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## Interview with Mattie Lou (Emmett) Thrasher Regarding Her Life (FA 154)

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Folklife Archives Project 154 – A Generation Remembers, 1900-1949  
Interview with Mattie Thrasher (CT 31 & 32)

TAPE1, SIDE1

KAREN OWENS: 2, 3, testing. [Tape noises] Full name and your age, and your birthday, and where you grew up, for the tape recorder, before we get started.

MATTIE THRASHER: Mattie Lou Thrasher. Mattie Lou Emmet Thrasher. And um, I was born October the 15<sup>th</sup>, 18n94.

KO: Where did you grow up?

MT: I grew up in Hancock County in uh, close to the Ohio River, and uh, uh, uh, between Hawesville, about five miles, five miles above Lewisport.

KO: Huh. Did

MT: And I've lived there, uh, twenty-three years 'til I married, then I moved to, to the house where my husband was born.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And I lived there, almost seventy years,

KO: Oh.

MT: And my husband passed away in '71, and I lived in this house for seventy or fifteen years, then I moved to this little house in Lewisport.

KO: Oh.

MT: And uh, I, I'm a country, I've a country soul {Chuckles} I love the country, everything about it. I, but I decided to move to Lewisport because, I lived in a big, great big two story house, and it was hard to heat, hard to keep cool, hard to keep clean, and uh, I realized my limitations, that age brings to you,

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And I, moved to Lewisport. Now everybody wants to know how do you like it, living in town, I like it, I have to, but uh, but when I look out the windows, I, I look for the green meadow with the cows and the calves galavantin' but that uh, I just have those memories which are, wonderful,

KO: Mm hm.

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MT: Valuable, treasures, and now I look out and all I see wheels, which is uh... I try to get interested in the wheels, I think that it's the most innovative device in the world, every occupation in the world, a wheel has been made for it.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: I'll call my son and say, "Paul, what can you do with the, most curious thing I ever saw." "Oh, that's the ??, the horse is in, the cattle, uh, a bolt, different things, or anything.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: So uh, if I, if I find it uh, interesting then

KO: Mm hm.

MT: I still uh, I, I still work, still work. I've been very, very fortunate. I don't have no trace of arthritis.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: I, I've never been in the hospital, but uh, but once, and that was just, uh, I had, I was tired. I waited on my husband. He was bedridden for three years.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And even, I was, there was nothing the matter with me. The doctor said it was exhaustion.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: The reason I had uh, I had ?? before, all in ???. I came home just uh, I had been uh, oh, I never had uh, I never been uh, I've never had a broken bone, or anything that was chronic.

KO: I was wondering uh, how far back do you remember? What's the first thing you remember, that happened to you or your family, like, not just things that happened at home, but what's your first thing that you remember about you out in the community?

MT: {Pause, chuckles} I, I really, I, I really didn't get out in the community very much until it was, went to high school in Hawesville went to school in Lewisport one year, too. Uh, a subscription school, and uh, but, we uh, I did, I did go to Owensboro, I did go as far as Owensboro, but I, I went on uh, to Owensboro, I did uh, I went on the train.

KO: Mm.

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MT: Until I was about fifteen years old.

KO: Mm. What was that like?

MT: See, I went with my grandmother, to Owensboro, and had uh, a cyst taken off my eyelid.

KO: Oh.

MT: That was uh, but uh, later on, I probably did go to Owensbor many times, because we had a, a car, but uh, that was my first trip on the train. That was uh, oh well I, I did go to uh, with my mother to Rockport on the steamboat occasionally.

KO: Tell me more about that. What was that like?

MT: Oh, that was wonderful. I enjoyed that uh, mother and I drove, a horse, to the buggy, to Lewisport but they, horse at the livery stable and had it paid and taken care of all day, and we got on the, the steamboat, and uh, I think it was uh, it was ?? or something or like that. The boat toured, the boat came up and landed at Rockport, and my mother visited her cousin there.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And uh, I, I enjoyed that, so much.

KO: How old were you then?

MT: Oh, I suppose I might have been, six years old, or something like that.

KO: Mm, wonder, was that an expensive trip?

MT: I don't know the expense. I don't imagine it was, but uh, huh, cheap as dirt now, I imagine. I don't remember it all. My mother would always uh, dressed up in our Sunday clothes, you know, and uh,

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Our bachelor uncle lived with us. He would always uh, would hitch up the horse 'n go five miles, and the horse would go five miles to Owensboro.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: 'Course uh, 'course mother tended to all that. I didn't uh, know what anything cost.

KO: Mm hm.

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MT: In those, I was carefree in those days. {Chuckles}

KO: Were you scared on the boat?

MT: Oh no, no. No, I was uh, I was grown up near the river, Ohio River. My daddy loved the Ohio River. Most uh, important and the most um, uh, I don't know, closer to his heart than anything I've ever known him to be.

KO: Oh, really?

MT: Mm hm. He always had a, a boat, a gasoline boat, and every Sunday he had to go up and down the boat. He went to Troy quite often, and uh

KO: Troy, Indiana?

MT: Troy, Indiana.

KO: Mm.

MT: And uh, he did all his shipping, and all the transportation was by boat, steamboat.

KO: Mm.

MT: I loved to go to the river with my dad. And see the, the, the boats loaded with the hay, or loaded with uh, uh, the bags of wheat or whatever it was he was shipping. Or cattle. Sometimes shipped cattle. That was one of my delights. My, when my father was alive, I'd always say, uh, "Can I go?"

KO: {Chuckles}

MT: "Can I go? Can I go?" "Go ask your mama." So, I used to beg.

KO: What kind of business was your daddy in?

MT: He was a farmer.

KO: Oh.

MT: He was uh, uh, uh, a good farmer. {Chuckles}

KO: So he took his produce 'n, and things to Troy?

MT: No, Troy was a small town then, like Lewisport. No, we uh, ship things through uh, to Evansville and Rockport, and uh, Louisville. We'd uh, my father uh, he was a pioneer, but I had his uh, certificate there, and uh, he uh, we would always uh, usually bales of straw, ship the

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straw, ship the hay, shipped everything, tobacco, loaded tobacco. I just loved it, ??, see the boat loaded. I was ??

KO: Mm hm.

MT: We got, we'd stand there and, pull up. "Now get a move on." {Chuckles} They had a little harsh words, too. {Chuckles} I think the uh, deckhands they were, they were always happy though, They'd sing, you know how black people are. They always seemed like they enjoyed it.

KO: So, did you ever hear of any accidents on the river?

MT: Uh, well yes, I heard about it, folks talk about an boat accident that was uh, not too far from a landing, but it was before I was born, I think. It was uh, our mother had uh, a kitchen door was small, and that came off a, a steamboat that had uh, had came off the, the cabin, on, on the steamboat that had uh, had an accident or, or something, but that was before my time. And uh

KO: Did you have to bend over to walk through that door?

MT: Oh no, no, it was just uh, or at least I didn't. I'd say six foot, but my grandson would I imagine, he's six foot four.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: But it was uh, were all small people. Our daddy was slim as a string bean.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: We all were, but I don't think, it opened out to the back porch. It wasn't uh, the men didn't go through it too much.

KO: Oh.

MT: Too often. I think.

KO: Mm. So what was that first train trip like to Owensboro, at age fifteen?

MT: I don't remember that I was very much excited about it other than I dreaded uh, having this uh, my eye, uh, surgery on my eye, and uh, grandmother was [with me] as usual and I was just always calm. I took more responsibility over it though, the people just went on {Chuckles} I think that I must have been a right good child. I don't think that I was ever,

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reprimanded or uh, commanded to come here, or “don’t do that” or “do that.” I was just, you know... {Chuckles} I must have been a fairly good child. {Chuckles}

KO: What was the train trip like? What do you remember about it? Do you remember a lot of smoke or noise, or?

MT: Oh, oh yes, uh, a locomotive always frightened me to pieces.

KO: Oh, really.

MT: When they were coming up and all. They’d breathe all that smoke ‘n {Chuckles} and steam, raw steam, and uh, They were the most frightening thing I’ve ever seen. {Chuckles} But uh, I got used to it, I went to, to high school on the train.

KO: You did?

MT: I went to Hawesville.

KO: Oh, how long did that take you? How many, how long did it take you did it take to get from your house to Hawesville, on the train?

MT: Oh, {Chuckles} depends on the train I reckon, uh, I don’t imagine that it took over, uh, 20 minutes, I imagine,

KO: Oh really.

MT: A short ride on the train that at Adair, the station in the country, and uh, rode to Hawesville. Went on the nine o’clock train on Monday morning and it got there pretty quick, but uh, then we came home on Friday {Coughs} afternoon, They called it” the cub.”

KO: Mm.

MT: And it was uh, it was a cub train, uh, heating stove in one corner, and always it, it stop at every cow path, All you had to do was wave a handkerchief, you know, and they would stop for you.

KO: Oh.

MT: So it usually took quite a little while to go from that short distance with, but the nine o’clock train was, went to Louisville, it was a passenger train, and it was uh, a long distance train.

KO: Mm hm.

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MT: And it didn't stop, except for two places.

KO: Mm. Did you board at school?

MT: Yes, I went to boarding school, during the week. I came home for the weekends. But we boarded, uh, there, and it was called Beechmont High School, and I was one of the charter, students, I guess you would call it.

KO: Mm.

MT: There was only, I think, about eighteen of us the first day.

KO: Mm. Was it a private school or was it public school?

MT: Oh, it was uh, a public school, but we didn't have uh, uh, the only public high school in those days was at Daviess County, and so many went to Owensboro, but just as I uh, finished the eighth grade, uh, they started this high school at Hawesville, and I was uh, I was uh, they, I was contacted to see if I would be, would come to the high school, because they had to get a certain number to before they could establish a high school. You had to have a certain number of uh, students uh, uh, already on the list.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: So I was uh, [contacted by] the state, the county superintendent and one of the teachers came to my house, my home, and uh, wanted to know if I, uh, intended to go to high school, 'course I was, I loved school. I loved books and school all my life. And uh, the first thing I can remember about my childhood, one of the things was sitting in my sister's laps, sitting in their laps, and begging them to read to me, "Read me this, read me that, read me that."

KO: Mm hm. So, you went to this high school, what was that like?

MT: Oh, that was wonderful. I loved high school. I was so, uh, I was so excited over everything, and so interested.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Ancient history to me was, and I still love history, it was of another world, other countries that I had uh, I had never heard about uh, ancient people and how they lived, I thought, I suppose I thought they lived like I do now.

KO: Mm hm.



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MT: I learned then, the uh, the beginning of so many civilizations, the countries, the differences, to me it was, uh, wonderful. I, but some people don't like that, but I did love, always enjoyed history.

KO: Mm hm. What else did you study at that school?

MT: Well, we had uh, we didn't have ??, we didn't have home economics but we had uh, writing, and geometry, and we had algebra class. We had uh, Latin all four years of that.

KO: My goodness.

MT: And uh, uh, art history and uh, we had uh, literature,

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Uh, I guess we called it English, and we had uh, we called it uh, we had physics, we called it, and we had uh, we had botany, and, and it was uh, about uh, and then later of course we had from algebra we had geometry, plane geometry, and we had solid geometry, and uh, I enjoyed every bit of, we had Latin, Latin grammar. I was a Latin grammarian. {Chuckles}

KO: Oh, really. Did you

MT: I thought I was. {Chuckles} The teacher said I was. {Chuckles}

KO: You must have liked it then.

MT: Well, yes, I did. I, I liked it. I liked, I liked books. {Chuckles}

KO: Well, did it seem like Latin was something you would ever use, or did it seem to a farm girl that, "Well, gee, that's, not, going to be much use?"

MT: I never thought of it that way. I was uh, and I still think that it uh, has helped me in my uh, uh, in my reading of words, you see it uh, all languages derive from the uh, the Latin, prefixes, affixes, and the longer words.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: So it helps you uh, uh, all my life it has helped me, I think, though I never uh, I think the only thing {Chuckles} I can remember about it is, I mean that's all, so that's all, I really liked the language. But we studied Caesar and uh, uh, Caesar and uh, Cicero.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Oh yeah! {Chuckles}

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KO: What did people back home think? Did they think Mattie Lou's puttin' on airs or she?

MT: No, no.

KO: Or she thinks she can be a big shot?

MT: No, they always thought, my mother was very patient. I often thought that maybe I didn't appreciate her as much as I should cause, uh she did all my laundry, you know. Brought it home and then uh, put it away.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And uh, now my father was just a little bit critical, I guess you'd call it. He would get uh, I remember, mother, always, I never asked my father, he'd always say go and ask your mother, and he would give me three dollars on every Monday morning.

KO: Mm.

MT: She'd say now, "This will have to do, because your daddy says that's all you're going to get." And then she'd slip in a quarter or two or so, so I could buy some ice cream cones for a nickel. {Chuckles} And uh, some buffalo nickels, had buffalo nickels in those days.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And I never, had never, I never, there was one time that I, I needed anything, that I couldn't get, I mean, I never wanted anything, but I, that I couldn't get. I've been satisfied with what I've got, to this day, I don't, I don't, envy anybody anything and I don't uh, crave something

KO: Mm hm.

MT: That's out of this world, because uh, I'm just, I do the best that I can. {Chuckles} Well, I've always tried to make it prettier or make it cleaner or make it available or make it useful.

KO: Where did you live when you were away at school? Did they have a dorm for you?

MT: Oh, yes, I was at a boarding house. It was uh, it was a residence really. It started out an old building, except it uh, kind of old residence that belonged to Mr. uh, uh, uh, Patterson, and uh, his father, the two houses on this field..

KO: Mm hm.

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MT: But you'd

KO: Mm hm, Yeah.

MT: Oh, it was a lovely place up there, but uh, what do you call, come off the bridge in those days.

KO: Yeah.

MT: You walked up a city path, right along the city path up the, the hill, and there was the uh, school and there was a residence. They uh, took out, a partition, or two, and it had uh, it had uh, it was a two story building. You had uh, to walk upstairs and then downstairs and we took uh, our boarding house was just right, two or three steps between the buildings. It was real convenient, because on rainy days and you didn't have to, to have to an umbrella, you'd just skip, one after the other

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And then uh, I think that uh, uh, but I had, I had a very dear friend that lived with me there all three years, but I just, I still regret that I didn't graduate there, but I, I went three years with 'em, and Ella Mae Bell. Her name was Ella Mae Bell and she was about my age, and we slept together, we played together, we studied together, we played together all those three years.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: She always said I was the only sister she ever had.

KO: Aw.

MT: She just had one brother.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Because I have two older sisters. They were married at that time.

KO: Mm hm. Why didn't you graduate there?

MT: I took a notion that I wanted to go to Bowling Green. I went, they were training teachers. Uh, my teacher was uh, Mr. Olson, Professor Charles Olson, and I was very uh, very fond of him, and he was, resigning and uh, he was offered another place,

KO: Mm hm.

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MT: Well, he was leaving Hawesville and Mr. Ed Kelly was taking his place. Well, I liked Ed Kelly, too, and Mr. Kelly always held that against me. He always teased me because I quit school when he started teaching. But I, I wanted to go, I wanted to be a teacher, so I went to Bowling Green and um, it was a normal in those days, and I went there uh, for several terms, I think, and I liked it, but it never uh, it was never quite the same as my, high school uh, days were because uh, for one thing it was uh, uh, I thought a big school, you know, uh, large classes, but when I went to school in Hawesville we just, probably be eight, eight or ten in a class and you got individual attention, you know, and the help you wanted, and I was uh, and uh, but in uh, Bowling Green it was different, but uh, I, I don't uh, I liked it but uh, not uh, not uh, I don't know exactly how learning, I still got uh, a state certificate to teach school for the Bowling Green area..

KO: Mm hm.

MT: A state certificate. Well, I taught school after I went to this, at that time.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And I liked teaching, too, I liked teaching.

KO: Did you come back to Hancock County to teach?

MT: Mm hm, mm hm. I boarded uh, with my aunt and taught one year, and then I stayed home and taught my home school for two years. That was three years I taught school.

KO: A home school, what's that?

MT: What?

KO: What's a home school?

MT: Uh, Beech Grove School, it was a country, it was a one-room school.

KO: In your home?

MT: Uh, it was uh, my home community, you know.

KO: Oh.

MT: Say, we walked to. I'm getting, my mouth's getting dry.

KO: Do you want to stop and get a drink?

TAPE STOPPED.

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MT: What's the question? {Chuckles}

KO: We were talking about your teaching career. You were teaching in your home community.

MT: Mm hm.

KO: And, what happened next, did you get married next?

MT: I got married, when the, the school closed in, in 1918, I got married, and uh, then I, started my own school. {Chuckles} I had five children.

KO: Uh huh.

MT: And uh, it was uh, uh, a country home and it was close to the railroad, but it wasn't too far uh, too far from where I was born. It was, uh, the neighbors uh, boys that came around.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And uh, he was a farmer, mostly uh, he had a little, tenant house on the farm that they raised tobacco, and we had uh, we had horses, and uh, uh, not many cows in the beginning, but uh, we, finally did wind up with a herd of cattle.

KO: Uh huh. Hi.

MT: This is my son, William, Billy, we call him Billy. And uh, I uh...

KO: Well, what was it like to be a farmer's wife back then?

MT: Oh, it was uh, it was work, but I, I like a garden. I've always loved my garden.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And I had to hoe and work in the garden, and then I liked uh, uh, canning, and preserving vegetables. And uh,

WILLIAM THRASHER: You're recording?

KO: Uh huh.

MT: Oh, it's

KO: I, I can do that easier than I can write down anything.

MT: Well, so, {Chuckles} I, I uh, but uh, we had my boys in the 4-H Club. {Coughs}

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KO: Mm hm.

MT: And uh, I was uh, well, I'd entertain the boys, I mean, the, the clubs and we had the party because you've got a big house, and uh, the boys would uh, camp in the back, well, there'd be uh, they got too old, when they got too old for the 4-H Club, I uh, in Hancock County, they organized a youth culture club.

WT: She's planning...

KO: Pardon me?

WT: She's planning on retiring.

KO: {Chuckles}

MT: And uh, then I began to work in the Utopia Club for which was mostly adults and married couples, and um, oh that club which uh, it was a wonderful part of our adult life and the farmer life. We were all farmers and the county agent where I participated. We met once a month and the county agent came and then we would write down all their questions for county agent at our club, and then I um...

KO: What was the purpose of the club?

MT: It was for advance the farming, the techniques.

KO: Oh.

MT: The county agent was the, the leader.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And uh, but it was in, uh, he was the leader and um, information he had access to the state university, but uh, we enjoyed that.

WT: Have you got to the car yet?

MT: No, we haven't got to the car, yet.

WT: O.K.

MT: Oh, um,

KO: {Chuckles} My goodness. Is this the first car you had?

MT: ??

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WT: ??

KO: Was this the first car you had?

MT: Uh huh. Mm hm, mm hm.

KO: Golly.

MT: But uh...

END TAPE1, SIDE1

TAPE1, SIDE 2

MT: but um, we never had any trouble, not ever, and um

KO: Did you have your babies, like, pretty soon after you were married or?

MT: Yes, uh huh. The next year, I believe, the year after married, the one year, and um, we uh, I lost uh, one child, had uh, meningitis of the brain. She died when she was two years, eight months old. She's a lovely baby.

KO: Could the doctors do anything for her?

MT: Uh, we took her to Owensboro to uh, a child specialist, but uh, there was nothing he could do. At that time, there was nothing he could do.

KO: How did you handle, your grief, over the baby dying?

MT: Well, I, I been told that still waters run deep. I, I, I was never one to, to show grief, but I, I was told that, still waters run deep, and I think they did. But uh, I had other children to think about, and uh, I didn't uh, I uh, I never let anything like that, uh, I had too much to live for, too many others to think about.

KO: How many children, other children did you have then?

MT: I, I had five children.

KO: Oh, she was your baby?

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MT: Uh huh. She was, no she was the girl baby. She was the next one.

KO: Oh.

MT: Uh huh. And then uh, they all, lived to be grown, and my daughter, my only other daughter, died when she ?? except when she was thirty-five. She married, and uh, lived thirteen years, and loved her little home, she had uh, a cancer is what the doctor pronounced it.

KO: Oh.

MT: And my son, my second son, had a heart attack and died in '71. He was married and had two children.

KO: My goodness.

MT: That was the most sudden thing, that was the most unexpected thing that, ever happened in my life.

KO: Back in the days when you were young and you were starting your family, uh, what was medicine like back then?

MT: {Chuckles} There was, there were only two or three, uh, quinine and uh, calomel, and um, liniments, rub on.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And then some salve that um, that they peddled around the country, Clover Leaf salve is a wonderful balm..

KO: What was the name of it again?

MT: Brand uh, uh, Clover Leaf salve. It was sold with Vaseline. I don't think we've had anything to call Vaseline but this Clover Leaf salve was uh, was right fragrant and it uh, it was mostly a, a Vaseline, a clear Vaseline color,

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And um, but pneumonia, there wasn't that, there was no cure for pneumonia, that was usually a fatal disease,

KO: Mm hm.



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MT: Until uh, penicillin was discovered, and uh, that was uh, pneumonia was attacked, and typhoid fever was another, uh, fatal disease, usually fatal. I never had any in my family, and I can remember when uh, people were afraid of small pox.

KO: Really.

MT: When I was a child.

KO: Was that very common?

MT: No, it wasn't common, but it was, it uh, it had been uh, I, I knew several people, uh, men, when I was a child, who were uh, pock-marked. Their faces. I always wondered what was the matter, and they said that he had small pox when he was younger, and it was still um, uh, uh, yeah, well, I was vaccinated for small pox when I went to high school, but that was the first vaccination I ever had.

KO: Mm. Do you?

MT: I was uh, so it was uh, there was very little um, uh, very little uh, precautions that we could take in those days. 'Course we knew to boil the water. It wasn't pure, but uh, and the milk, too, that was about all we knew about uh, killing, we didn't know much about germs.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: You know, germs was almost a mystery. I remember when I was a child.

KO: Really?

MT: Germs was uh, we, we hardly knew what the word meant.

KO: Huh. Well, do you remember the flu epidemic, of 1918?

MT: Yes, I had it, yeah.

KO: What was that like?

MT: Well, that was uh, that was serious, a serious, uh, troubled time. So many, I had a young, cousin, who died of that, a young man, and uh, we were quite ill, but uh, uh, not uh, fatal. {Chuckles} Henry and I had it about the same time.

KO: Oh, really?

MT: And uh, Henry's sister lived in Louisville, and uh, her husband was conductor on a train so she got a pass and came down here, and she came down um, from Louisville, and um,

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she always stayed over night a few days, and she had a chill while she was at our house, and um, grew ill, so she went home as quickly as she, she could, but we, we, we, our daddy had contracted that uh, and we, each had it, but uh, we had a good doctor who visited uh, it was Dr. Jim Griffin, from Lewisport. He was a nurse as well as a doctor. He could come and uh, and do anything for ya. If you needed a bucket of coal, why he'd get a bucket of coal. He'd do anything for ya. But the neighbors didn't come in.

KO: They didn't?

MT: If they did, they didn't come in. They came and brought food and they would bring it to the kitchen, and put it in the door, but they didn't come in the bedroom, and um, if they did, they wore a mask over their faces. It was um, everyone was frightened.

KO: Mm hm. Did you all have a pest house in this county?

MT: Pardon me?

KO: Did you have a pest house, a pest house, in this county, where they sent sick people sometimes?

MT: No, I don't believe a pest house.

KO: I think Owensboro had one. I was just wondering if you all did.

MT: No, huh unh, I never heard of it. I, I know uh, at that time they had a pest house at, at, at the flu epidemic?

KO: I think so. Only they sent smallpox patients there.

MT: I heard the word.

KO: Uh huh.

MT: Uh, I think that they uh, probably, uh, during the smallpox uh, epidemic, I think that's when they had the pest house.

KO: I think you're right.

MT: But uh,

KO: Do you know when that was?

MT: Well, it was before I was born, but uh, it was uh, uh, I imagine in uh, 1890s, I imagine something like that.

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KO: Well, do you remember when all the modern invention, inventions started arriving like the telephone, and electricity, and the car, and all that?

MT: Yes, uh huh, I remember our telephone. It was uh, 19, 19n07, I believe. I came home from school, and uh, uh, the telephone box was on the wall, {Clears throat} and uh, they wanted me talk, and I said, “I don’t want to,” {Chuckles} and they said, “Oh, go on over and... Grandma wants to talk to you,” so I talked, and to this day, I, I, I’m not crazy about a telephone.

KO: Oh really.

MT: No.

KO: Huh. Why not?

MT: I don’t know. {Chuckles} Well, I, I think partly one thing now is that I don’t hear so well.

KO: Oh.

MT: And I hesitate to call because I’m afraid that I won’t uh, uh, carry on the conversation, that is long distance, but uh, I was never a great hand to get up there and uh, and talk long.

KO: What about electricity, do you remember when that arrived?

MT: Mm hm, I sure do.

KO: Huh?

MT: That was, the greatest thing that ev-, ever happened, to, the country people.

KO: Oh really?

MT: Oh, it was wonderful. When they said “Press that button,” I’ll never forget that, and turn on your lights, and when those lights came on, it was like a new day. {Chuckles}

KO: How old were you then?

MT: Let’s see uh, that was uh, oh, I guess, long ago, turn that off {Chuckles}

TAPE STOPS

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MT: A, a coal and wood stove.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And um, until it was chilly, but oh, it was uh, it must have been about uh, about 18n, or maybe 19, 19, 19n uh, oh, somewhere along there, uh, I could have looked up that, if I had known that, I could have looked, I had the first, uh, {Clears throat} I had the first uh, bill I got from the electric company.

KO: Oh, you do.

MT: You couldn't guess what it was. The amount. It was a dollar forty-eight, I believe. A dollar forty-eight.

KO: {Chuckles}

MT: {Clears throat}

KO: That's amazing.

MT: All I ever had was lights, the first month, and uh, that was the first month's bill. I have that yet. {Clears throat}

KO: That's amazing.

MT: And uh, so after that we got uh, um, we got the stove, I think, the first, it was an electric stove, electric range, and um, oh, it was marvelous, that was marvelous. Then we got then the refrigerator, um, but the lights were wonderful because um, huh, we could put away those, kerosene lamps, you put away a lot of the labor. We had to uh, fill a light, at least once a week, and you had to clean these uh, glass uh, uh, chimneys, globes, you know, they had to be kept shining.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Uh, there was all this smoke, if the flames got too hot, they'd smoke, oh they were, terrible than that. But, I was so glad to get rid of that, and then we had the light that we could read by and see, really see something, could work by. I'll never begrudge one thing I spent on electricity, even to this day, sometimes I think {Clears throat} it's, a little bit gouging here, the electricity here is uh, is the rate is alright but I use it a lot.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And I think that I never, {Clears throat} I never uh, uh, never regret one penny that I spent on electricity. It's the cleanest, most efficient energy you can get.

KO: Mm hm. What about uh, the first automobile that you ever saw, do you remember that?

MT: First one I ever saw?

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Well, I suspect about the first one I ever saw was the one my daddy bought.

KO: Oh really.

MT: About 19n10.

KO: Huh. What, do you remember much about it?

MT: Yes, I do. That was quite uh, exciting, exciting time um, it was uh, a Studebaker, now, let me see uh, that's a picture of it.

KO: Oh. {Chuckles}

MT: And um, it was shipped from Evansville on the steamboat.

KO: My goodness.

MT: And my brothers went down to the river to get the uh, to bring up the automobile, and neither one had ever driven one, it had no manual, at all, it was a used one, of course. It was red, and uh, we took my brother home, he was married and lived {Coughs} down the road a piece. We took him home and then uh, {Chuckles} everybody would say "How did you know how to drive it?" I'd, {Clears throat} "Who taught, who taught you" "Nobody." He just instinctively, my brothers had a, mechanical, technology that was out of this world, they were born that, with that uh, talent, and uh, we were riding down the road and there was a sharp, almost a right hand uh, a right angled uh, turn in the road to take my brother home, and his wife and little boy, the little boy was Willie Joe, and he turned it a little bit, a little bit too much, and we slid over in a little shallow ditch there,

KO: Uh huh.

MT: Oh my, we just, about had a spell, you know, but oh, the boys were not daunted on it was uh, just a little uh, uh, slick in the ditch. It wasn't a deep ditch. Went over there to the straw stack close by, and they went over and got an arm load full of straw, and Willie Joe said

he got his hand full of straw, too, put that under the wheel and um, it went right out, so that ‘n my {Coughs} older brother stayed home, and my other brother, Paul, the one next to me in age, we drove the car up {Coughs} to uh, up to his house, put it in the drive. I remember that uh, I always said uh, you know, it’s a good thing that little accident, that accident happened, because, I’m drivin’ a lot slower now than I did, would have if that hadn’t happened. {Chuckles} Said it can get away from it, {Both chuckle} so, {Both chuckle}, I’ll get away from it, drive about fifteen miles an hour. Twenty five miles was a pretty good mileage. Thirty five miles an hour, and forty, oh, forty was dangerous. That was speeding. {Both chuckle}

KO: What about tractors? Did they come along pretty soon after that, or was that a long time later?

MT: {Chuckles} Oh, oh, it was a long time for tractors come on. This was about 1910. I want you to see this, special, we had an old license plate.

KO: Uh huh.

MT: And uh, no uh, license, no uh, driver’s license, it was uh, it was a free country in those days. {Both chuckle} And there was another car on the road, there was one, two other cars in Hancock County at that time, I think, but uh, {Chuckles} they frightened the horses to death, but uh, we had no, no trouble with traffic {Both chuckle} and you had to, you had to have that uh, that uh, god awful crank, you know that, to start it, and that was the worst trouble {Chuckles} and um, had um, oh um, hand uh, hand clutch, you know. We just had three speeds, the low, and the, the low, and the uh, medium, and high, and uh, had to start the gear ‘cause if you didn’t, you’d get kicked, there. {Both chuckle} When the boys would have it, “Have you got out of gear?” or make sure of that because if you tried to take to second gear, it would, you know, that would break your arm. {Both chuckle}

KO: What about the first airplane you ever saw, do you remember that?

MT: Well, {Pause} I think perhaps I, {Pause} I, I don’t really remember the first time, I guess.

KO: Oh.

MT: My brother bought one.

KO: Oh, he did.

MT: Yes. My oldest brother bought, bought one.

KO: What did he do with it?

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MT: Well he, finally tore it up because he didn't uh, it was way back there in um, well it was built like Orville Wright built it, it was a, the bi-planes, you know?

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And you had to start it, start with the propeller.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And there were no landing strips, no landing places. He was uh, uh, a pioneer, he was adventuresome, my, my brother was, he was something. Wasn't afraid of anything, and uh, he bought this airplane. I have no idea what he gave for it. I, I wonder.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: But uh, he had landed it in our, our uh, corn field, our, our pasture, I guess it was, and um, I bet he was a little boy. He must have been about nineteen and twenty, twenty-five or twenty-six.

KO: Huh.

MT: And um, uh, there was uh, a, Billy and uh, my husband went with my brother on the plane. They went over on, I said, "Billy, did you see the river?" and they went over the river, made a short trip and came back.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: On the way, they came through the tree tops, and Billy said they had to pull out the branches of the tree out of the, the plane, and everyone told him, said that uh, "You're going to, get killed in that airplane." He said, "Yes, I'm probably going to die in your beds too."

KO: {Chuckles}

MT: Never flying, but he did uh, he did, I don't think he uh, uh, operated it, uh, less than a year, I think, and he finally did have an accident that just broke it all to pieces, and he was uh, I guess the shock, it was, sort of unconscious, I guess, anyhow they said uh, "Oh, he's, he's alright, he's alright. You can't hurt him, it didn't hurt him, so leave him alone, bold as anything, so breathe or anything." He'd just run into a tree, I believe, flown into a tree some how or another and landed on it, and uh, it was just uh, they got uh, got a wagon. Never know uh, uh, trucks, you know.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And uh, put all the pieces in a wagon, all the pieces of the airplane, in a wagon, and that was the end of his airplane experience, but they built boats, too, my brother,

KO: Oh, they did?

MT: They built boats, and uh, this uh, uh, motor boats, they were uh, uh, airplane motors in 'em, put airplane motors in a boat, and they were racers.

KO: {Chuckles} Where did he race them?

MT: On the Ohio River.

KO: Oh, really.

MT: Yeah, yeah.

KO: Well, that's interesting.

MT: The Ohio River was a part of our lives. {Clears throat}

KO: Mm hm.

MT: I still this, to this day love the river. I think it's, the most beautiful river in the world. {Chuckles} I've seen other rivers. I was in uh, uh, Nebraska, and um, the Missouri River uh, uh, goes between Nebraska and Iowa, and I said uh, "Can I go see the river? I want to see the Missouri River." But it didn't really have any uh, any landing spots that I could see, but one of the uh, uh, stations, uh, gas stations there was a spot that you could get close enough that you could see the river.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: So we parked there, and I could see the Missouri River, and I said, "Well, that's quite a river, but it doesn't compare with the Ohio."

KO: Mm.

MT: The blue Ohio is beautiful. It's right there.

KO: Mm hm. Well, back to the

MT: Now, the Mississippi, I didn't, I never thought, I never admired the Mississippi River like I have the Ohio, because that, that's, that's just {Chuckles} a childhood uh, uh, fondness, of the Ohio River.



KO: Well, back to about the time your brother was flying his airplane, that was the Roaring Twenties. What were the Roaring Twenties like around here?

MT: Well, they uh, the plays, they did get uh, I can't say there were no commercial planes, I mean, very, very few, commercial planes if any, but uh, we had um, well, it was, once a year we had a big uh, barbeque and picnic, they called it, in, in Hancock County, close to Lewisport {Clears throat} and my sister and sister-in-law uh, operated uh, four or five years uh, the barbeque, and they always had uh, a plane to come and take up passengers, and they would land out in uh, always uh, select the landing out in a pasture some place, and they would take passengers up for uh, a dollar, I suppose, or maybe, maybe a quarter.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Drive around for about uh, ten minutes, in, but I never rode with them, 'cause uh, but uh, and I use, I remember watching the planes go overhead, and I always watched the tail end, around the side, because I, was almost that sure that it would drop, before they got out of the side, but I never saw one that did, {Both chuckle} so I tracked a little bit to be sure that they would make it, {Both chuckle}, but at that time an airplane was something uh, uh, that was miraculous, downright miraculous, how it could be. I never could understand and I still don't, quite understand all that, aerodynamics connected with, with the flight. {Chuckles}

KO: You, you hear a lot about how the Twenties were a wild time. Were people, did people have as high standards then as they had had earlier, or as they would have later on?

MT: Well I think um, I think the automobile, brought a different standard of living.

KO: Oh, really.

MT: Because um, you could go farther, oh, when they had the horse and buggy you never, you didn't take, you didn't drive twenty miles very often, but uh, that is to Owensboro, but the automobile {Coughs} made your neighbors further away and sometimes um, your new neighbors, they were not quite as dependent on each other as they had been, 'cause we used to borrow, a cup of sugar when we needed it you know, but uh, I don't remember uh, 'course about that time, too, uh, uh, the movies came in to uh, uh, operation, and uh, everybody wanted to go see the movies, but I can't remember that uh, that there was anything wild about it, not in my life. {Chuckles} We were country people.

KO: What about speak easies? Were there, was there a lot of drinking, and dancing, and that kind of thing going on, during the Twenties?

MT: Well, I just tell you that there's always been, drinking going on.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: I remember my husband, uh, who was ten years older than I am, uh, going to the country dances, and uh, uh, no one ever, they didn't carry guns in those days, they didn't have hand guns, and if they got in a fight, it was usually a fist fight, or a quarrel, and uh, and there wasn't um, um, it wasn't accepted then as it is now, I mean, um, if there anyone got drunk people who, they were usually, people that were not uh, well, we didn't think that they were quite uh, you'd say class, which I don't think was the right uh, thing, but they're not in our class now. That, I learned that expression when I was young, but I never liked it. I don't believe in dividing people into classes. {Clears throat} Usually the land, the land owners, {Clears throat}

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Those who lived in one community, one generation after another. They were a certain class, and there was another group of people, {Clears throat} who had uh, who were called tenants, and they moved, probably, every year from one farm to the next, and they probably had uh, no uh, resources except uh, maybe they had a mule or a plow, they could get uh, raise somebody's tobacco, on, uh, shares, I don't, but they were, they, they were often very good people, they uh, {Clears throat} I've always loved the people who lived on our place, {Clears throat} because they were good people, but they were uh, it, it really uh, um, well, as I say, they wasn't in our class.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: But I don't, I don't think that meant so much as living standards as their uh, {Clears throat} maybe education, maybe they couldn't read or write, but uh, but that didn't keep 'em from being honest, and um, uh, big hearted and good people, but now I think that there isn't a difference that their standard of living probably was a little different, but now I think that people are uh, their standard of living, most everyone is uh, fairly good.

KO: Mm hm. What about Prohibition? Did people take that very seriously?

MT: Not at all, no. {Chuckles}

KO: No?

MT: No, no. {Chuckles} Oh, I, I guess I shouldn't say that I guess, but uh, there was a lot of um, I think just about as much drinking went on during Prohibition because there were named bootleggers, you know, and uh, you could get whiskey most anyplace, in Lewisport, and certain places you could go, and you could buy moonshine, and um, the woods was full of 'em makin' whiskey, and some even made um, home brew, at, at, down in your basements at home. 'Course that was your own business.

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Interview with Mattie Thrasher (CT 31 & 32)

KO: Mm hm. What about the Klu Klux Klan? Were they very active during the Twenties? Do you remember anything about them around here?

MT: No, I don't, it uh, let see, it, it was um, we didn't call it Ku Klux Klan, what did we call it?

END TAPE1, SIDE2

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

MT: My uh, my activities uh,

KO: Mm hm.

MT: My activities with...

KO: Well, how did you

MT: I, I, things like that always frightened me, I mean, I was uh, more or less a timid, timid child and my parents weren't too, I don't uh, I suppose if a Night Rider, threatened to kill someone if they did do something like set that bomb off, well, that was always frightening to me.

KO: Mm hm. What about uh, racial relations back when you were young? How did blacks and whites get along?

MT: Wonderful, wonderful. We had uh, a cabin on our place {Clears throat} and um, uh, we lived down ?? and there was always a ?? back there at that time. I've played with negro children. I've gone over there and eatin', potatoes that they warmed; they had the best potatoes I've ever tasted in my life. {Both chuckle} They cooked with wood, I loved the wood stove, and when I smell wood smoke, I think about the negro cabin, oh they, {Chuckles} oh they were crooked sometimes but I liked 'em all. {Chuckles} They, well they went back to ?? ever wanted, {Coughs} ?? that's um, ?? Mammy, maybe Mommy anyway, but we had the most fun. I always did love babies, so we'd, I'd play with the baby, {Chuckles} most ?? lemons, she'd say, "I'd ?? lemons?" She'd always try to keep something for, to make lemonade. Finally, one day uh, and uh, Mammy always brought uh, uh, a gallon, tin bucket to put uh buttermilk. She took the buttermilk home with her. We had plenty of milk. She always filled this bucket with buttermilk. One day I saw her out in the back yard, just a pickin' up, pickin' up, lemons and I

said, she was pickin' up the lemons. She'd throw those lemons out in the backyard, and then when she went home, why, she'd put these lemons in her gallon bucket. {Both chuckle} Oh, she'd pick up some lemons, I don't think that mother ever even thought about it. Maybe she did, I don't know. {Both chuckle} Oh.

KO: What kind of... I'm sorry, go ahead.

MT: What?

KO: Go ahead. I didn't mean to interrupt.

MT: I was just thinking about the negroes, uh, the log cabin burned, that I can remember when I was a child, and um, Bud Butler was living there. We had the ??, I think, and um, um, Bud cried, and I remember him lying on our back porch, by the kitchen, and crying and praying, and I just felt so sorry for that man. He would cry and then pray a while. And he was a good worker, for my uncle. My father brought um, every hog killing time, uh, when I was a child, my father brought fresh meat to them, to an old negro lady, lived in Lewisport and she had been uh, a slave, I think, for his father.

KO: Oh.

MT: And the negro woman used to walk out to the end of the country, every, summer, and she would uh, go home laden with, shoes and clothes, that uh, we had out grown, and um, I thought, I, I liked, I liked all of 'em.

KO: Mm.

MT: {Chuckles}

KO: I was wondering, too, what you remember about the Depression?

MT: Well, I remember the Depression very, very well. I went through that with flying colors, too, because uh, we lived in the country.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: But I saw so much of um, other people {Clears throat} the um, and the train that uh, we could easily see the train from where we lived.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: The boxcars would be covered with uh, unemployed people, you know, we called 'em tramps, but they were not, they were not tramps really, they were just trying to find work.

{Clears throat} And they would get out of the cars at that {Clears throat} little station called Adair right close to our house, {Clears throat}, and they would come over and want something to eat. And um, my daddy, they would ask if he would “have a little something that I can do for you”, you know. ‘Course we had boys, and did all the odd jobs, but uh, I usually gave them a sandwich, I, biscuits, or if I had biscuits, always gave ‘em some biscuits.

KO: Mm.

MT: And um meat, we always had plenty of meat, but that was when uh, the things were really uh, we had it good in the country living during the Depression, because we had our own, eggs, and meat, and our vegetables. All we had to buy was uh, was the clothing for the children and I made all my, I made uh, always made the clothes except the shoes, and, and um, we had, we always had plenty to eat, had plenty to eat.

KO: Mm hm. What about...

MT: But we didn’t um, we didn’t have money, we didn’t have money.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And most of the farmers mortgaged. The farmer had to buy uh, in order to um, to buy his seed, and some fertilizer, that wasn’t much used in those days, but uh, uh, we did have to have money for some things, but not like you do now, you just, you have to have money every time you turn around these days.

KO: Yeah. What about pesticides? Did you all have those back then?

MT: What?

KO: Pesticides, you know, insecticides.

MT: Yes, I remember when um, oh, I bet I can remember, we sprayed for flies. The flies just drop dead. You’d go down to the barn and it would just be alive with flies, and would spray with that. {Clears throat} What was that? You’d never have flies again, you’d put it in your paint, and you could paint your walls and you’d never have a fly, well, I just thought that that was, {Coughs} was the most wonderful thing, and uh, we used that maybe for a year or two and, and it kill all the fleas, you know, on the hogs, and the, and the, everything.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Found out that that was uh, uh, wasn’t to be used, it was bad for humans.

KO: Oh.

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Interview with Mattie Thrasher (CT 31 & 32)

MT: Bad for humans, and you can't use it to this day.

KO: Arsenic?

MT: I, I can't think what they called it, but uh, we used that for a while.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And um, but now you can't even use it all.

KO: About how old were you then?

MT: Oh, I was married, and uh, I was uh, oh, I was uh, I imagine, thirty-five years old, thirty-something or another. {Chuckles} I'm not that good on dates.

KO: That's okay.

MT: And uh, I wish that I could think of the name of that.

KO: Maybe later on, I could call you back, and you could ask your son.

MT: Well, you do that.

KO: It would be interesting to know.

MT: Yeah, yeah, and I uh, I, I often say that God gave us a computer between our ears, and it's up there, the hardware and software, it is all up there, and everything you say and, and um, have learned is up here, but sometimes, you can't recall it. Just like somebody, pressed the right button, and it will come to you. That's why I know that it's up there all alone.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: I've had um, somebody make me think of something I hadn't thought of for years.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: But it was up there, and I think that um, some day you might have to give it a tip and it will be right up there, with no difficulty. {Both chuckle} But uh, maybe uh, uh, I had a crazy idea that I said that God gave us the computer between our ears, we don't, we don't use the, we don't get the potential that we should have, most of us, most of us do not.

KO: Mm hm. Well uh, do you remember when farmers started spraying their crops? You know, with different chemicals to kill the, weeds and stuff?

MT: Oh, yeah. Mm hm.

KO: When did that start happening?

MT: Mm hm. Mm hm. Probably about that, um, Billy would be better on that too, because, um insecticide that was good, too, but uh, I, I'm a little skeptical of that.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Um, I think it was just uh, nature's time that usually takes care of things. I mean, that we kill pests, what you think is a pest, but that pest maybe was, consuming uh, uh, another pest that was, was harmful as he was. I think that every, nature keeps things in balance, and if you kill one of these um, layers, then the others is going to shoot up, I'm just sayin', or take advantage of the absence of the uh, predator.

KO: Did you all realize that back then in the, in the Twenties or the Thirties?

MT: No, because we don't realize that to this day.

KO: Oh.

MT: That we poison water, and we poison everything. The earth is, one of these days, going to be gone, all the living on because it's just been, humans have just, that's my idea.  
{Both chuckle}

KO: Well, at the time, did it seem like these were miracles, the chemicals?

MT: Oh, yes. Yeah. We had no, we had no idea, that is most of us are going to um, uh, suspect that um, that the fish were dying and um, it just wasn't that uh, ?? expansion and the balance of the, of the natural, {Coughs} uh, resources, and um, then of course the government now they have technicians to analyze all this water, see if it contains uh, chloride, and um, and I think it's a good thing. But even at that, even the ocean, is polluted, you know, I learned that long ago that the ocean was {Clears throat} was so beautiful, blue, and {Coughs} clear, and, and it now uh, it is uh, you see drugs in the ocean, and uh, of course, I've never been on the ocean, just, just the beaches, but uh, there's so much um, uh, thrown into the ocean, in all these years, just thrown in the ocean. Get rid of it, just put it in there.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And it just, contaminates the water.

KO: Yeah.

MT: I think that they are really trying to uh, to uh, not do that and to restore some of the um, the, the, the ?? for it, and to what degree we can, and to take better care now, but uh, it's, it's

been pitiful. That's the um, that city, um had to be evacuated because they had uh, {Coughs}, well, a lot of them had this uh, polluted in it, and uh, ??, I think, and the whole town was, suffered with uh, what was ?? obvious it causes cancer, probably causes emphysema, and uh, it um, uh, and we just um, we uh, we needed to take more precautions, of course we did it without knowing everything, and the aluminum plant {Clears throat} in uh, the Martin Marietta Aluminum Plant {Clears throat} was supposed to {Clears throat} uh, in operation just above my house in the country, we had to open up um, um, from some kind of, I think it was water, and they had uh, {Clears throat} a certain uh, agent to come down, I think, once a month and um, took this, this little liquid. I guess it was water, and tested to see if it, it was, any pollution coming from the aluminum plant, and they did that, I believe, about for the first year.

KO: Mm.

MT: And uh, I didn't learn if they uh, I think that it was always alright. {Chuckles} Least that's what they said it I think it was.

KO: Ms. Thrasher, I know that you're probably tired of talking, but I wanted to ask you one more thing before I have to get out of here. I was wondering if the Flood of '37 affected your family very much, and what you remember about it?

MT: Uh, {Chuckles} um, it didn't um, {Chuckles} it didn't really affect, now my mother lived in Lewisport and she had to move out. It got up into her little house in, in Lewisport, {Clears throat} got over three feet deep in her house, and it never touched our house. It uh, we have {Clears throat} uh, uh, a creek, we have a creek in our back pasture, and um, Yellow Creek, and uh, it got so high that it came up, almost to our barn, and it looked like a river out, out there, and then it really uh, we had to cross it, the, the same creek, across a bridge to get to Lewisport, and uh, from our house, and uh, it got almost up over that bridge but it didn't quite make it, but we were so, afraid that it would, this bridge, but we still made it Lewisport, or that route, and um, we took in um, we took in um, two families, refugees because we had a big house. We put one family upstairs, and um, uh, got and they took two um, two elderly, two elderly ladies, in our uh, our spare bedroom, and they stayed with us, I expect uh, for um, two weeks or maybe more.

KO: Really?

MT: They brought her back, brought 'em back to Lewisport, but where their uh, home uh, was badly um, it had to be cleaned all. Mother's home was never the same after that. Her doors didn't fit now.

KO: {Chuckles}



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Interview with Mattie Thrasher (CT 31 & 32)

MT: Hardwood floors were, halls were warped, and um, that was uh, uh, horrible experience, and my, my brother, who uh, {Chuckles} bought the airplane,

KO: Mm hm.

MT: ...and at that time, he was always a river rat. He was a water rat. He had uh, a motor boat, and a barge, and he went around and he got the biggest kick out of it.

KO: {Chuckles}

MT: He and his wife, she went with him. They said, “Callie, how’d you ever do it from and I just, I imagine hundreds of people and, and animals, in that flood, and um, but as far as I was directly, concerned except through others, I was not um, uh, hindered in any way.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: I never got in my mother’s home where I was born in.

KO: What about World War II and the 1940s? What do you remember about that? What sticks in your mind about that time?

MT: {Chuckles} My two boys, uh, uh, had to uh, well, my boys spent uh, almost four years overseas.

KO: Really.

MT: Un huh. It was in that Infantry which was the worst possible {Clears throat}, and my second boy named Henry, named for his father, he joined the Navy and he was in the Air Force in the Navy, well, he could uh, he said that he wouldn’t take anything from his experience. He really, enjoyed it, and learned so much, you learn, you know, you learn uh, I, I think that, I’ve always said God makes something good come out ever, evil, and I think he would agree, ‘course it was terrible, education, but you learn that there were other countries, and how they lived, and the middle of New Guinea where they had terrible

KO: {Chuckles}

MT: Henry, Jr. brought home some, things he got off Japanese soldiers and oh, that had been killed on the island, Guadalcanal, but Henry always uh, said he wouldn’t take anything for it as far as his, and he had uh, he had about uh, seven hundred hours, in the air, in the air, and he was always uh, but he fell in love in with airplanes.

KO: What was it like for the people back home, who were waiting for these young men to come home?

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MT: Oh, it was uh, it was a suspense from one day to the next, and we were so pleased to hear from them, and we did get uh, we got mail uh, fairly regularly to uh, under the circumstance I think it was wonderful. We got the letters and um, and they were uh, {Chuckles} huh, curious looking letters. I think Billy has some. Just one little sheet of paper, about as big as my hand, and that was the note, the letterhead, address, Everything was all on one piece of paper.

KO: So were

MT: And then we had uh, and then we had uh, war uh, war uh, it, it was bombed, and it had more nerve-shattering um, more had em', what do they call it, well, anyhow, exhaustion they call it soldier, he had to go to the hospital several times, because they had to get uh, nervous exhaustion.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Battle fatigue. Battle fatigue. Called it battle fatigue. But after all, it was uh, some of the boys did not get home. Had uh, had a cousin's son, that was killed, and they uh, at the landing at Normandy.

KO: Mm hm. Did people just live for news of the war?

MT: But you know, I, I've often thought that um, well, I, I don't believe that that can be repeated. I don't believe it, that the young people nowadays um, not as patriotic like they used to be, I don't think. I just wonder, if even Eisenhower, could say "You boys" and on that beach, Germans, Germans, would shoot you down, and no, no guarantee that you'd make it.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: But you have to do what, I just, I just wonder if those boys would turn and say, well, it might be now, but I, I might be wrong, but

KO: Were people patriotic back then?

MT: Uh, at that time they uh, well, we were frightened. The Japanese, struck our fleet at Pearl Harbor, and they were all alone, and it uh, everybody was, was, was uh, eager, to stop it, and I, I don't think that it was very, it was very few who uh, uh, most of them, of course, you were drafted, but no one tried to escape the draft, that I know of, but uh, they were patriotic, we were, we were fighting for our country, and I, I just wonder now that, I may be wrong, but I don't think, we don't uh, {Chuckles} we don't, teach, patriotism,

KO: Mm hm.

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Interview with Mattie Thrasher (CT 31 & 32)

MT: Like we used to. It was our country, our country, right or wrong, you know, but now we find fault with our country, and we're the most wonderful country in the world, the whole world, but we're not sometimes taught to appreciate the United States.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: And I may be wrong. I hope I am. That we never have to be tested, that way, tested that day because we have the nuclear bomb now,

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Which is better than, invented or even tried out.

KO: What did uh, people around here think when they dropped the bomb? How, how did they react? Do you remember?

MT: Uh, you mean in World War II?

KO: Uh huh.

MT: Mm hm.

KO: When they dropped the atomic bomb on Japan.

MT: When they dropped the bomb on Japan. Well, we just knew that uh, something terrible, had started, and that would end quickly. And everybody went to work. All the factories went to work, and women went to work in the factories. I had a daughter-in-law who went to Evansville, and she worked, she could, she was, {Chuckles} like her husband, she could manage any machine.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: She was sure a wonder with machines. Everybody was, was uh, was doing their part,

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Because uh, we were, we were shocked, and uh, I think Roosevelt did a wonderful job. He kept uh, and now that's another thing, I {Chuckles} uh, I wonder if a leader, would appear today, who was as strong as um, and as up, diplomatic and uh, could do what Franklin Roosevelt had to do, but anybody, I don't think that I, I know of anyone {Chuckles} from the U.S., that could take his place, and 'course Churchill was another one who was uh, a strong, uh, leader.

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KO: Who um,

MT: They uh, they gave you courage, um, and gave you uh, what the four freedoms, that you say, you vote for your four freedoms, and everybody got uh, uh, enthusiastic. It wasn't this uh, as terrible as you think in a way, there was a glory in it.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: {Chuckles} If you can imagine that. {Pause} I don't especially like our uh, our text-, our school books, uh, I can't uh, I can't see why, that some things have to be omitted, and can't be taught in school.

KO: Like what do you mean?

MT: Well, moral and patriotic, both.

KO: Oh.

MT: Morals and uh {Coughs}, you can't have the Ten Commandments in the school. You can't pledge allegiance to the {Coughs} government in school, and it's uh, you're just not taught those things that we grew up, as a part of our, mental processes, that was special to us, ?? almost.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: But, it's progress, and um, but you pay for progress. You pay, dearly for progress. And I, and you can't, regress, you have to, you have to go on.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: But sometimes I think that um, 'course I'm, I'm old. {Chuckles} I still have the ideas that I grew up with, the ones that I was taught when I was young.

KO: I was wondering if you could remember where you were and what you were doing, when the news came that the war had started, did you remember that?

MT: It was on a Sunday afternoon, I think that I was at home. And um, we had radio. We didn't have television, but we had radio, and I suppose it came on the radio.

KO: Mm.

MT: And um, that the Japanese had uh, landed at uh, at Hawaii at uh, a harbor

KO: Mm.

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MT: {Chuckles} It's up here.

KO: Yeah.

MT: And uh, our soldiers were killed and how the ship was sunk there, the Arkansas, I believe it was, and how, it was a shocking, thing.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: We thought that we were more civilized. That uh, things like that couldn't happen.

KO: Mm hm.

MT: Um. {Pause} I was a little resentful, I remember that Billy was uh, was the first one to go over there

END TAPE2, SIDE1