

PATCHWORK OF DEPENDENCY: The Effects of World War II on Edwards, County, KS

Interview with Jean Titus, February 16, 2009

Interviewers: Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff

Conducted at the Kinsley Library, 208 E. 8th St., Kinsley, KS 67547

Narrator: What is your name?

Titus: Wilma Jean Titus

Narrator: Where do you reside?

Titus: Lewis, Kansas

Narrator: Where were you born?

Titus: I was born in Stafford, Stafford County.

Narrator: Who were your parents and grandparents?

Titus: My grandparents lived in Hutchinson. Their name was Jonas and Maggie Milhoun. He used to be a farmer and he had an orchard and sold fruit.

Titus: My other grandparents were the Bests and I really didn't know my grandfather but my grandmother was from Hutchinson, also, and I wasn't around that grandparent very much. My parents were Clarence Best and Sylvia Best whose family resided at Stafford and then moved to Lewis and my father farmed there.

Narrator: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Titus: I have two brothers; one was Clarence Best Junior, and I had a younger brother which was Robert Best.

Narrator: What brought your parents to Edwards County?

Titus: My father came out and worked for somebody out around Lewis and then he went to farming himself and they farmed all the rest of their lives.

Narrator: Can you tell us a little bit about the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl? I think you were talking a little bit earlier about that, that's what you remember about that time period.

Titus: I was probably about 11 or 12 years old when the dust storm really hit and it was terrible because we'd see a dark cloud coming up and instead of being rain it would be dust, and it would

often fill up around all the machinery and stuff, and in the house, if the house had any open places kind where the partitions and the like were, the dust would even cover the linoleum that was on the floor in just one day. When we went to bed at night we'd cover our faces, our nose and mouth with damp cloths to keep from inhaling that dust so we wouldn't get dust pneumonia. One time I was at the Garfield School, which is closed, and they had a new addition built on, just had finished it, and we was having a 4-H club meeting there and the dust come in through that new building so bad you could hardly see across the room, and then we thought we would never get home because you couldn't see where you were driving, so it really was real bad. On out west it covered up a lot of machinery and the farmers couldn't even sell the ground out there, and so they just had to walk off and leave it. Some people would get about four dollars an acre out of it and people around Lewis bought ground out there for just a cheap price, and now they have had gas wells and stuff on the ground, so they did have pay off from it.

Narrator: How long did a dust storm last? I mean, was it like an hour or two hours?

Titus: Oh, no, you know how the winds are here now. It would just come up and would blow for a long time and then kind of go down again and of course there was no rain and no trees hardly at all in this part of the country, and finally they went to planting trees and making shelterbelts so that helped break up the wind currents, so that really helped.

Narrator: Okay. Well, what we're sort of focusing on in this interview today is the time period from World War II and a little bit after. How old were you? Try to think of December 7, 1941, when war was declared.

Titus: Well, I was born in 1922, so that would be 21 years old?

Narrator: Yeah, that would probably be about right. What do you remember about that day? Can you describe where you were when you heard?

Titus: Do you mean about Pearl Harbor?

Narrator: About Pearl Harbor, yeah.

Titus: Well, I just was around home, and when that came on the radio, of course there was no TV or anything; you had to hear it on the radio, and it was, you know at that time, Pearl Harbor would have been a long way, in our estimation from what it is today, because we never went over there, and it was a shock you couldn't hardly comprehend, really, what was going on, but then when they got to talking about the big ship that had been sunk and how many soldiers or seamen had went down with the ship, then you began to realize how big a deal that it was.

Narrator: Were there many people from Edwards County at that time that were in the military, you know, before Pearl Harbor, that you remember?

Titus: Well, I know there would be some, but not very many because we wasn't at war yet, and that was the beginning when we went into the war?

Narrator: Okay, now, in your family, you said you had two brothers?

Titus: Yes.

Narrator: At this time were you married?

Titus: Yes.

Narrator: You were married at this time? You had a husband. In your family who went into the military service and was it at Pearl Harbor or later?

Titus: Well, actually it would have been later because my older brother was in the Army, also, and he was stationed in Germany and most men at that time didn't go to the Army unless you were drafted, and of course, he wasn't married so he went right away. My younger brother was in the National Guard but he never did go into the regular military service. My husband, Jim Titus, went into the service. Well, first he was exempt because we had three children. Then he was exempt because of his occupation which he was a tool-and-die maker for a big ammunition factory down east of Kansas City, and they made the big shells there. They exempted him quite a while because of his occupation but after awhile regardless of what you done, if you were that age you had to go to the service, so he went in and was stationed in the United States for awhile and then they sent him to the Philippines and they had given him some refrigeration training and so he worked on the refrigeration units on the big ships that were going over there. Then after that he went into fighting and hunting the Japanese.

Narrator: Okay, now. I want to get this straight. You were living in Lewis and farming at the beginning of the war.

Titus: At the time he went into the service, we had moved to Buckner, Missouri, which is just east of Kansas City and had lived there for probably, oh, five or six years, and then because the two younger daughters of mine were born in Independence, Missouri, which is a branch of Kansas City now.

Narrator: Now, why did you go up to Missouri?

Titus: Because of this job.

Narrator: Not with the war, though, but before.

Titus: Before, yes.

Narrator: And he was a tool-and-die maker at that time?

Titus: A tool-and-die maker, and the men that make big huge dies out of steel; they put them in big presses and that's what makes the forms, whether it's a stove or a shell or whatever it is, and we were living down there, and then when they said he had to go because of his occupation, because they were needing men like that, and then his age, and so then they told him that in May, and so we

moved back out to Lewis, the girls and I did, and they didn't go ahead and call him until August.

Narrator: That was 194-? You told me a minute ago, '44?

Titus: '44, that was when he went in, in 1944.

Narrator: Okay. So you got married in what year was it?

Titus: 1939

Narrator: 1939, and right after you got married, he was not a farmer; he was a tool-and-die maker

Titus: He never was a farmer at that time

Narrator: So you got married in Edwards County but then you went up by--

Titus: East of Kansas City

Narrator: to live, right after you were married--

Titus: Yes

Narrator: and had two children there--

Titus: and we already had the one daughter

Narrator: So then, when he was finally drafted, in 1944, you came back with the little girls

Titus: Yes, and then, I was going to say, when he came back from the service, he went to Coleman Lamp and Stove Company at Wichita as a tool-and-die maker, and we were there for a lot of years, and then his father had retired from farming, and so we bought the farm, and then Jim went to farming then.

Narrator: So during the war, then, you were home with the three girls.

Titus: Yes.

Narrator: Did you live in your own home or did you go back with your parents?

Titus: We lived in, we rented a house in Lewis and lived in town, and my folks lived out from Lewis about two miles, so it was convenient if I needed something then.

Narrator: Can you describe a little bit, how that was for you, to live by yourself with your husband overseas?

Titus: Well, you do what you gotta do, and having the three children, that kept me busy, and I had a

garden there, and my folks had a garden, and at that time we didn't have the money to go in and buy a bunch of food. I think I got combined with the kids and everything, we got around \$200 but Jim got \$25 for his expenses, and we lived on the rest of it.

Narrator: That was \$200

Titus: Total

Narrator: A year? A month?

Titus: A month, and at that time that would have been, we got along, but we didn't have a lot of money to spend, and of course, we had gas coupons at that time and you only had a certain amount of gas, you couldn't go very far, and so my folks and I, if one of us left, we used the gas, and both of us went; in that way we could do more on our gas. Also at that time, you know with the gas coupons, I forget how many gallons that was, and then we had sugar coupons and we had coffee you couldn't hardly get and pepper you couldn't get, and tires you couldn't get, and so you were pretty limited on what you done.

Narrator: How often were you able to hear from your husband?

Titus: Well, if I got a letter once a week I was doing good. Of course, I didn't get them that often, but you write every day. Well, I'd write every day, but what can you write different every day? So you get tired of hearing the same things over and over. But I wrote every day and there was no communication whatever, only writing letters. And we didn't have e-mail or all this new equipment like they have, you know, today where they can contact each other every day.

Narrator: Did you have telephone?

Titus: Yeah, I had a telephone, but you know, just the local telephone.

Narrator: So did your girls start in school?

Titus: No, they wouldn't be old enough.

Narrator: Did you notice what effect it had on them, missing their father?

Titus: No, they had never been around him only enough to realize who he was, you know, and I know Mary Lou was telling me the other day, she said, "I never will forget when he came home from the service." She said, "I didn't even know who he was and I was afraid of him." I mean, you know, they didn't actually miss him because he'd never been around until they got older.

Narrator: So, during this time period, you're busy taking care of the girls and what else was going on in the county? Were there things to do? You mentioned 4-H earlier. How did life go on in the county?

Titus: Well, pretty much, you know I don't remember because there was a whole bunch of things

going on that we wouldn't be involved in because the girls weren't old enough to be into anything. And I don't know, we went to town and worked in the gardens and, of course, there was a grocery store in Lewis, so we actually didn't have to go away. I sewed a lot because I couldn't afford to buy clothes, and you couldn't just go to the store and buy clothes like you can now. And a lot of the clothes were made out of feed sacks which were nice. They was a kind of coarse material, but they had pretty prints on them and everything, and everybody used feed sacks for all kinds of things for their clothing and stuff. So I sewed a lot for them, and went out to the folks, and there was things going on locally in town that you could go to.

Narrator: Like what?

Titus: Well, they was the community things going on, and of course we went to church, and I don't know, time you cook and do things for your family and everything you don't have a lot of extra time. Of course there was no TV. All we had was radio and I know my girls would listen to *Superman* and to *Gene Autry* and that kind of program, and that's all we had. The radios at that time weren't the best either; they were run on batteries, a lot of them, and so I don't know, our time just seemed to go.

Narrator: Did you do things for the war effort, like I've heard about wrapping bandages or --

Titus: No, I didn't. I don't think they done anything like that real locally. They might have over here at Kinsley, but at that time from Lewis to Kinsley seemed further than it does now, and you didn't have the gas to run around on, and now maybe some of the organizations in town did. I don't know. I didn't belong to anything.

Narrator: Now, at this time were the trains stopping at Lewis?

Titus: Yes, it was. I went to see Jim one time in Louisiana where he was stationed, and I caught the train right there at Lewis, and then I went on to Newton and then caught the train to go on down to Louisiana. In fact, that's the way we went more than anything with trains, some places with buses, but I know when I stopped in Newton I had to little layover there, I went into the canteen. They had a big canteen there, and they wasn't any of those around Lewis, but that was probably the closest one that I can remember, anyway.

Narrator: And you could get something to eat?

Titus: Yes. Narrator: That was for the servicemen?

Titus: Yeah, it was for them, but I could go in there and get some, but you know when we got on trains, they wouldn't allow that now, I don't think. When I got on the train at Newton it was loaded with soldiers and people so much I had to sit on my suitcase. In fact, the whole aisle was full of people sitting on their suitcases, and that's the way you had to ride, until there was a seat open for you.

Narrator: Were most of those soldiers going down to Louisiana or do you know?

Titus: I don't know. Some of them were around, this was Alexandria, Louisiana. They was quite a few military camps there. They were probably going down there but not necessarily. I know they had a big parade one time when I was down there and gosh, the soldiers just marched by and by and by; it lasted a long time because there was a lot of them basing down there.

Narrator: How long were you down there when you went to visit?

Titus: Probably a month.

Narrator: Now, what happened? Where were your girls?

Titus: They were with my folks. They had been with them enough that they were perfectly content there.

Narrator: And where did you stay with your husband?

Titus: I stayed in Alexandria with a teacher that taught there

Narrator: She opened up a room in her home?

Titus: Yes, we rented it from her and she was very belligerent about that the North had paid the colored people enough wages that they were leaving down there and she had lost her housekeeper and she wasn't too happy about it, and one thing I noticed while I was down there, I had a great-aunt that lived on down at St. Charles, Louisiana, and out on a big plantation that they had had their own schools and everything, and I took a bus down there and the colored people rode in the front for a ways, a few of them; there wasn't that many on the bus, and when we got down to a certain line they would put big canvass hanging at the back and they got up and went behind that canvass and rode the rest of the way.

Narrator: Had you done very much traveling before going down to Louisiana?

Titus: No, I hadn't. People didn't take trips at that time like they do now and no, I think probably Hutchinson was probably as far away as I got, you know.

Narrator: Living up at Kansas City

Titus: Oh, yeah, I've been down there, but I know I can remember one time when I went to Hutchinson to stay with my grandmother down there, my grandpa was bringing me home, and the car we came home in was one that had the isinglass windows on it, you know? It was a nice one, but it had that kind of windows and I had to sit in the back and hold a quilt up around my grandmother to keep her warm, but it took pretty near, you know, a day to come, no faster than the cars went.

Narrator: When you were down in Louisiana with her husband he would have been working during the day and then you were able to be together at night?

Titus: Yes, we'd come home at night, as a rule, unless something special that he was training for.

Narrator: Was there entertainment for you when you were down there or just seeing each other was enough?

Titus: Well, all through the day I would go, you know, walk down town or take a bus and go down town, but pretty much I entertained myself.

Narrator: What sacrifices maybe did your family make in support of the war? I think you've already told us, you know, some of those, with your husband being absent, certainly, and sugar stamps and gas rationing and is there anything else you can think of?

Titus: Well, I know that from May to August, that left the time there when I had already moved to Lewis. He stayed with friends of ours in Kansas City and one condition was she rented him a room if he would bring his sugar stamps with him because she said I need them to cook with, and of course, I didn't use that much sugar, so that didn't bother us any. But I don't know, people were kind of poor around, didn't have much money, and so you done a lot, you know, gardening and canning and we'd fix chickens; folks raised chickens; we'd fix those and gee, we'd worked canning them and fixing them all day and some of us would freeze them. They had a locker plant in Lewis at that time, and so we froze stuff and put it in. But mostly we'd can in glass jars, the fruit and vegetables and meat. And then at times they'd have the butchering. They butchered pigs and the neighbors would come in. And we'd butcher a calf for something and you know, to this day I can't understand how people didn't get sick because most of it was cured with salt, you know, the hams and all that bacon, they cured it with the salt solution stuff, but nobody ever got sick from it.

Narrator: So the community would come together and neighbors would come together to butcher and do the work?

Titus: Like I said, we didn't have any TV. All we had was a radio. Of course you worked around the home and through the week and do that kind of stuff. On Sundays lots of times, a couple of neighbors that I can think of, we went and they'd trade off fixing dinner. And then the older people would play cards or something. The kids would go out and play *Annie-Annie Over*. Or we'd make swings out of tires and hang it on a real high tree limb and you could really swing way up. And we'd play hide-and-seek. And the boys played marbles a lot, and then they'd dig holes in the ground and keep the marbles, and that's the way we done our entertainment, it wasn't going anywhere.

Narrator: Was there a movie in Lewis?

Titus: One time there was, but I can't remember. I don't think it was there during this period. It was in the community hall that they had there, but as near as I remember, it wasn't through this period.

Narrator: How did the war effect like holidays, Christmas or?

Titus: Well, we'd go ahead and when you're so out in the country, you might say, and separated from big towns, you kind of do your own thing. I know I went to my folks always on Christmas, and then

another holiday I can remember Fourth of July was a big, big holiday in Lewis. You couldn't even find a parking place. And on Saturday nights you couldn't find a parking place because people would take their car in and park it and then all the people would be there in town and they'd visit and everything. And I remember once on Easter, on several Easters, the drug store there was a very nice one; if the kids would bring in an egg, they'd give you an ice cream cone for it. And like the town had, on holidays, different things, you know. The Fourth of July was really a big deal; there was ball games and everything going on.

Narrator: You said your family supported you. How many other women would you guess were in your situation that were living at Lewis and had children and their husbands were fighting? Were there a lot of you, or just a few, or?

Titus: Well, there was just a few. Most of them were the parents who had boys in the service, but they weren't married, you know. And I was talking to some the other day and they said, well, they was in the service, yeah, but they weren't married yet.

Narrator: They took the unmarried men first, right?

Titus: Yeah.

Narrator: Besides your family, did the community support you in any way?

Titus: Oh, yeah.

Narrator: How? I mean what?

Titus: Well, not money-wise. I mean, you know, you'd go to town; they were friendly and I never will forget the grocery store gave my kids candy every once in a while, a little piece, you know. Well, then, the girls were in there one day and they just picked up a piece of candy, and they said, well they can't do that; they had to pay for it, and I said, "That's your fault because you gave it to them and now they didn't realize that they had to pay for it." The people that run the grocery store, they also had yard goods and sewing things and you could go in there and get things so you didn't have to go other places to buy those things. In fact, they had very nice material in the prints, and you could buy better prints in there than you could buy lots of places, the bigger places, so I mean, you were self-sufficient there without going somewhere else.

Narrator: You talk quite a bit about what your parents did for you. What about your husband's parents? Were they involved?

Titus: Well, I'd go down to them once in a while, but they lived, see Centerview, I think it's 8 miles to the parallel and from there, it's 2 more, about 10 miles, so I didn't go down there all the time. We spent time at home and, you know, played with other kids; now you're involved in a big community. Then Lewis was the community in itself, and you'd just visit people that were there in town. And I had my neighbor that I rented the house from, was the depot man, so they were older people, and

they helped us a lot, you know, visiting and one thing and another. If you needed anything, boy they were right there right now, and his name was Mr. Dresie. Nobody around here any more belongs to that family.

Narrator: I was wondering, you know, when your husband leaves, all of a sudden you were left doing a lot of chores that the man used to do, you know, fixing things or whatever. Did other people come in and do those things for you or did you just take over and have to learn yourself?

Titus: Well, I don't know if I had to because Mr. Dresie could take care of anything that was around the house that broke down, or my dad, and I don't know. This community out here, anyway the rural people, from the time I was a child, you was self-sufficient. I mean, you took care of your own worries, you know. If something broke, you fixed it. You didn't call in a repairman. We didn't have a lot of things like there are today to break down because, at that time, my folks had, well, when I was a girl, we didn't have electricity because you couldn't have electricity in the country then. When the rural REA come along, then they'd build all the new lines, and I know when they was fixing the houses, people could have one plug-in to a bedroom, and one center light, and you had to go out to a toilet out for your bathroom facility. And where my folks lived, they had running water, but it was pumped by windmill, and if the wind didn't blow you didn't have much water, so you had to go out and do it by hand, pump it by hand. So there wasn't a lot of things to break down like there are now. I mean, we didn't have TV and all we had was a radio, and I never will forget my folks, when they got their first TV, there wasn't TV's out in this part of the country. We went down to visit them one time and they'd just got that TV and you know we went home and didn't hardly even get to talk to them. They wasn't about to talk to us. They was a-watching that TV and they was up real close because you couldn't see it from, you know, a long ways off.

Narrator: What year would that have been about? It would have been after the war

Titus: Oh, quite a ways after.

Narrator: The 50's?

Titus: Well, probably. And you take when you didn't have electricity, lots of them, they couldn't have that. But then by that time, then electricity was getting pretty much this Rural Electric Association, and wired all around out in the country quite a bit.

Narrator: Okay, now, you said earlier, your husband, how did he get out of the service? I don't think we've said that on the tape.

Titus: Well, he was stationed in the Philippines, and he got malaria. And I know one time he wrote me a letter and he said, "I'm laying here in my tent and the water is running through it." And I thought, oh here, he had malaria and water running through it, that wasn't very good for something if you were sick, but I think probably the Philippines has, or at that time, had quite a bit of rain

Narrator: So he was sent home before the end of the war?

Titus: Yes, because of, well, he came home in '46 and the war was over actually in '45. By the time he got home and everything, it was January '46.

Narrator: After he came home, did the malaria manifest itself at all?

Titus: No, it never did, but living up north, they told him if he went down where it was damp and hot, it would probably come back on him.

Narrator: Can you tell us what it was like the day he came home, or your brothers came home?

Titus: Well, I thought about that and I don't know that with so many people coming home and the like, and naturally you're glad to see each other, but just life goes on and, of course, the girls were afraid of him, and so it took a little getting used to. One thing I noticed about him, I felt like, was that he was more abrupt and not as gentle a person as when he left because they had to go up into the caves there in the Philippines and roust the Japanese out. And I think when you're with guns and fighting and one thing and another that carries over for awhile when you come back. And so anyway they sent him home, and I know he came out of Fort Hood in Colorado Springs and then he hitch-hiked all the way home. And I thought that was the day you wouldn't think about picking up a soldier or anybody because you don't know what kind of person they are. At that time they could hitch-hike home quicker than they could take a bus or a train home. But after he got home, why then, you know, after a little bit, he went to work again, so it smoothed out. But he was a different person when he came home.

Narrator: Then did he go back to being more like he had been or did that war stay with him?

Titus: Well, he went back to being pretty much like he was, but I think once you've been in that kind of atmosphere a little bit of that carries over.

Narrator: Did the community of Lewis have any kind of a celebration or activities or, you know you said the Fourth of July had been big, was it bigger after the war?

Titus: No

Narrator: Was there any recognition of those veterans?

Titus: No, not really as a big celebration because so there was so many coming home and at different periods of time, that they really didn't have any around here. Now I know like probably in New York and most places they probably really celebrated the end of the war, but out here I can't remember anything that they did, you know, like a big celebration.

Narrator: No parades, or anything like that?

Titus: No, I can't remember of any. I know I've spoken to some of the others and they didn't seem to think there was, either. Of course, like on Memorial Day and the like, there would be a lot in

those parades, but not because the war was over, no.

Narrator: Now, did you have friends or relatives that lost their lives in the war?

Titus: I had some friends that did, but no relatives that did.

Narrator: So, these would have been husbands of women friends, or whatever, or just men that you knew that were married?

Titus: Just some men that I knew, and I know there were several around Lewis that lost their husbands in the war.

Narrator: Do you remember, did they stay in Lewis then or how that affected their lives?

Titus: They stayed, two of them I know, stayed, and you know, they went on and later married again, and so a little community is so much different than a big city. I think they are closer knit. But then these women, you know, the community, they kind of helped them get over it. And then they soon married again, and so they stayed around, they did.

Narrator: You said, after the war, your husband went to work for Coleman?

Titus: No, he went to work at Lake City ordinance plants, is where he went to work for, down east of Kansas City. It was a big ordinance plant, and after the war they went to making caskets and stuff like that. I don't know what they make now. The factory is still there, but this one was a big factory and they made shells, big shells, I suppose they were the ones I made lamps out of, two of them, and they probably were 14" long or 15, probably 4" across, and then they made tracer shells that probably were 7 or 8" long and when they shot them, you know, there was a flare, sometimes, that followed them so that when you were shooting they could tell where they go, and that stuff they made, was that kind of stuff.

Narrator: And so your family, you went, when you came back, in fact, you and your girls moved with him

Titus: To Wichita, and that's when he went to work for Coleman Lamp and Stove, I think, and made deep dies. I know one die that he did make was one that gas lanterns, okay, he made the die that punched out the bottoms of those and you had to be pretty precise on your work for them to punch them out and all the other parts fit them, and they was made out of heavy metal, you know, and paid good money. And he had gotten his journeyman's card in the tool-and-die making, so that's a pretty good paying job

Narrator: And this would have been like 1947 or right after the war? Right after he came home?

Titus: Yeah, soon after that

Narrator: And the girls had a big adjustment? All of a sudden they had a man around and they

moved.

Titus: Yeah, we moved then. Well first, see, before we went to Wichita, he had got this training on refrigeration when he was in the service, and so he and the Hildenbrands in Kinsley, I can't think of his name, set up a refrigeration shop and worked on refrigerators and stuff.

Narrator: Was that in Lewis or Kinsley?

Titus: Kinsley

Narrator: That was in Kinsley. He came over here. Your husband worked over here

Titus: He worked over here, and we moved to Kinsley for a short time. In fact, we owned the house down, end the main street here on the south side. I don't even know who owns it, and I remember we had to wait to get the house because you couldn't make somebody move until they had a place to go, and the people that were living there at the time we bought the place, was Baker, and I couldn't tell you the first name. I have no idea of the one. So we bought the house, but we couldn't get the house until they could find a place to move to.

Narrator: Then why did he decide to leave that business and go to Wichita?

Titus: Well, I couldn't tell you; I really don't know.

Narrator: If it was money or?

Titus: I think probably it was. You know, you got two people making a living off one place, you've got to make quite a bit of money, and so I guess I can tell this, he said one time he went to somebody's house at Offerle, I believe it was, and the woman said their refrigerator was making so much noise, so he went and he looked and couldn't find anything, and found out something she had standing in the back of the refrigerator was vibrating and made it. So, I don't know, he said they charged her a little bit of something but not a great lot. And so I don't know, I think this job down there, he felt like, and it did pay a lot of money compared to what he was getting here. But that was a nice home up here on main street, too

Narrator: About how long did you live in Kinsley?

Titus: Well, let's see. Not too long, I would say two or three years, something like that, and then we moved down there and soon after we moved there Pat started school down there. And at that time we moved out to housing areas for veterans at the south part of town, in Wichita, and it was called Plainview. And they just looked like a big bunch of new apartments, nothing very pretty about it, but inside the houses were nice. Some of them were long apartments and some of them were individual houses. But the thing that was different about it was we had to burn coal for heat, and I know now they're not wanting coal places to start up. It was a little messy, you know, the dust from the coal bins, because the government bring big loads of coal and put out there in those bins and you had to go out and get it and carry it in. Had a furnace inside, big furnace; very nice places inside,

but really wasn't pretty on the outside.

Narrator: Back in Lewis, did you use coal to heat there?

Titus: No, gas.

Narrator: Gas, oh, you had gas.

Titus: Well, that was kind of different, but it was a nice place. They had their own schools out there and churches. They had one church where the girls went to school, and there was about 400 people that come. They'd meet in the auditorium and couldn't be any denomination. There was two different churches that didn't come there, but all the other churches, different kinds of churches, would meet there. And, like I said, they couldn't preach a known religion, they had to preach strictly from the Bible. And it really worked, and I wonder why some of these smaller churches now that are having a hard time can't do something like that, because they wouldn't have to be paying a whole bunch of ministers big wages and they would have a bigger congregation.

Narrator: So then you stayed in Wichita and then you were telling us earlier why, when did you come back to Lewis, and why?

Titus: Well, from Wichita we moved to, Jim's folks had bought a place up to Garfield, a nice place, and we moved back there because Jim had gotten so he wasn't feeling very good. And so we moved back out there, and then, that ground, they hit oil on it, and so it was a profitable deal for his folks. And then we moved in down south of Lewis at Centerview on our place that we had down there.

Narrator: You stayed there?

Titus: Okay, Pat graduated from high school at Garfield, so that year we moved down there, and then we lived at Centerview until we bought the home where I have up at Lewis.

Narrator: You moved around 1959, about? Probably? She was born in '41, '49, '51, '61, would be about when she was graduated from high school

Titus: Well, I imagine, I don't know. I didn't think that.

Narrator: And in some, you know, you were talking about you moving and the kids grew up and got married. Are there any other highlights in your life?

Titus: Well, finally I went to work over at Kinsley and I can't even tell you what year that was. Farming wasn't real profitable and so I went to work at Ehlers, and the Ehler's daughter married Verne Rehmert. I went to work at Ehlers and worked there for, I don't know how many years and enjoyed it because they really had nice clothes and stuff. I never will forget, there was one woman, I don't even know who she was now, went to California and she came back with this wonderful Catalina sweater; it was beautiful, and was showing it to us. And we had one just like it back there; we were selling it at quite a bit less money. It was really a nice store. At one time that store had

yard goods and at one time they had men's clothing, too. Well, they divided, and Coover, I believe, took it over, and he started, I mean the men's department, he started the men's store and Ehler's still stayed with material and clothing and shoes. They had nice clothes, and so, Jim, he felt like the girls only need one good dress, so I went to work and so they had nice clothes before. And I worked there for awhile, and then the bank at Lewis was needing somebody in there because one of the girls was quitting. And they got after Jim to have me come over there to work in my own community, and I hated to leave because, at that time, Ehlers, you could get quite a nice discount on things, and I could even buy men's clothes. I bought Jim's boots and stuff and one thing and another, so that made me get pretty good wages. But the bank kept going on, so I finally went to work over at the bank. I worked over there for a lot of years in Lewis.

Narrator: You worked at Ehlers; they had an upstairs, kind of a mezzanine type of thing? What all was up there?

Titus: At the time I worked there, there wasn't any clothing or anything up there. They had a shoe department down below, and up there they had a desk and they had just that type of stuff, nothing to sell. Finally Verne put me in charge of this shoe department and I ordered shoes and I went up there to dye shoes. At that time girls would buy dresses and stuff and they'd want shoes to match, and so I would dye the shoes, and I enjoyed working there. It was a nice place to work because they had nice things. I enjoyed the bank; it was entirely different, but I enjoyed it.

Narrator: When did your husband pass away?

Titus: May the 18th, 1995.

Narrator: Okay. I guess if we're finished, did you have some other general questions? Any topics?

Titus: You know, Lewis used to be a nice town; it was a big, you know, for a small town, it was pretty good sized town.

Narrator: Did your girls have any trouble adjusting, when you moved back from Wichita, to Lewis? You know, like the school? Was there any adjustment there?

Titus: No, they didn't seem to have any problems. The only thing I can ever remember they had a problem when they started school in Wichita, such a big school, and they was like, they had a first grade class or a kindergarten; there was several of those classes, and I know, remember that I took Pat up there when she started, and the teacher let you bring them to the door and they would take them. And kids was a-bawling and everything else because, you know, their first time to have been in school. But the girls are all pretty intelligent and I think if you are kind of backward or everything, and are smart enough, seems like you're accepted into schools better. I don't know. Maybe I don't feel that way is right but –

Narrator: Okay, looking back overall, how would you describe how World War II affected your life in total? Did it give you different outlooks on life?

Titus: Well, I think it made me grow up, I'll put it that way, because you had to grow up and take over the responsibility of the family and, of course, and make you responsible for things that you hadn't been before. And I think it changed the whole world, and made people maybe not quite as considerate of the other person as they used to be. I mean, they were busy doing their own thing, so much more, and at the time that World War II started, people were more in their own communities, I think.

Narrator: So that when the war ended, did people sort of dispersed and you lost some of that community?

Titus: Yeah, I think we did, because you take all the soldiers and everything had been all over, and that made everybody else look more world-wide instead of just within your own community.

Narrator: When you worked at Ehlers, and I know they had nice clothing, did you have any Hispanic or black customers, Negro customers, that ever came into Ehlers?

Titus: I don't, not as near as I can remember, I know you're talking about people that maybe moved up here from Mexico or something. Now we've had people over at Lewis, I think as much of as I do white people that have lived there all their life, and their parents lived there, and we accept them as ourself because they are that kind of people. And I can't ever remember a colored person coming in there.

Narrator: Because it was a very nice, very nice building.

Titus: Yes, there was other clothing store, you know. There was a man's clothing store, and then a clothing store on the south side. I can't think of her name now, that run that for years.

Narrator: Clarice Stutzman

Titus: Yeah, and so I mean, I don't, we just didn't have that many Mexicans here in town, I guess. But those people that basically first came up here and were liked, and they worked on the railroad. And so I don't know, I think a lot of them, and everybody does. In fact, when we think about today, that the people that had came up from Mexico in the last few years, that aren't really citizens, and the like, we feel like our Mexicans are, you know, one of us, I guess I want to say, because they've been here for years.

Narrator: Well, I wasn't trying to seem

Titus: I know, but

Narrator: But I know that the swimming pool was not integrated, and I just, you know, I don't know when it was integrated, but I just wondered if we could have waited on them, or if they would have had to go?

Titus: I don't know. I probably would have waited on them but, you know, you might have little bit of, maybe you don't realize that a little bit of not being as forward with them as you would with the

white people. I don't think we had that many colored people out here, even.

Narrator: Well, remember, we have several Negro families

Titus: So that would be in Kinsley, but I know one Negro, for instance, that went from here to a college; here he was accepted; there he wasn't, so I think that's kind of the way; I guess if you grew up with people you accept them. And I know one time, I had a Mexican boy in my class and he was so courteous to the girls, and wasn't rude to them or anything, while the white people boys, they could, there were more things to be ornery about,. And so I was talking this Mexican boy up at home, and I never will forget my folks just got all over me because they was one girl in our class that married the Mexican boy and she was just off; they just didn't accept her anymore.

Narrator: Well, the last question I have here is: Do you think World War II made changes for the people of Edwards County, and what were those changes, and were they good changes or bad changes Or both or ?

Titus: Well, I really think maybe that might have been kind of the time it started that people started going other places to shop and everything. I know when I was working at Ehlers that Verne said at night they wanted us to stay open; they hadn't been staying open after 5 o'clock and so he said okay, he'd do that. Well, I know one dentist's wife here, she was one of them that thought he should stay open until after 5 o'clock, and she was the only one that came downtown. He didn't even have enough trade after hours that way to even pay his utilities. And so he said, "These darn women." He said, "My wife is as bad as the next one." He said if they would stay at home and shop, he said businesses wouldn't be dying. And I think maybe the end of the World War II, if people knew there was a place out there, they would, you know, have started going, and I think that might have started the fall of these little towns.

Narrator: Did the roads get better and the cars got better?

Titus: Well, the cars got better, because they could go faster and you had gas and everything. But at the time, you know they had the WPA and, let's see, that would be in 1930 some, I think, and they kind of worked on roads and bridges and stuff to get, they didn't get much money, but they got enough they could eat, you know, and so I think that the roads was in pretty good shape, but, and I know, we had a guy on the road maintainer, the folks did, and we did, that he would get up at night, and if it was snowing out, and open the roads so that the buses and the like could go, and they don't do that today that good. People done a lot to keep enough food to eat during the depression.

Narrator: Is there anything else that you would like to add to this story or have we covered everything?

Titus: Well, probably the only thing I could add to make my life story more complete, now I'm watching my great-grandkids play basketball and football and go to college, so it's done made a full circle here.

Narrator: I guess maybe it might be fun to hear your views because you lived through the Depression and we're in a hard economic time now in the country, do you have any opinions about the financial situation in the United States today and what you've lived through in your life?

Titus: You know, I think two people are out spending what they get is probably what started this. And people got kind of greedy, and I know I was looking up on the computer about the WPA, and I thought you know that's kind of like it is today. Here Roosevelt started the WPA and put the men to work on roads and bridges and stuff like that at that time when I was talking about, this in the 30's. And they planted those tree belts, I see that they are taking a lot of them out and I think that they may regret that. That may be one reason we're having so much wind cause so many of the tree belts have been taken out. But anyway, back to the WPA, they, and I know my father-in-law worked on the railroad at that time. He farmed and worked on the railroad to make money. And people lived within their means then, and I think now people are living so much beyond their means and they don't know there's going to be a pay day, that's what's wrong. All these big companies and stuff have over-extended what they are making and so I think that's what's put us right back probably kind of like we were in the 30's. And it may be that way because my granddaughter lives in Kansas City and works for a great big insurance company, has overseas contacts that they take care of, she talks several languages to be able to do this, and she says it really hurts her now because, in the past week, some of the people that she's worked with for years have come in and have been let go that day. And some of them, they have walked to the door so that they can't, you know, do anything as they go out. And people are losing their jobs all over. I think out in this part of the country maybe we don't realize it quite so much because it hasn't hit yet, and that's kind of the way it was back in the 30's. People lost their jobs and didn't, and of course the dirt was blowing and farmers were losing their ground and stuff and I think people are over-extended so much and don't realize that they're going to be out of money one of these days. They buy stuff they shouldn't be buying and have lived so high, and now they are out of money or out of a job, so now it's a payday, so we wonder how it's going to turn out now.

Narrator: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Titus: Well, I hope I got dates and stuff right, I don't know

Narrator: This isn't a history book. This is more of an impression. I learned a lot. That was really interesting. I don't know why we all assume that somebody's lived some place all their life. I mean, I had no idea that you'd gone. That was interesting in that you'd worked.