month, the twenty-sixth day, of 1918. Now how old am I [laughing]?

JC: I'd say like eighty-three or something.

IS: Eight-four years old, yeah.

JC: And uhm, you have one brother, right? Is that what you said? Because you . . .

IS: Do I have what?

JC: You have one brother?

IS: I had two brothers. One Carl Strawn, Carl Leroy Strawn – do you want when he was born?

JC: Sure.

IS: He was born in nineteen, May, in March the eighth, 1921. And Richard, he was born in December the eighth, 1934, I believe.

JC: So what do you guys do together for fun?

IS: What did we do what?

JC: Together for fun or . . .

IS: For fun?

JC: Yeah.

IS: Mostly ride the horse. Sometimes we'd ride the, sometimes we'd ride calves and uh, the uh, we had . . . in them days it took, it took the calf off of the, from the mother when they was about six, seven, eight days old. You took them off the mother so you could milk the cow. And then when you milked the cow, you'd give the calf part of the milk back, see, to him, and you'd take the rest and separate it. See that's kind of cheating the calf but that's what you'd do.

JC: So did you bottle feed them or something?

IS: Huh?

JC: Was it like bottle feeding them?

IS: No. Now that is an art in itself. And it was a, a job that required a lot of patience. And there was a little song about, uh, it something . . . I don't recall it right now but there was a little song they sang about did you ever, about uh, 'did you ever', 'did you ever see a preacher feed his calf?' [Laughing]. What's he had to do? He was under it when you got it in there. You had to get in and you had him in a little pen. And he was hungry because he was being cheated, you know. He could go get his dinner anytime wanted when he was out of the calf. And consequently, they were, they were better. They were nicer calves. And uh, when they'd run out in the pasture by themselves, when he got hungry, he'd go get his dinner, you know. And so uh, this way you only fed him twice a day and when, what you had to do was to learn to, to, he was real, real hungry so you'd put your fingers out there like that and he'd put them in his mouth and he'd go to sucking on them see. So then you had to hold the bucket up there with the milk in it and then, while was sucking on your fingers, you'd put his head down in the milk and he'd . . . and he'd get up like this while the milk got all over your hand [laughing]. Oh boy, yeah, did you ever see a preacher try to feed his calf [laughing]? Well, anyway, that was, uh, consequently we had, uh, a calf and when they go through, when they got up pretty good size, you know. They'd be three hundred to four hundred pounds, they'd be, those kids only twelve, ten or twelve years old, when they got through feeding the calf, why we'd just swing right up on top of them, you know. And they'd go to bucking, you know, bucking right off, you know, until you fell off, you know. That was our entertainment some of the time.

JC: Yeah, I think the boys –

IS: Let's see, what else did we do? What did we do to play, you say?

JC: Yeah.

IS: Ok, I'll tell you. In 1921 or '22, the town of Cimarron built a swimming pool, mind you. One of the first in the community. You didn't have no swimming pool up and around . . . but after Cimarron got theirs, I think Dodge City put one in and Garden City put in one of the world's biggest one and those up there. I think it's still up there. Is at the, out there to the park?

JC: I don't know. I don't go to Garden that often.

IS: Oh, it's real big, it was a real big . . . but anyway, and it was free.

JC: Yeah.

IS: That's one of the best things that ever happened in Cimarron. And us kids, every time we got a chance we would uh, get to ride, we'd go to town, you know, catch a ride to go to town, we had a, we had a Sears and Roebucks swimming suit that we got out of the Sears and Roebucks catalog. And uh, we'd catch a ride, we'd go up there and uh, we'd swim while whoever it was we caught a ride with – it be either parents or neighbor

-- well uh, when they got done shopping in town they'd come down and they honk their horn, you know, a couple of times and that meant for us to get out there, and get . . . and get our clothes on and go [laughing]. So that's uh, that's for our entertainment. We didn't have any fishing holes any place that's big. We had some, the water was in the river but it was only this little creek. It was a few minnows in it. Sometimes it would get up, you know, sometimes when it rained sometimes it was full. It kind of go into a flood stage or something like that.

What else did we do? Oh, we did a lot of playing in the hay loft. You know, we had rope in the rafters in the hay loft and we'd get back on the wall and we'd swing down and jump out and, you know, fall down in the hay and uh . . . I don't know if you'd call it fun or not but we used to trap skunks in the wintertime for, for money. And I'd get seventy-five cents for a skunk skin. Boy, I'll tell you, you'd almost do anything for that. And some kids, [laughing] we had a neighbor that uh, had uh, in them days, you know, you didn't have the, the older houses, didn't have any basements or anything. Might have a little dugout under one to put fruit and stuff in the wintertime to keep it from freezing, you know, a kind of cellar underneath the house. And uh, but this family lived right over there. Her name was, uh, Cedarrouite (sp?) and she was, uh, oh, I guess she was, uh, I guess she was about, a little younger than you. You're a senior, aren't you?

JC: Junior.

IS: Junior?

JC: Yeah.

IS: You're doing darn good. You're going to college as a junior?

JC: No, I'm not in college.

IS: You going to nurse's training, aren't you, over in Dodge City or something?

JC: I have my, I got my C&A license. Yeah.

IS: Yeah. Well, I thought that Jared (Cohoon) told me that you were going, going to . . . did you go to college over, over --

JC: I went over there for a month but you can do that at sixteen. It was just for C&A. That's why I work at the rest home here.

IS: Well, anyway, to make a long story short, most every kid had some kind of a trap, you know, and if he ever found a hole that he thought had a skunk in there or something, he'd always set a trap. Sometimes he'd catch his dog in his own trap. Anyway, he uh, there was a little hole under the house, little, little, little hole, about like that. So, old Junior -- he was, he was uh, kind of an orphan. He lived with his Grandmother and his sister, uh, Theta (sp?). She was bigger, you know. She was, uh, oh, I guess she was a freshman in high school. So one of his, Junior set this trap there by that hole, and the

next morning he got up smelling something. He knew he had something. He run around there to see what he had. He had this Sibit cat. Now that's smaller than a skunk. Do you know what a Sibit cat is?

JC: No.

IS: It's related to the skunk but he's just a little brother but he's really potent. Uh, he gone back in the house and there were two families living there. There was these two orphans, these kind of orphan kids and there was another daughter that had lost her husband and had four kids and moved back in with Grandpa and Grandma. It was a big house. Come back in there [laughing] there's a skunk out there. Theta got all excited and Grandmother said, "Don't you go out there, now." but Theta didn't pay no attention. She went all around there, darned if she didn't, looking down there, the skunk squirted. Got it in her hair, oh (unclear). And she wasn't going to go to school but Grandmother made her get on the bus [laughing]. You know, what kids would do, you know. Oh, the teased her and teased her and teased her. I don't know if she went to school or not. I think she went up, though she went down to her other grandmother's place. Oh gosh, that was one deal. Oh, we had, what we used to, we used to uh, we had, my grandmother one time made a, had us a snow sled, made a sled, you know, for snow, and uh, it didn't snow. Well, if it would have snowed, it was to darn cold anyway. So us kids, we had an old horse named Daisy. I (unclear) to get her horse collar. Do you know what a horse collar is?

JC: Uh-huh.

IS: Put it on her neck and then you pull a lariat rope through the horse collar and then, we never had a saddle. We never had a saddle. We just to ride bare back and if we fell off we just had to get up. Consequently, I got two collarbones broken from falling off a horse. A wonder I didn't kill myself. I don't know how, how, innumerable times – I don't know how many times – I fell off. Most usually it was over old Daisy's head. She'd stop like that and I'd 'whoapa!' So uh, I guess that's all about getting on the sled. And so, we didn't have to have any snow. We'd just put a rope on our sled and away we'd go, you know. And uh, we'd, dragging all over the ground, you know, dust getting to flying and everything but it was really sport, you know. We'd really like that. Old Carl Eves (Sp?), he'd ride back there, and uh, oh, we did that until a nail stuck up, one time, in the sled, that had bent over, in the sled. And I started up really fast with a jerk, and jerked the sled out from under Carl and took a hold of his pants and a little hide too [laughing]. Then we quit.

JC: Uhm, what could you get from the seventy-five cents you made from your skunk?

IS: What did I do . . . ?

JC: What could you get from it? Like, you know, today you wouldn't be able to get very much for seventy-five cents but . . .

IS: A box of 410 shells. Four hundred and ten shells.

JC: Would you say that –

IS: For seventy-five cents.

JC: Would you save it up for anything special?

IS: Oh, I probably did but I don't remember, I –

JC: Yeah.

IS: I was. I saved. I remember the first car I got. It was a model T Ford. But I got in trouble with it. My dad, my dad really hit the ceiling when he found out I bought it for five dollars. And I had a friend drive it, pull it over home. My dad didn't have five dollars in his pocket or in the bank account either but I'd say five dollars. And when I got, when he got home, he asked, "What's that (unclear) doing out there, out in the yard?" It wouldn't run but it was sitting out in the yard. And uh, I said, "I bought it, Dad."

"You what."

"Well, yeah, I bought it from" – I forgot the guy I bought it from. Well, he said, "How'd you get it home?" And I said, "I talked to a friend of mine and dragged it home." Oh, he did and turned red. He says, well, he said a few words I can't repeat. He said, "You get that thing and pull it across the road. I don't want it even on my property. You get it over there and you get rid of it as soon as you can. Tomorrow even if you can."

So, I didn't get a licking for it but, pretty darn close. So next day I went up town to go swimming. I met a guy up there that had a job. And that was something, you could hardly buy a job and if you did get a job it was a dollar a day. Sometimes you might get a little bit more if it was public works or something for the city or something but if you had a job, you had something. But he had a job and I told him about my car, you know, my model T. And he said, "What will you take for it, Ira?" I said, "Ten bucks."
[Laughing].

JC: Did he buy it?

IS: Yeah, he bought it. Yep. Ten bucks.

JC: Was your dad happy?

IS: Well, he never said anything more about it. It disappeared it was out of mind so he didn't say anything more about it. I don't think he even knew I sold it for ten dollars. So that's some of the things we did. And we, I'll not mention the Halloween nights and stuff like that. Uh, I guess that's about all. Any questions you want to ask me?

JC: Uhm, about the dust bowl. Uhm, like how old were you when that started?

IS: Twelve years old I was, 1930, I was twelve years old. And that was good times sometimes in 1930. My dad built a new home. Cost him four thousand dollars. He borrowed the money from Federal Hand Bank and he had a model a car, he had three model A cars in one year and one tractor. So you know we had, and they, he paid for it. But he didn't pay for his house. He borrowed the money on his ground to . . . And so did other people. This section right up here, Addison's, they borrowed ten thousand dollars on that. On a section. Dad had a half section and he borrowed five, and he built a house but I think they took a, I don't know what they done, they spent, I don't know what they done with their money. Anyway, uh, oh, let's see, times, we had good crop in '31 and in the crop year of '32, we had a good crop. Now a good crop in them days was something that made pretty close to thirty bushels. You'd laugh now. You make thirty bushels, well that's, that's ok but uh, most usually it was fifteen, someplace between fifteen and twenty bushels is ok. And uh, it was hard times, uh, depressing times, uh, and wheat was selling for twenty to twenty-five cents a bushel. And Dad farmed his half section across over here, and then not the full half but I think he had two hundred acres there, and uh . . .

So I was twelve years old. My brother was nine years old, and my mother, uh, Carl and my mother run the truck to gather the wheat and I rode the tractor and my dad rode the combine. And we cut that wheat, piled it - Do you know what a wreck is? It's a real, whatever it is, hay, grain or anything put in a wreck, it's a long, you back up and you make it like this, you know. Runs down along the side but it's long, like a long roof, like a roof on the barn on the ground, you know, so if it rains it runs off on the ground. You don't want any holes in it or anything so it runs in down in the grain. That's just for temporary deals; now, temporary may be two to three weeks. And until you finish harvest, then you get up and picked it up and put it in your, scooped it up - you didn't have an auger - you scooped it with a scoop and that puts some muscles in your back and in your arms, you know. So uh, that's what dad did that in 1932 and he hauled it to town and hardly got anything. You could load the truck up with wheat and uh, that would be only twenty-five dollars for it. And a tire on your truck cost seventy-five dollars so you know what kind of depression thing it was at that time.

My dad, then later on, in the thirties, in the thirty-fours and thirty-fives, sometime in there . . . I remember him, uh, going, driving to his father-in-laws place, which is seventy-five miles east of here at Lewis, east of Kinsley - you know where Lewis is?

JC: Kind of.

IS: Nine miles east of Kinsley and uh, he, his, his father-in-law said, "Come down and I'll give you enough seed wheat to plant your, plant you're, what ever you're going to plant. And, so Dad got in his truck, he drove down there, got the load of seed wheat on his truck which was to be about seventy-five bushels. Coming home on Basin road, you know where the shelter belt is over here? On Basin Road. You never go that way?

JC: Yeah, I've gone on it like once.

IS: Well, that shelter belt over there, he blowed a tire out. And he had seventy-five bushels of wheat that he could have bought for twenty-five cents a bushel, having blown

a seventy-five dollar tire out and drove all the way down there and back, so that wasn't a very good deal.

JC: Yeah.

IS: And it was, then we did, the way we farmed those days. We farmed deep. You know, we had listors (sp?) that busted ridges out, you know, and then you brought them, you had this ridge buster that you brought them back and then you planted your (unclear) and then you planted your wheat and you . . . continuous cropped out here. One year after another, if you had wheat here you plant wheat next fall and on like that, which was not a, wasn't a good practice it this semi-arid place in Western Kansas. And so then, we come into what we call Summerfall (?) where you leave the ground lay idle and keep the weeds off of it and accumulate rain if you got any that would be like money in the bank in the sub-soil. Moisture like money in the bank, if you got moisture in the sub-soil. And then we got to raising better wheat, you know, more bushels and it was such a risk. Then, and so it was that way and the drought come along in '32, '33, '34, '35, '36, '37 . . . '38 we had a little crop, you see I was only eighteen, seventeen, eighteen years old in '38. Then '39, '40 I had started to farm a little bit and I went broke, lost everything I had and uh . . . So I had to get a job. And I went from the job to the army and I was discharged out of the army in 1945. Anything else.

JC: Uhm, what did you do in the army?

IS: I was a cadet. Do you know what a cadet is? Well, first I went as the army, I went in as the . . .

(End of tape A, side A. Beginning of side B.)

IS: . . . What you call an A.M. school, the airplane mechanics school in Lincoln, Nebraska. I had tried to, uh, enlist in the cadet program. The cadet program was a program where you learned to fly. They had three, three uh, three stages. They had pilot training, navigator training – you know what a navigator is? Takes shot of the moon and the stars and tell you where you're at and . . . Then you had a bombardier. A bombardier had a machine that he, uh, could hit targets from the air, you know, with bombs. And they were all commissioned officers. And then they had gunners, and radio operator, and I think they had one, two, three, four . . . four, five, six, seven . . . at least seven on, in a bomber. Sometimes eight. But anyway, I . . . at Lincoln, Nebraska they wanted uh, they was taking uh, real bad losses in old Germany at that time, you know. They was only a few . . . well I know a friend that was a bombardier, and he made twenty-five missions. If you made, flew over the, the, for twenty-five missions you were entitled to come home. And out of a hundred people that flew a hundred missions, there was only fifteen that did that. So you know the losses was great, but anyway, we didn't know that. I didn't know that. But anyway, they, was uh, wanting people to, you had to pass a test, you had to pass a physical, and you had to have three recommendations, three uh, people from your community that knew you and would recommend you. So I had tried before to, to get in

the cadet program but I couldn't pass the physical, I had, you know – have you ever had a physical?

JC: Yes.

IS: Did you ever have to jump up and down on one foot and run (unclear) and sit down? They take your blood pressure?

JC: Yeah, I think so.

IS: Huh?

JC: Yeah, I think.

IS: You did? Well, that is, if it got a name for it, and I think if I remember it's a Con. Not a con, they wasn't trying to con me but, that's what they called. But my blood pressure would not come down after that, it wouldn't come down after one minute, you know down to normal. So I couldn't pass. But up there in Lincoln, Nebraska, they'd run this through, you know, they come to . . . you went in and reported to a Colonel. Usually it was a lieutenant but this was a full Colonel and a doctor. And so, went in there and he said uh, "Strawn, have you though about taking the, the thought about taking uh, getting in the uh, uh, taking, being a cadet?" And I'd, I'd give up, you know, I'd tried it two or three times. And I said, "Well, yes I have but I can, but I couldn't pass that test, that con test." (Unclear) He said, "Well, you go take your, the written examination again," and he says, "I'll sign it." So that's what he did. I took the test, and fast, and I went over there and he signed it. And from then on it was, uh, it was close to, I think it's suppose to, from the time you started until you got, until you went overseas it was someplace less than six months. And I was in there eighteen months, simply because they had so many that they thought they was going to need, that they just had it overloaded. I, they pushed us, and pushed me around and finally, take my turn and I got into uh, pretty, uh, basic training down there to, San Anton. I was there nine months. You just suppose to be there three, or less, and then I went, then I started to flying. Now, what do you got in Texas? That was primary, and then I went to basic training down in Mission Texas, passed that. I went through, there's two classes, upper and lower classes in each place. (Unclear) and then I went to advanced and that's B-25s down here in Enid, Oklahoma. Lamb Center Field (?) and I got one hour and ten minutes, uh, due time in a B-25. When I, when I, when we was coming in there was usually two or three students to an airplane and a, an instructor. And we was coming in on our overhead pattern to land and, looked down there and everyone was just run, run, running, going crazy down there, you know. When the radio come on, said the war's over. Boy howdy, was we happy. And so uh, when the war was over, well they didn't need any more pilots, see, and uh, so they give us a chance, they come up and said, "Do you want to stay in and here go ahead and finish your training but you'll have to sign up that you'll stay in here for two years." Well, you know I'd been in there so long, that I was so wanting to come home so bad that I thought that was a good deal. Well, as it turns, I guess it was a good deal. But you know if I had

went ahead I probably had to go to Korea. That wouldn't have been very good. So that's my army experience.

JC: What was it like going to school, like during the Dustbowl and all that stuff?

IS: Oh, going to school. Well you realize we had obsolete buses compared to what you got now. Yeah, our buses was, uh, trucks, regular trucks, uh, with uh, some of them was wood, some of them was partly wood and steel covered and they were, oh, my gosh, they was probably a fourth the size the these buses that run up and down the roads now. And the seats were, were run along the side, you see. You just sit on the seat there and you window, hand out the window and the kids like this, and like this. You understand what I'm trying to say?

JC: Yeah.

IS: And you just had a little isle in the middle to get there. I don't know how many kids there, maybe eighteen. If it was anymore than that it was just, oh, everybody, you know, uh, somebody would have to, big kids would have to hold the little kids on their lap and, you know, there's always some of those, uh, what you call, bullies. There always was some of that and then, uh, but uh . . . Oh, we went to school. The first one, I first, remember the first time I went to school, it was just a country, little country kid, you know, and those, all those big kids, I'd never been around big kids, you know. And underneath the seats, the seats, you could turn them up and they had a box underneath the seats, you know, for tools and stuff like that. I remember they was always threatening to put me underneath the seats. And uh, we'd drive up there to that old school house that I showed you and uh, during the summer, nobody ever cut any weeds or anything and it was always goldenrod. Do you know what goldenrod is? It's uh, well, it's a kind of a flower. It's a weed. It's gold in color but it's got pollen that just goes everywhere and you get it in your nose, if your, well, it's just uh, what they call that . . . allergies. Everybody was sneezing, eyes were watering and all that, you know and uh, but you could smell that school house, well I could still smell it today. And the floors was wooden and they used a floor sweep that had oil and uh, sawdust that they go around sprinkling on the floor, you know and then they'd take the brooms, brush it up to get the dust. I don't know how come we didn't have some kind of . . . Well, we did have rashes and measles and flu and uh, chicken pox . . . what else did we have? Mumps, diphtheria, I had diphtheria once but I never had mumps yet. Uh, well, what else could I tell you? Oh, the gymnasium.

JC: Huh?

IS: We had a gymnasium. It was dug out underneath the . . . The school house was built in two different sections – now, I'm talking about the old one. When I say the old one, it means the third one. This one and the . . .

JC: The one they just took down.

IS: Yeah and the uh, the third one was the one I went to school in. It was a stucco building, made out of wood. Uh, high ceilings, big, high ceilings. It must have been ten, twelve foot up there. I don't know why they did that but they did. And it had steam heat and it had a small, real small basketball court. You know where the free throw circles come?

JC: Yes.

IS: They was only about that far apart. And the ceiling was real low, you know. Uh, gosh, let's see. The teachers lived over in the band hall. Do you know where the band hall was? It's still there. It's over where the administration building was, used to be. I imagine, that's . . . What do they use that for now?

JC: I think they still do. I'm not for sure.

IS: Yeah, I think, I see it still there, but that's . . . oh, the superintendent wouldn't live on a place like that, would he?

JC: No, I don't think he does.

IS: Anyway, that's what you used to call . . . Manual training used to be down in the basement. We used to walk from there over there. Oh, they had classrooms upstairs. Now this is later. When I first went to school that's where the teachers stayed. That was the teacher dormitory up there. They hired a lady that took care of the place, took the food and they went over there for lunch and uh, pretty nice. But then after things went on so good, they hired married teachers and stuff like that well they stayed off there. And teachers didn't get paid very good either. They, just, less than a hundred dollars a month.

JC: Yeah.

IS: But a hundred dollars would be quite a little bit when you bought a pair of shoes of three bucks, a dress for two to three dollars. And uh, ok, what's next?

JC: Uhm, how many teachers did you have?

IS: How many what?

JC: Teachers did you have?

IS: Teachers? Oh, gosh, it's kind of hard to tell you about that. I don't remember. The first teacher I had was named Fink. The second teacher I had was named Maxwell. The third teacher I had was named Camel. The fourth grade teacher I don't remember.

JC: Must not have liked him or something [laughing].

IS: The fifth grade teacher was named Ulmo. You know Loraine Nugent? You know Loraine Nugent?

JC: I don't know. I don't think so.

IS: You don't know. Do you know the Bryans?

JC: Yeah.

IS: Well it would be . . . one of the Bryan, name me one of the Bryan boys.

JC: Chris? Or . . .

IS: Chris. Chris . . . there was three of them.

JC: I don't know.

IS: Well, anyway, their, let's see, their . . . their dad's aunt was named Rosanna Bryan Ulmo and she taught fifth grade, ok. My sixth grade teacher was named Bruce Jasper. And then when we got in the seventh grade we'd moved up, we got to be seventh graders, we junior high, see. Seventh, eighth, and ninth grade is in the junior high. Is that the way it is now?

JC: Well, we have seventh through twelfth in one school. But seventh and eighth are junior high and nine through twelve is high school.

IS: Well, I'll tell you what happened. We had a junior basketball team. Now we don't have what you guys got.

JC: Yeah.

IS: We had one game a week, and that was on Friday. Not in the middle of school. On Friday. And uh, we started and we had, no thing in (unclear) down there. You just got out there and played basketball, football or whatever you, baseball or whatever you wanted to do. And recess? When we got to be seventh graders we didn't have recess anymore. We had study hall and uh, you know, I couldn't tell you the teachers there. Helen Hollinger (sp?). Well it was just a group of teachers. They teach, you know, you didn't have . . . you had sponsors. Mary Reese is one I remember real well. She was a tough old gal but she loved me. Yeah, and she didn't take any backtalk from anybody either. She, bless her, she's dead now but she was one of my favorite.

And I couldn't hard, I couldn't . . . Algebra and English was on of my hated subjects. I was just as dumb as a post on them. The others I could get along pretty good on. If there was anything I just about failed on it was those two. And uh, oh let's see, I graduated in 1927. I guess that's, what else do you want to know?

JC: Uhm, I was going to ask you something but I don't remember. Uhm, when you got your first job, how much money did you make?

IS: Well. The first job I had, I guess, I had odd, little jobs. You mean a permanent job when I was . . .

JC: Yeah, you said that before you went to war, you had job that you got because you were, you didn't have any money because you tried to farm.

IS: Well, uh, when I got out of school – that was in May – my uncle, we didn't have any crop here. We had a crop failure. Back there to Lewis, Kansas, my uncle had a fair, little, fair crop, you know. Eight, ten bushel crop, you know. And so I wrote him a letter and he said, "Yep, come on out and drive one of my tractors." So that is what I did. And uh, oh, I bought uh, I saved up some money. I drove the school bus for ten dollars a month, ten dollars a month now. And uh, I saved every dollar of that and my mother and I, we raised some turkeys. And uh, we, I had saved up three hundred dollars and I borrowed three hundred dollars from my grandmother and uh, we bought – we had an old model A Ford that was about wore out – so we bought this Chevrolet coupe; six hundred dollars, brand new. Well, that's another story but uh, anyway, I went back and worked down there. I don't know, I think I got three dollars a day but it was up at sunrise, milk a butch of cows, eat breakfast, go to the fields, work all day until sundown, come in, milk the cows, take a shower if you had a shower or something to take it, they had a, a big old, a little horse tank or something that you usually washed off in, went to bed, got up at sunrise to do that again for ten days. So you see, it was hard to do. And then I came back, and got a job at Steph's (sp?) Grocery. It was uh, you know where the Burkhart Funeral Home is?

JC: Yeah.

IS: That's where it was at, Steph's Grocery. I was delivery boy. In them days, you deliver the groceries to the houses. I had a Chevrolet pickup and you had little boxes . . . Mrs. Burns, Mrs. Burns called up – she was deaf. She couldn't hear nothing but every morning as soon as you opened up the door you better run back to the telephone because Mrs. Burns on the telephone. It was ringing right there. You picked up the telephone, it was Mrs. Burns and she was already giving part of her grocery list. You better write it down, you know, you had to do. You had to get it because she only gave it once. So uh, that was uh one of things that, and then uh, I'd uh, take and uh, put up her order in her little box and then I'd take it and deliver it about ten o'clock and then in the after dinner I would do the same thing; go around town with this truck. So that was my first job. And that lasted I guess from July . . . oh, sometime I guess before October, November. Sometime in that area. And uh, you went to work at six o'clock in the morning. You got off when the sun went down. I remember that well. And it seems like I made ten dollars. Pretty good. Most people worked for a dollar a day.

Then I helped uh, helped my folks farm for a little. I got a chance to have a little farm but I went broke on it and I don't like to talk about that.

JC: I don't blame you. Uhm, uh, you, what did you have to do as chores when you were a kid?

IS: What?

JC: Like chores. What kind of chores did you have to do?

IS: You mean on the farm?

JC: Yes.

IS: The first thing you did was you tried to get up and eat breakfast. Mother would have your breakfast ready, usually a cake, and egg, and a couple of pieces of bacon and a biscuit, maybe a little jelly on it. I didn't ever drink coffee like I'm doing now. Then you'd go down – your cows was in a lot- you'd go down and put your cows in a, in a uh, barn, put them in stances, their heads in stances, put their feet in there, put . . . and uh, you milked your cows. Then you'd take the milk out – hoping the weather was nice. Sometimes the wind was blowing, you know, and you take the milk up to the house and put it through the separator, separate the cream. It depends what time it is, if you were a little behind, why your dad or mom would have to finish up the job while you went and got, washed your face and hands, put on a shirt and got on the bus, because they didn't like to wait on you. And then when you come, well that was the first thing you'd do. You'd get on old Midget and you'd go out and ride the cows in and uh, you'd do that, and go through the same thing and you'd, it was kind of a routine deal. That you'd get your chores done, separate the milk, take the milk to the separator, and feed the calves or feed the hogs or . . . and uh, Mom usually took care of the chickens. I don't remember taking much care of the chickens. And uh, that's about it.

JC: So with the dust storms and stuff, did you have to do extra stuff to try to get all that, everything done?

IS: Did I have to what?

JC: Did you have to work a lot harder to get everything do with all the dust and . . .?

IS: Oh, yeah, it was uh, hindrance. Sometimes, even in my lifetime, even after what I call the dust storm days in the fifties, I used to, uh, I lived up north of town and I remember one time, we had fifty-seven I think it was . . . don't quote me on that. But anyway, uh, I went out to milk my old cow. I had this small barn and I kept her in there and she had a nice place in there and I kept her in, had a feed container there. I'd just feed her and milk her, you know, and it was about as here to your car to the house or maybe a little farther, and uh, the dust and the wind was blowing and I could just barely make it, you know, I mean, see where I was going. And when I got in the house, I looked down at my milk and it looked like cocoa.

JC: Yeah, that's what our teacher said that they used to put plates upside down on the tables and the glasses and all that stuff so that you can eat actually kind of not with dust. So I bet you guys had to clean house a lot.

IS: Well, yes you did. My dad, you know, had that house that I told you about, cost four thousand dollars and had brand new windows. And the wind come up so bad and it . . . Black. You couldn't see that bird feeder out there.

JC: Yeah.

IS: And uh, but the wind was blowing so that the wind was blowing up and it would fountain up under, you can't hardly – I don't think you can believe. It would hit the window and would find a crack, you know. It'd blow underneath the window, up, the air and it had dust, dirt, stuff in it and it would fill up the, the uh, the stool, what they call it the window stool (sill) that sticks out from you window a little bit. It would come in down underneath the window up this way and up here and start . . . The dirt would accumulate there, you know, until it was up like this and then it start running on the floor. You can't believe that but that's what it do.

JC: Yeah, so what did you do to keep it from coming in?

IS: Well we usually took - you know what they used to make wall paste out of? Have you ever used wall paper?

JC: Not really.

IS: You never did wall paper did you?

JC: Nope.

IS: Well, it's made out of starch and sometimes I think in the olden days they used flour and the mixed it with water and made a paste and they stripped old sheets about this wide and they'd – around the windows – put this strips around the windows.

JC: So did your food taste like dust sometimes?

IS: Did it what?

JC: Taste like dust sometimes? Could you just feel it in your . . .

IS: Well, I don't remember. I imagine I've eaten plenty of dust.

JC: Yeah, probably.

IS: I got plenty of dust around here if you look pretty close (unclear) or more than that maybe.

JC: Our teacher said that, uhm, you guys like had food rations and gas rations and stuff.

IS: That was in during the war.

JC: Was it?

IS: That was in 1941, '42 to '45. Do you want to know about that?

JC: Sure.

IS: Well it depends on what you was doing. You had, they had a . . .

(End of tape A, Beginning of tape B)

IS: . . . the barber shop is? That you would go in there, everybody knew one another, you know, you go in there and you'd get uh, a little ration book for how many was in your family. How far, well there was several questions you'd ask and if you qualified for that particular place you got a little book. As I remember, mine, I only had it once. It was a little book that entitled you to so many gallons of gas a month and I think it was three gallons of gas a month and you had a speed limit of thirty miles an hour. And so uh, I never had too much to do with that. And you had shoes; you had one ticket a month, a year. You know how I got my shoes?

JC: How?

IS: Well, you know they used to have bounties. Do you know what a bounty is?

JC: I don't know much.

IS: Huh?

JC: I said I don't know much.

IS: Well, a bounty is -- did you ever hear of a . . . a . . . desperado? Do you know what a desperado is?

JC: Yeah.

IS: It's a bandit. It's a, a wanted man for something that he'd done, and he was out, especially out here in the west or Kansas, you know. West, or anywhere, you know. IF they wanted a man real bad, they put a bounty on him. Sometimes if a train go robbed, you know, stopped, put rails on a, ties on a track and stop a train and uh, and a group of guys would hold a train up and they would get into the mail. Mail went on trains them days, not trucks, trains. They'd get in there they'd, get, get, maybe get some gold chips,

get some payrolls, you know, money getting set for the payrolls. And consequently, they'd put a bounty on them. Dead or Alive. Did you ever hear of that?

JC: Yeah.

IS: Dead or alive. They worth so many dollars. Well, that's the way they did out here on the prairie, they used to have jackrabbits. You never did hear of jackrabbit drives, did you?

JC: Our teacher told us about them but she didn't tell us about . . .

IS: Well, you know, droughty conditions, we haven't any yet, but I've had, I've been, I've lived through two series of rabbit, uh, plagues. They just eat everything, you know. But anyway, get back to the bounty. Well uh, they had bounties on rabbit ears. In other words, if you got a rabbit you'd cut his ears off, put them on a wire, stick them up in the barn and they'd dry out, you know, and uh, that's especially for kids. I don't think, I imagine some of the older farmers did the same thing but they only got I think, five cents a, maybe ten cents at the most but coyote ears, you got a dollar. You know every time I got a chance to get a coyote, I got, I got a coyote and take his ears off and put them on a wire, hang them up in the barn. So that's what, when I come, before I went to the service, I was needing a pair of shoes but I didn't have enough money to get one but I got me eighteen coyote ears, eighteen pairs. And uh, cost me eighteen dollars of a pair of shoes. They was good ones too. So that was about the only thing I, that's been, there's two times that I remember that we plagued with rabbits.

JC: How did you catch them? What did you do?

IS: Huh?

JC: How did you catch them? What did you do?

IS: Oh, I shoot them, you know, with a twenty-two. Yeah.

JC: Because she said something about, like a lot of people would walk and get them all in a corner.

IS: Oh, yeah, well, that's what you'd call rabbit drives. They'd take and uh, make a tent and uh, select a place, you know, in a, into a, mostly in a township. Six miles. And they'd go three mile this way, three miles that way, three miles this way, three miles this way. And in the middle they'd put this tent, rabbit tight now, real close to the ground, at least this high, you know. And uh, then they'd have wings, you know that'd go out maybe a quarter of a mile or more, and then they'd keep getting littler and littler and littler until it went into the gate. And then you'd, have, have a place to set the gate open. Well, they'd take everybody, everyone – they'd let school out. Yep. All the kids they'd get . . . and they'd have the old farm truck, you know. And everybody would get in a farm truck that could get in there, uh, I mean there'd be maybe twenty, thirty into a farm

truck. Maybe not that much but they'd go out and at three mile line they'd start throwing, letting people out. They'd be about one hundred yard apart. See, and they let them out all the way around that deal. It would be three miles, six miles, nine miles, twelve miles back to where you started so that would be three times three is nine, nine sixes. [Ringing telephone] Excuse me.

JC: That's fine.

(Personal telephone conversation)

IS: That's my cousin. She says, "Yes, I remember those rabbit drives."

JC: Where does she live?

IS: Huh?

JC: Where does she live?

IS: Out to Ulysses, yeah.

JC: Uhm, did you ever go to the movies or anything?

IS: Did I what?

JC: Ever go to the movies or anything?

IS: Oh, yes, but you know they had to have promotional, uh, something to attract people up here so what they did was uh, they put up uh, a kitty. Do you know what a kitty is?

JC: Yeah.

IS: It's uh, it's uh, little uh . . . little prize. I think they started out, maybe it was five bucks, you know, and so, uh, uh, they had uh, at the end of the show – it cost you twenty-five cents and that was a heck of a price, you know, that was two and a half hours of work. And, to go to the movie, and uh, so they put this prize up of five dollars and at the end of the show, well, they had a little deal that uh, uh, mostly for adults. They had their tickets, see. You know how that did, but it wasn't, you didn't win every time. Now how they did that, I don't know. But if they did, if there was nobody taker, it was double the next time. And if nobody was there the then that had the ticket, the right number, well, they, they would uh, put in another five dollars, I suppose, fifteen dollars. Until it got up, sometimes it got up as high as fifty dollars, you know, my gosh, that just packed the house, you know, them days. So that was a promotional for movies, and uh, kids could get in for a dime but adults was twenty-five cents. (Unclear) you didn't have any, didn't have any computers or TV then. TV come along, my first TV was 1955. Paid five hundred bucks for it.

JC: Oh my. Paid more for that than you did your first car.

IS: Oh, yeah. That was cheap, that was, that was a demonstrator I think. Yep. Well, a great deal.

JC: Yeah, uhm, so about the jackrabbit drives after you got them in there what did you do?

IS: Well, that was the one of the gruesomest things I've ever seen. They killed them, you know. In fact they did club them. Then they picked them up and the threwed them in the truck. There would be a truck full of rabbits, sometimes more. And they would bring them down to Cimarron – it was usually in the coldest part of the weather, you know – and uh, there was a produce house, right north of - You know where the Jacksonian used to be?

JC: Yeah.

IS: The building right next door. I think it's a counting office now, isn't it?

JC: I'm not for sure.

IS: Well, that used to be a produce house where you take your chickens, your turkeys, your cow hides or anything like that, you know, you'd sell it there. So uh, most settlers, they'd give you so many, I don't know what it was. It was worth something money and whoever, all the men there, they just give them to him, you know. They'd just give him the rabbits and he'd haul them in there, you know, I don't know how many thousand they'd be. But they, a truck full of rabbits is quite a few rabbits. So they would take and uh, I don't know whether they pelted them, take the skins off, and then they put the rabbits in a barrel with ice in there, and they put them on a railroad train and send them to Chicago or someplace like that. I don't know how they did it but they did it. And now I didn't hear of anybody dying about eating rabbits [laughing]. That's what happened.

JC: Well, I think I have most of my questions answered.

IS: Yep.

JC: Uhm about how many people from your graduating class had to go the war?

IS: How many people graduated what?

JC: About how many people from your graduating class had to go to the war?

IS: Woo. I think there was thirty-seven. Thirty-seven of us graduated and out of the war, they was . . . well, I went. Cecil Davis went. Uh, Lema Tempking (Sp?) went. Dallas Jantz went. . . .Oh, uh . . . I'll think of it. How many more? How many do we got, five?

JC: Uhm, pretty close. Yeah, some where around there.

IS: Uh, let's see, what's his name . . . Lawrence Burkhart went. . . Wilbur Friars (sp?) went . . . That's all I could think of. I don't, out of uh . . . oh yeah, Ralph Wagner didn't, went. I think there was, uh, our class was about half and half, so there was about twenty boys. And I don't think, there just a few that didn't go. I don't remember any that didn't go, except for maybe Bus Rack (sp?) and he might have went. But there was no one killed in my class.

JC: Uhm, with the not having that much money and all that stuff during the Depression and all that stuff, uhm, how did they, how did you get married or whatever? Did you have a big ceremony?

IS: No, no.

JC: What did you do?

IS: We just went to uh, got the license and got married. It wasn't no big dances or anything like we have now. Now there might have been one or two, maybe there might have been one or two out of a hundred that did. But most of it, family affairs. Most of them was taken in the house, in homes . . . that I knew of. At the, at the most you went down, had the preacher at the church do it. Might have had a few, family, or something like that. But there was no big dresses like that or anything like that or flowers or anything to speak of. That I remember back then, well, in the first place there wasn't any. There just wasn't the, really couldn't make a living anyway. We wouldn't buy flowers, you know, unless, you, wealthy. You (unclear). I think the did have some that you could order for funerals or something like that but it was usually just uh, very uh, very modest. But most of that was mostly the way it was.

JC: So how old were you when you go married?

IS: Oh, I got married, let's see . . . thirty-nine. That's my first marriage but it didn't last very long. I was married the second time in thirty-nine, ten years later. Uhm, between there I'd been in the service, three, almost four years. I pretty much was financially embarrassed about those years. I would owe money and couldn't, couldn't, could hardly support yourself, you know. And uh, if you had any debt, well, you couldn't pay on no debt. But I still, when I got back from the service, I, my dad made a deal with Carl and I to share one crop three different ways, you know. He'd furnish the equipment, we'd furnish the labor and third, and each one of us would pay a third of the expenses to put the crop in and that's how we got started. Oh, I built this little house over here. That's were I started out. I lived with my parents over there where Richards live. After I got out of the service, my brother, he was married at the time, Carl. We did that, I think we did that for two years. We that once for Dad and when we got that first crop, well, Carl and I went together. We farmed together for a year or two and then after that we split up. I got married again to Margery (sp?). Did you know Margery?

JC: No.

IS: And she's a music teacher here in Cimarron. And uh . . . then Kathy was born in fifty. Daryl was in fifty two. Dave was in . . . fifty-two, sixty-two, sixty-five. I think that's right.

JC: Did you build this house?

IS: Huh?

JC: Did you build this house?

IS: Yes I built this house in seventy. My dad died, my mother died in fifty-two. And then my dad died in sixty-eight, and I inherited this place this quarter and some money. I used to live up north. You know where Hammerstein's live?

JC: Yeah.

IS: There used to be a place south there on the east side of the road. I used to live there, and uh, rented that place. I still farm it.

JC: Yeah, I knew that the . . .

IS: And uh, so yeah, we built this place. I got this quarter. David, Daryl, I mean Carl got the quarter south of here and David, Daryl, Richard got the quarter where he lives. Then I, we had two, we had, we got a quarter and an eighty. So, and then Carl and I bought a quarter over here and then uh, later on then we traded. Carl took that quarter over there on that section in the southeast quarter and I got this quarter here. And then when, uh, we bought these two quarters along the road here. Then when Carl dies, well uh, Audrey wanted to sell her two quarters. So we bought the two quarters and I don't know what's going to happen. We should do . . . It's about like 1932, let me tell you that. Yep.

JC: Well thank you.

IS: Well, you're welcome.

JC: If I have anymore questions I'll just give you a call or something.

IS: What?

JC: Said I think that we're done now. If I have anymore questions I might just give you a call or something sometime.

IS: Ok. What does that machine do?

JC: That is recording you.

(End of the Interview)