

Interview with Kathleen Carney

March 19, 2009

Conducted at Carney Home, 508 Edwards St., Lewis, Kansas

Interviewers: Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff

Interviewer: Kay, can you give us your full name?

Carney: Yes, I'm Kathleen Verna Martin Carney.

Interviewer: When were you born?

Carney: I was born January 21st, 1922.

Interviewer: And where?

Carney: Fellsburg, Kansas

Interviewer: Can you tell us a little bit about where you lived in Fellsburg?

Carney: We lived out on a farm. I was delivered at home. I had two sisters that thought I should have been a puppy they would have enjoyed more, and I also had an older brother, and he was fourteen. He really didn't he needed another sister, but he got one anyway.

Interviewer: What were your parent's names, including your mother's maiden name?

Carney: My mother was Sarah Curry Martin and my father was Burney Sidney Martin, and they were great people. He was a farmer. She was a homemaker, and a very talented one. She was Homemaker of the Year one time with the state which was a big honor, but it was all her, you know, everyone, \we didn't have, no one had much money, but she really managed to have a beautiful home. We even had a buffet painted green one time to match the wallpaper, but they were great people, wonderful parents.

Interviewer: Do you know what year she was Homemaker of the Year?

Carney: No, I really don't, but it was a nice honor for her.

Interviewer: And who were your grandparents?

Carney: My grandparents were Matthew Curry and Evalina Curry. My mother lived at Belpre, and that's where my father, he came from Missouri, but he came to Belpre to stay with an aunt and that's how they met.

Interviewer: What brought the Currys to this part of the country?

Carney: I really don't even know, probably the farming. However, they ran a grocery store and a restaurant in Belpre. They were old pioneers.

Interviewer: And had your father been a farmer in Missouri, too?

Carney: No, he hadn't. He came and he helped in the store and was more interested in farming here.

Interviewer: Okay, now can you remember back and tell us a little bit about your early childhood days and what you remember about the Depression or the Dust Bowl or any of that time period? What it was like to live in Edwards County there.

Carney: Well, I remember the Dust Bowl, yes, I remember mother hanging wet sheets over the windows to help keep the dust out, and I remember my father standing out as crops were ruined and always saying well, there will be another year. And I went to a little country school out here. Sometimes my sisters went to Lewis to high school so they would drop me off.

Interviewer: Was your school at Fellsburg or what was it called?

Carney: I went the first two grades in Fellsburg. Third grade I went to Lewis to school, and then I went to the country District 11.

Interviewer: District 11?

Carney: Yes. It was a great childhood although we went through the Depression. My parents never felt like, or made us feel like, we were deprived of anything. There was lots of love, lots of food. All the farmers raised their own. It wasn't that bad as a child, I'm sure it was for them, but we all survived and they were very interested in education. My father was determined his children would have an education, and we all attended college. Two of us didn't finish, but the other two did and did really well.

Interviewer: And he gave the same importance to the girls to get an education?

Carney: Oh yes, absolutely, and I remember, it was during the Depression that my older sister graduated, and at that time you could take a test and teach at the country school. And she did that, and she applied and she thought she had got it so she came home and cried because she wanted to go to college. It turned out someone else got it so my father said that we'll manage some way and she went to college. She later became associated for Charm Magazine in New York City so her education really paid off for her. She did well. My brother, he was the oldest, he went to K State, too. I know he waited tables and did different things to get his education.

Interviewer: What did he go on to do?

Carney: Well, he went to Chicago, then, and was a salesman. And then he was in Manhattan and extension work. And then he came back to Lewis and worked as a sales representative out at Crosses. So he did come home.

Interviewer: Did he serve in World War II?

Carney: No, He was married and had a small child.

Interviewer: So then you went to high school here in Lewis?

Carney: Yes.

Interviewer: And your family lived in town, then, or

Carney: No. We just lived in the country after at that time, actually during the World War II.

Interviewer: You moved to town?

Carney: We moved to town, yes. I was with my parents because Wayne was overseas at that time, so we lived down the street from where I am now.

Interviewer: You know why your family moved to town?

Carney: Yes, my brother did come back then and take over the farm and he did that for awhile before he went to work for Crosses.

Interviewer: So did your dad sort of retire then?

Carney: Tried to. It was hard for him to, but, yes, he retired.

Interviewer: Okay, so then did Wayne go to Lewis school?

Carney: No, he graduated from Garfield.

Interviewer: So, how did you meet? Tell us about that. How did that happen?

Carney: Okay, well, during the summer between my college years, Lewis had a skating rink and that's were all the young people met. And he had just moved to town, and I thought he was really cute. But he was dating my girlfriend, and I was wearing another fellow's fraternity pin at the time. But we used to ride around and visit our friends and that was just all. And then he went to service and I went back to college. And then I went to, later went, after two years I couldn't decide what I wanted to do, so I went to Wichita and worked at Federal Land Bank. And we had a real story book romance. I had bought some stationery that has a soldier on it, and I thought what am I going to do with this? And I remembered Wayne and what good friends we were, so we started writing. In the meantime, we had both broke up with our former friends and it just kept developing till he came home on furlough. And when he went back, I wore a diamond ring. So it wasn't too long that I rode out to California with my mother's cousin to go see him. Well, instead we got married. I don't know what my poor parents thought. They didn't know him and they weren't sure that was the thing to do. But he turned out to be their favorite son-in-law, so it was great. And then he was shipped overseas and I came home, back to Lewis, and lived with my parents, and had Linda. He came home on Armistice Day in 1945 and Lewis always had a big celebration, a football game, and that, so it was just great. And when he came home, he was discharged in Colorado and the train wouldn't stop. But they said it would slow down and he could jump off, so he did. And he went to his parents because he didn't know

where I lived. But it was 3 o'clock in the morning, and he pounded on the door, and my dad went to the door and he came in. Linda was just a little over a year old, but she was a precocious child. She could not walk, but she could talk. We went up and woke her up, and the first thing she said was "Hi, Daddy." She had seen his pictures. So that was our romance, but, you know, I think a good way to start out is being good friends, and it all developed into a good marriage with children.

Interviewer: Okay, you were two years at college, so that made you about 20?

Carney: I was 21 when we were married.

Interviewer: He hadn't been overseas before you got married, but he was in the service?

Carney: We were married in California, and he was stationed at El Cajon. And then he was stationed at Santa Anita, and I saw they were stationed in the stables, and I just stayed with him then.

Interviewer: Oh, Santa Anita race track?

Carney: Yes. Then he left, and he was going overseas, so that's when I came home. And then he left, of course, across the United States in a boxcar which they called "Forty Men and mule," what they named them, and that was not a good ride. But the trip from the European theater to the Pacific Theater was by ship and went through the Panama Canal. And he met a friend that was able to call me and tell me where he was, so I thought that was a good thing.

Interviewer: So he went overseas and you did not see him for how long?

Carney: Well, Linda was, well, let's see here, he left in '43, in March of '43, and he came back in November of '45.

Interviewer: So, over two years?

Carney: Yes.

Interviewer: You didn't see him. How often did you get letters?

Carney: I would get letters in a stack, but he wrote almost every night, and I did too, of all the time he was gone, but he wouldn't get them. It wasn't like it is for the young servicemen now, that they can talk, they can e-mail. They can talk which is very great. You know I always had faith he was coming back and I think he did, too, so that made it easier.

Interviewer: And he was not present when your daughter was born?

Carney: No. She was a year old, the 5th of November when he came home from there. So that was a big deal.

Interviewer: Did he ever share with you how he felt about not being there when his daughter was born? and her first year?

Carney: Oh yes, a lot. It was rather funny, though. Like I said, she didn't walk; she was in a walker, and he came in. His sisters all had babies at that same time. And he said, "Who is that?" He'd seen her the night before, but she looked so different dressed. "Is that Bessie's child?" I said, "No, that's your child." But he was a great father.

Interviewer: Can you tell us a little bit now what was his job in the Army like?

Carney: Well, he was in ordinance, so he didn't see that much action. But he did see a lot and he never wanted to talk about it very much. I was able to save quite a few of his old V-mail, and the orders that they sent out, and different letters. We received lots of letters from the commanding officers about what they were doing.

Interviewer: You received letters?

Carney: Well, not about him personally, but about, yes, in fact, I got them out this morning because one of my sons wanted copies of them. Some were from Clark and some by other commanders.

Interviewer: I didn't realize that the families got something like that.

Carney: Yes, we did.

Interviewer: Did you notice any difference in him when he came back? Do you think the war affected him at all?

Carney: Oh, yes, it did. He came back with malaria and rheumatic fever both. It was tough for him. He would have nightmares and that sort of thing. But he was a strong man, but it was a difficult time. It was difficult for him. He'd lived abroad; He came home to a child and a mother. It was difficult, but it worked.

Interviewer: When he got back, now you were living with your parents?

Carney: Yes.

Interviewer: So where did you live next?

Carney: We bought a house right away, and he worked for Ford Garage as a mechanic. And then this malaria and rheumatic fever hit him and he was in the veteran's hospital for awhile so he came back. He was parts man and he did that for awhile. But his first love was mechanics so he set up a garage in the barn behind our house for awhile. And then he went into business with Ted Vanderree, but they build a shop behind. At the same time Willis McClaren bought the service station from Ted, and Wayne bought the garage so they were partners together. Their businesses were independent, but they were together.

Interviewer: Did the malaria affect him for the rest of his life or did he have any other effects?

Carney: Oh, he had, has left more with a heart murmur than, yes, than rheumatic fever or malaria.

Interviewer: While he was gone and here you were with a young child. What kind of support did you get from your family or the community?

Carney: I lived with my mother. I worked at the bank at the time she was born, lots of support from the community.

Interviewer: In what way?

Carney: Well, oh, I don't know, just concern for all of us and for him. We had a newspaper that was wonderful to print everything about the serviceman and that was nice.

Interviewer: Were there other young couples in your life?

Carney: Oh, yes. There were lots of them. We formed a little bridge club. That was the first we learned how to play bridge was while our husbands were gone. Dorothy McClain had Jerry and June McClaren had Carol. So there was lots of support, lots of young wives were here. I don't know, you know, it was the worst of times, but it was the best of times, too. We were all young, thank goodness. You weren't that worried, but we were worried. But it was a great time, too, and then they came home.

Interviewer: Did you know people whose loved ones did not come back?

Carney: Yes, well, Jim, Wayne's sister's husband, was killed. That was Carol's father. And there were others, too, but most of them came back. But it was hard when they first came back. But you know, they came back heroes then, and that hasn't been true with other wars. And that's too bad because people have given a lot of their lives for our country.

Interviewer: So, he was in Europe for the victory over Europe and then he went to the Philippines and the States.

Carney: Yes. Well, I think he came home a little early because he did have a child. But they started sending them home. Yes, in looking over some of those documents we had, I think it's from Mark Clark's letter that the word was from there they were through, but they had to go on, some of them, to finish in Japan.

Interviewer: You remember asking at the beginning. What were you doing on Pearl Harbor Day, and what do you remember about bombing of Pearl Harbor? Or don't you?

Carney: Well, yes I do, too. Just stop to think. I was driving. I was working at Kinsley, for a short time, and I heard it over the car radio, but it did, I guess, make that much; you know, it did

make an impression. But it's not like with television and everything coming right home to you like it is now.

Interviewer: You were how old when you did this?

Carney: 22.

Interviewer: so your husband was 25?

Carney: 22.

Interviewer: So, was he a volunteer or was he drafted?

Carney: He was drafted, and he went in June of 1942.

Interviewer: He was drafted because they felt they were going to be going to Europe?

Carney: of course, that's where he went, was to Europe.

Interviewer: Well, he was drafted before Pearl Harbor?

Carney: I had just looked back at those papers, or I wouldn't have said June '42, but I'm sure that's right. I'm sitting here not remembering anything and I lived through it. I looked at the dates, really, I really had to look them up because you do forget, and I lived through it, too.

Interviewer: When you were here, did you get military pay?

Carney: Yes, I did, and I was reading that. I had gone back and got lots of information. This item I was interested. He came home with, he had saved his and I had saved mine, but he had \$542, and he had saved over \$310. He was supposed to get \$300 mustering out pay, but evidently he didn't because all he had was \$500. And the only thing I had spent of what he had sent was I bought a bedroom suite. But together we managed to make the down payment on the house and furnish it. I remember our kitchen stove was one that an aunt of mine had out in the garage, you know, with the oven on top. And he worked for Mr. Posey at the garage; he found us a refrigerator for \$25. I think now the way my grandchildren started out in their beautiful homes, but you know, they're not a bit happier than we were. We were happy to be able to buy a home and start out.

Interviewer: Did you have your daughter in the hospital?

Carney: Yes, Great Bend.

Interviewer: And you were fortunate in that you didn't have to have living expenses.

Carney: No, and that's why I could save what I had, so that was great. And I just thought, my dear parents, run off and being married like that, then coming home, expecting a child. Of course they loved her, loved having her. She was grandpa's girl.

Interviewer: What about any Hispanic people that lived here?

Carney: Yes, a few, not that many.

Interviewer: And they worked for the railroad, was that right?

Carney: that was their main occupation. Grace Rockwell and Tootie Robbins, several of them, you know, were young people then.

Interviewer: Did they live any place they wanted to? In Lewis? Or did they have an area?

Carney: No, they could live any place they wanted to. There were some down there, I think, that did have such housing at one time, but I don't think that Grace's family lived there. I think straight down, right across from the high school some place.

Interviewer: Was there any prejudice that you saw?

Carney: I don't really remember that, but the boys were great athletes, you know. No I really can't think there was that much prejudice.

Interviewer: Do you remember and Negroes and was there prejudice?

Carney: There was a city ordinance, supposed to have been (*keeping Negroes out*). One Christmas, my children were beginning to scatter out and my mother just passed away. So we decided we wanted some children from Wichita for Christmas, which were Negro children, and we laughed about the ordinance. Really nobody cared, but that was such a fun Christmas, too; we had two little boys, they were great little boys.

Interviewer: So there was an ordinance that they could not live here, or they couldn't be here after sundown, or?

Carney: I don't know what it was. It was way back on the books, and there has been, I'm sure, some since then, there weren't, I don't really remember having any (*Negroes*) when I was growing up.

Interviewer: How do you think the war changed your marriage or your life, or didn't it?

Carney: Oh, I don't know. I think they increased our faith because that was very important, and maybe the ability to take what comes in life. I don't know how to answer because I don't know how it would have been different if we had not had the war.

Interviewer: You were quite an independent woman because of your education, with your father's emphasis on that, and you've been out and worked in Wichita and government, and you worked out there in a war plant.

Carney: That's right. I'd worked at that, yes. Well, that was another thing our parents, they had, I remember their philosophy was: "Get your wings so you can fly away, but you'll fly back home." And my sister, like I said, was in New York. And I've been raised to be pretty independent. Sometimes I think it's a curse, though.

Interviewer: I know females were, you know, raised that way.

Carney: That's right.

Interviewer: It was after the war?

Carney: that's right, but especially girls in the family.

Interviewer: And if you're a farming family, too, you may have been a little more independent.

Carney: They were pretty super people.

Interviewer: Can you think of any way that the war would have changed Edwards County? Before and after the war, were there differences? Did you stay there, you stayed in Edwards County.

Carney: Yeah, at that time, I think most, you know, young me, they came back and established their homes which in later years they began to leave, the young people.

Interviewer: Most of them, the veterans, came back.

Carney: Yes, they came back and, right, we had a very active, little city. We had two garages; we had two doctors; we had a dentist; we had a hardware; we had, you know, it was very, they came back and made a success of their businesses.

Interviewer: What was downtown Lewis like on a Saturday night?

Carney: Oh, it was great. Everybody came to town on Saturday night. We had one lady that lived out in the country, but she had to come early because she wanted to park her car in front of the drug store so she could watch the people go in and out. And we had a movie theatre, but we didn't have a theatre; we had all, in the summertime, they'd have outdoor movies. And they had a bandstand where they had a city band, you know. Like I say, it was good days; it was a good place to grow up.

Interviewer: Do you remember any celebrations at the end of the war?

Carney: We always had, in Lewis, a big Armistice Day.

Interviewer: That would be celebrating at the time when we won, and then it became..

Carney: Yes, and it was a big celebration, which, I think Lewis' big celebration, was the Centennial.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Carney: I don't remember.

Interviewer: You said there was a skating rink?

Carney: Yes.

Interviewer: How long ago was that?

Carney: I think it was here probably five years or more likely, maybe longer, but that was the big thing. That's the bandstand now.

Interviewer: Where was the bandstand?

Carney: Where the post office is now, and you know kids that took band in high school and then there were city, older men, or women, who played. It was a thing on Saturday night, too.

Interviewer: Did you play in this group?

Carney: Yes, I played the clarinet, a squeaky clarinet.

Interviewer: Did you play in the city band then?

Carney: Yes, that was fun.

Interviewer: And you played for Armistice, Fourth of July ...?

Carney: Yes, and on Armistice Day they used to have a big celebration going to the cemetery with the little girls all dressed up with their little baskets of flowers and the boys, Boy Scouts, with their flags. It's sad to see what's happened to the little towns.

Interviewer: What do you think caused the decline?

Carney: I don't know. I think the farms got larger and the expense of starting up a farm maybe was beyond most young people's ability to do. And that maybe our children were more educated. They found other sources to leave Lewis and Kinsley. It's happened to all the small towns.

Interviewer: You said, this is in the 40's and 50's, like where the pub is now, that it was the drugstore and the hardware store. Is that right?

Carney: Yes.

Interviewer: Remember the Community Center would have been across the street from

Carney: It has been there a long time. The large grocery store was just north of the community hall, yes, and there was another grocery store. There was one, well; the hardware was down on the corner where the rest were. The city building is now, and then there was a drugstore and a grocery store. There were two grocery stores, one across the street.

Interviewer: There was a grocery store and drug store in together?

Carney: Right. There was two garages. There was a grainer.

Interviewer: And if the band shell was where the post office was, was there a little park there? With the Co-op?

Carney: I think jut a small square.

Interviewer: A small little hardware.

Carney: That's where it was, in that area someplace.

Interviewer: The Lewis Press, I mean I know where it is now; was it always in that building?

Carney: I really don't know. It's in that vicinity.

Interviewer: Just curious.

Carney: You should have warned me you were going to ask about Lewis so I could have figured that out. I was more concerned with World War II.

Interviewer: I just thought of another question, and I think it was about when you went to California and got married, then you just stayed with your husband? And how long were you out in California? What was your living like out there?

Carney: Right after we were married, we had a room in an old maid's house. Another couple had another room, and we shared the kitchen. We weren't there very long until we found a little cottage in people's year which was just a living room and kitchen and bath and bedroom. They had never rented to servicemen, but they did, and they just fell in love with Wayne. From then on, they did rent to servicemen, and it was great. They were so good to us. So that was our lady, and then were he was moved out to Santa Anita race track, why I just had to move there because we were there a very short time.

Interviewer: So at that time, he was staying at the barracks, and did he come to see you in the evening?

Carney: He stayed at the barracks, yes. But now when we were in El Cajon, he could stay home. But when we were in Santa Anita, why, he had to stay there because they didn't know when they would ship out. I could hear sometimes a train at night, and I would go "Is that it?", but it wasn't.

Interviewer: What did you do? You know, like money, or did the service pay for anything, entertainment, what was life like up there? Other than waiting for him to come home?

Carney: I worked at the bank there in El Cajon, too, and we went to movies. And we didn't have a car. He had a friend Eddie that had a car with what they call a rumble seat. We used to go with Eddie in the rumble seat. That was our whole honeymoon. There was a mountain. We rode up the mountain in Eddie's rumble seat, and down Mt. Healix. And so that was our honeymoon.

Interviewer: You rode up and down?

Carney: Up and down, that was our honeymoon.

Interviewer: Did you ever get one late on? A second honeymoon?

Carney: No, really don't think we did. Well, we had lots of honeymoons. After the kids left, we had a good time going places.

Interviewer: Did you ever have service friends that you kept in contact with?

Carney: Yes, we did. In fact, the couple that stood up with us when we were married, he passed away a long time ago, but I still am in contact with her.

Interviewer: Did you know her before you got married?

Carney: No, and she was there just visiting Allen, Wayne's friend. And the house she lived in, the lady had a little reception for us, a wedding cake and all that. We were married in a church. The service guys were all there for the wedding.

Interviewer: Did you telephone, telegraph your folks?

Carney: I think I did tell them.

Interviewer: Telephone, or ?

Carney: I probably wrote them. I might have phoned them. As it happened, my dad was in the hospital at the time, which, poor mother, double shock.

Interviewer: Did they want to give you a big wedding?

Carney: Oh no, you know, it's kind of strange. I had two sisters and one brother. All of the girls were married away from home. The only wedding mother ever got to go to was Don's, my brother. Maybe Dad, my dad, kind of thought that was okay.

Interviewer: Well, you're not the most important one there when you are the mother of the groom, though.

Carney: That's true. You're sure not.

Interviewer: Then you came back, like on the train by yourself?

Carney: No, I came with another army wife that had a baby, and so I came with her after the baby. She lived in LaCrosse.

Interviewer: She had a car and you drove?

Carney: No, we took him on the train, but I came with her, or we came together. And we were friends for a long time, the couple at LaCrosse. They're all gone now.

Interviewer: On the train ride, were there service men and lots of war brides?

Carney: Yes. It was, I guess you didn't feel alone because there were so many service brides, friends.

Interviewer: What else would you like to tell us? Is there anything, a story that you would like to tell us?

Carney: I think I talk too much.

Interviewer: Oh, no, this has been wonderful. There's nothing else?

Carney: No, I've been very fortunate. I've had a great life. Maybe being sort of an independent person has helped. But I like people. I like to be with friends, and Lewis has been a good place.

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