

Interview with Wesley Elwood Agnew
August 18, 2011
Conducted at the Kinsley Library, Kinsley, Kansas
Interviewers: Joan Weaver, Kinsley Library
Present: Sue Agnew, spouse

Elwood: My full name is Wesley Elwood Agnew.

Joan: And where do you currently reside?

Elwood: 2005 Redbird Circle, Bonham, Texas.

Joan: When and where were you born?

Elwood: Kinsley, Kansas. 2/12/1935.

Joan: What were the names of your parents?

Elwood: Ethel and Floyd Agnew.

Joan: Ethel's maiden name was?

Sue: Beebee.

Joan: We also have Elwood's wife, Sue, in a quick interview here. Do you know the names of your grandparents?

Sue: Fanny and Roy North, the Agnew side, and his mother's first name was Virginia Johnson, but I don't remember the father's. I have it on my computer.

Joan: Who came to Edwards County? Was it your grandparents or your parents?

Sue: His mother was born in Larned.

Elwood: Yes, my mother was born in Larned.

Joan: Did she come here with your father?

Elwood: When they got married.

Joan: And your father? Where was he from?

Elwood: Here.

Joan: So he was a local, maybe his parents had been here before him?

Sue: They came here.

Joan: Do you know what brought them here to Edwards County? Were they farmers?

Elwood: I have no idea.

Joan: Do you remember their occupation or anything?

Elwood: My grandpa drove a truck and hauled cattle and wheat and stuff.

Joan: In your household, did you have any brothers or sisters?

Elwood: I have one sister.

Joan: And her name is?

Elwood: Lucille Agnew Gifford.

Joan: She was a little older than you?

Elwood: Ten years.

Joan: Ten years older than you are. Where did you live here in the city?

Elwood: 1133 March Avenue.

Joan: What did your father do?

Elwood: My father was on the carnival, and then when it come time for the carnival to come back in, he ran Ann's Café.

Joan: So he only did the carnival during the warm months?

Elwood: Right, and then in the wintertime he ran Anne's Café.

Joan: So who ran it when they weren't here?

Elwood: Mrs. Skillet.

Joan: Mrs. Skillet ran a café; that's sort of cute. When did they become involved with the carnival? Do you know what year?

Sue: We were talking about that a minute ago when we were looking at pictures, and probably it was in the 1930's.

Joan: So before you were born?

Elwood: Oh yes.

Sue: He was born in 1935.

Joan: But your sister was then.

Sue: Yes, the early 1930's, probably.

Joan: Which carnival were they involved in?

Elwood: Brodbeck/Schrader.

Joan: And your Dad and Mother both worked for him?

Elwood: They had their own stuff and traveled with him.

Joan: What was their stuff?

Elwood: Oh, at one time they had a Bingo, and then they had a picture machine to take pictures of people. Then they had where you try to throw a hoop around a black box. That's what they had at the finish.

Joan: Two carnival games, but then the pictures, what do you remember about the camera and the set up? How did they do the pictures?

Elwood: You'd set down in a little booth and they'd take your picture. They'd develop them right then and give them back to you.

Joan: So there was an actual developing process? With chemicals?

Elwood: Right. And it didn't take any time.

Joan: I think in the interview I just did, we had some pictures taken in one of those booths. Did they travel with motor home?

Elwood: A small trailer.

Joan: Where did the carnival go? Do you remember? You were a small boy until what time with the carnival, or when did they quit maybe?

Elwood: I think they quit in 1950. My dad went to Beechcraft in 1950, and they didn't go out in 1950. The last time they went was 1949.

Joan: So you were grown by this time. So all the time you were growing up, you were involved with the carnival.

Elwood: Until I was 15 years old. It was in 1940 or '41 when Brodbeck's split up. Rockwell started his own carnival. My folks were married by then.

Joan: Okay, we'll stay with Brodbecks for a little while then. So when you were a small boy, they were with Brodbecks. What do you remember about that time? Traveling?

Elwood: I know that you did a lot of moving. It's set up on a Monday, play till Wednesday. On Wednesday you'd move somewhere else and set up till Saturday. You'd drive on Sunday. It seemed like we were moving all the time.

Joan: So it was two stops a week, normally.

Elwood: Normally, unless you played a fair that lasted a week.

Joan: Where did you go?

Elwood: All over Kansas and Oklahoma, southern part of Nebraska and the eastern part of Colorado.

Joan: Do you remember any of the bigger fairs?

Elwood: The one in Hutchison, Kansas was probably the biggest one we played.

Joan: About how many people were in the carnival?

Elwood: Probably 150 for big fairs and 75 for small fairs.

Joan: They all traveled?

Elwood: Oh yes, a lot of people had a stand. And you know, they had him, her and the kids. So it made quite a few people.

Joan: Yes, I didn't realize it was that big.

Elwood: Well, you have to have somebody to run every concession stand. You had to have somebody to run all the rides, and some of them took two people. By the time you had your concession stands and everything, you had a lot of people in the carnival.

Joan: When did you start having chores with the carnival?

Elwood: I think right after the folks bought the merry-go-round, I had to polish the brass on the horses. And I wasn't very old.

Joan: About how old would you guess?

Elwood: Six, because they bought the merry-go-round either in '40 or '41.

Joan: And there was brass on the harness?

Elwood: On the poles that ran up and down that the kids would hold on to. About so far from the horse's brass; I got to shine that all the time.

Joan: Had to get the cotton candy out!

Elwood: You'd be surprised how much sticky stuff got on it.

Joan: Would you do that every night? Or morning? Or just when you moved?

Elwood: Usually after we moved, because they'd get dusty in the truck. You know, you had old trucks and trailers. You couldn't keep just dust out of them.

Joan: So that was your first job. And as you got older, what else did you do?

Elwood: Oh, I got to walk around the top of the merry-go-round and unhook the top, the canvas off the top.

Joan: Was there a little ladder? How did you...?

Elwood: Put a ladder up. I mean, you had about a six inch walkway you could walk on and unsnap all the snaps. I'd do that while they were getting ready to tear down, and that way when they got back, they could just take the top off and tear it down.

Joan: How many horse were on the merry-go-round? Were they two abreast?

Elwood: No, they were three abreast.

Joan: So it was a big one!

Elwood: Oh yes, and we had two big yellow chickens with red beaks.

Joan: So horses and anything else besides the chicken?

Elwood: No, just the two chickens.

Joan: Did you have the carriage? They always seem to have one that is a little sleigh or something.

Elwood: Yes, you had two of them on there. The older people liked to sit down and ride around in it.

Joan: Did you graduate to actually taking tickets or helping to run it?

Elwood: Oh, I ran the one where you threw the rings and tried to get them around the blocks. They always kept an eye on me, but I ran it.

Joan: What did they give for prizes?

Elwood: Usually little teddy bears, some little glass figurines and stuff like that.

Joan: Do you remember any particularly exciting things, like storms, tornadoes, or police running through?

Elwood: Oh yes, several times the storms picked up a lot of the tents and blew them down. We never had one that really tore up the big stuff. But the tents got it quite often. You'd get a high wind, and the stakes were in the ground, and if the ground was all sandy it would pick the tents up and dump them over. Usually it would spread the stuff in them all over. At night everything stayed in them. Usually at night one of the guys that ran the rides, worked the rides, they'd sleep in the tent. That way you didn't have to put everything up. They didn't make enough money hardly to rent, so that's what they did, sleep in the tents. That way you didn't have to put your stuff up. It was safe.

Joan: But you had a little bed in the trailer.

Elwood: Oh yes, I slept in the trailer.

Joan: And your mother cooked in the trailer?

Elwood: Oh yes, at that time we ate all our meals at home. We didn't eat out. Of course, they didn't make that much money to eat out, much.

Joan: I'm trying to think, this is during the war years, too. Buford talked about how the government allowed them gas and things because they thought people needed the diversion or entertainment.

Elwood: They got about all the gas they wanted.

Joan: Then you said they left Brodbeck's and went with Rockwell.

Elwood: That was either in '40 or '41, it had to be. That was when my folks went to Milwaukie, Wisconsin, and bought a merry-go-round and brought it back. And then they started running the merry-go-round on Rockwell's till '49, yes '49 or '50, then they quit it.

Joan: What other rides were there besides the merry-go-round? How big of an operation was it?

Elwood: Well, they had a tilt-o-whirl, a merry-go-round, a Ferris Wheel, and little cars. There was one that had the swings on it that they spin you around in. Those were the main ones.

Joan: How many carnie games were there, like your ring toss?

Elwood: Between places to eat and everything, they probably about 30 of them.

Joan: So you'd take up quite a bit of space when it was all set up!

Elwood: Yes, we took a lot of space because they tried to spread everything out, instead of being all on one place.

Joan: When did you start going out in the season?

Elwood: Oh, they would go out about May, I think, somewhere right in there.

Joan: Did you finish your school year and then go out?

Elwood: Oh no, I stayed with my grandma.

Joan: So they went out without you.

Elwood: Yes, they went out without me, and then when school was out they'd come to Grandma's and get me. Then when school started, they'd take me back to Grandma's. Then when they came back, I'd go back home. Every year, they did it that way. They made sure I didn't miss no school. With my grandma, you weren't going to miss no school!

Joan: Now what was your grandmother's name?

Elwood: Well, we called her Fanny. Fanny North. I don't know what her real name was.

Sue: Her first name was Francis.

Elwood: Well, everybody called her Fanny. That's what I knew her by.

Joan: Where was her house?

Elwood: I don't know how to tell you. Where the Stinsons lived, just to the west of the water tower. You went past the water tower to the first street, turned back left, and it was the second house on the left side of the street.

Joan: Is the house still there?

Elwood: I don't know because I don't know how to find the house. I just know where the water tower is.

Joan: I don't know if it would be there. There's two water towers.

Elwood: Well, there used to just be one over there.

Joan: So maybe Miss Rosetta may be able to help us.

Elwood: Montgomery's lived just right across the street from it.

Joan: Okay, that'll probably tell Miss Rosetta more.

Elwood: Next door to the south was Jim Mack.

Joan: We'll figure it out, and we'll put the address in the transcript. So then, did you walk to Northside?

Elwood: No, I stayed in Southside. My uncle took me, or my aunt. You walked out of my Grandma's door and walked straight into my aunt's door. The alley between them made it straight across. Usually one of them took me to scho, and one of them would pick me up. A lot of times, my uncle was gone. Both of them hauled cattle and wheat with my grandpa. My grandma didn't drive, so my aunt or uncle took me to school. I went to Southside all the way through school. Then I come up to the high school.

Joan: What else about the carnival life do you want to tell us?

Elwood: Well, it was a lot of fun. It was really exciting. I met a whole lot of nice people, and you met a lot of people who weren't nice.

Joan: You enjoyed traveling and doing that? For a kid, that was pretty....

Elwood: For a kid, that was great! You got to see a lot of things you'd never seen before. Because who would go to these little towns? There's nothing there, so why would you see them? On our way up here, we went through three or four different towns in Oklahoma, and I said,

“I’ve been here, and I’ve been here.” We went through Woodward, and I’d been to Woodward. You got to see all the little towns. That was the nice part about it. In Nebraska, we’d see all the little towns up in there. They mostly played small towns. But they always played places like Kinsley, towns about that size. And they always played here, every year.

Joan: Now Buford told about playing Nicodemus. Did you ever?

Elwood: I know nothing about Nicodemus. That was before my time, I don’t remember it. The only reason I remember Blackwell, Oklahoma, so well is that when it was time for me to start school, I didn’t want to come. I told my folks I wanted a dog, and my mother told me, “If I get you a dog, will you go back and live with Grandma?” So I said, “Okay.” And she got me a dog, and I went to Grandma’s. The only trouble was, the dog ended up my mother’s. When I’d go back to school, from then on, I couldn’t take the dog!

Sue: They got the dog in Blackwell, Oklahoma.

Elwood: That’s why I remember Blackwell, Oklahoma, so well. And it was a pretty good place through there.

Joan: How old were you when you stopped the carnival?

Elwood: I was 15 years old. My folks moved to Wichita, and the people that were renting my folks’ house, I stayed through the eighth grade with them and went to school. I didn’t want to go to Wichita; I wanted to play sports. Then my freshman, sophomore, junior and senior years I lived with Miss Seward. She lived across the corner from Elmo Cody’s place, right behind the Ford Garage on the street on the corner back there.

Joan: You said it was the eighth grade you started living with someone else?

Elwood: With Miss Seward. I didn’t go to Wichita.

Joan: Wouldn’t that have been sort of unusual at the time, don’t you think?

Elwood: My folks rented our house to some people, and then they basically bought it. So I lived with them for a year, and then they bought the house. Then I moved in with Miss Seward. I didn’t go to Wichita because I wanted to play sports. I wasn’t big enough to play sports in Wichita, so I stayed here and played basketball and football.

Joan: I understand that.

Elwood: Go over there, you’ll find my name on those trophies!

Sue: He told me that he told his folks, “If you make me move to Wichita, I’m not going to school.”

Elwood: I just didn’t want to go up there, I wanted to stay here. All my friends were here. I was raised up with them, and I wanted to stay with them.

Joan: How often did you get to see your parents then? Did they come back to visit?

Elwood: Every once in a while they'd come back.

Sue: About once a month or so, they'd visit.

Elwood: Either they'd come back, or my sister and brother-in-law would come back.

Joan: I've heard of that when kids were juniors or seniors, but not when they're quite so young as you were.

Elwood: Well, I wasn't going to go to that school; I wanted to stay here! So they let me stay here.

Joan: And you were just part of the family where you were living? Miss Seward was just a single woman?

Elwood: Her husband had died.

Joan: No children?

Elwood: No. I'd take her to the store.

Sue: How old was she?

Elwood: I have no idea, probably about 65.

Joan: She didn't drive either?

Elwood: No, I'd take her to the grocery store, and I'd take her to Larned to the doctor. We got along great. When my oldest boy had his first birthday, I had the birthday party at my sister's house and they told me she had died. That would have been in...

Sue: 1959. December of 1959 that she died.

Joan: So she did your cooking and was just a substitute mother for you?

Elwood: Yes, she was my part-time mother. I kind of had a weird deal, not like everybody else. But I didn't want to go there, so I didn't go there.

Joan: This is what's so much fun about doing interviews because you see all these different lives and how it was. So you liked sports and played both football and basketball and probably track because you didn't have anything else to do! And you were good!

Elwood: Yes.

Joan: How did the team do those years?

Elwood: Pretty good. Of course, we had everybody about 5'7" to 5'11", and a lot of these schools had these six foot something guys. We didn't have any tall guys. I think George Tew was about the tallest guy we had.

Joan: Now, you learned to drive. Were you able to drive when you were in the carnival?
Probably not, that was about the time you were learning to drive.

Elwood: Yes, I learned to drive in the carnival.

Sue: Who taught you to drive?

Elwood: The guy that worked for my folks.

Joan: At the carnival?

Sue: I can tell by the look in your eyes that you weren't supposed to!

Joan: Did you go out in the country here to learn to drive?

Elwood: I don't know what his full name was, everybody called him Gunzel. He'd come up here and work for my folks. Then when the carnival quit, he'd go back to Florida and work for a carnival. Then when the folks would go back out, he'd pop back up, every year.

Joan: I hadn't thought about that, but people who did that could work in the south in the wintertime.

Elwood: Most of these people that worked year-round, they would travel back south in the summertime and winter back to the north. He worked year-round. He had a carnival down there he'd go to and then come back up here. When we were done, he'd go back down there. But that's the way most of those people did. Then we had people like McKivvens, who lived in Oklahoma, and they traveled with us. In the wintertime, they'd just go home.

Joan: Okay, I'm trying to think, because I'm not a carnival person. Is there anything else we should talk about? The Rockwell Carnival, is that what it was? I don't think I know anything about Rockwell. I worked through the pictures in the other interview, and that one doesn't come up.

Elwood: When the two brothers split, the Brodbeck Brothers, each one started a carnival. When they started the carnival, Rockwell was the son-in-law, I think, to them.

Joan: Is that the last name?

Elwood: Yes, it was Rockwell. When they split, he started his own carnival. My Dad said, those others, all they were wanted was to make us change too much...

Sue: Watch what you say.

Elwood: Well, all they wanted was... They went with Rockwell.

Joan: So there was a Brodbeck Carnival and a Rockwell Carnival at that point.

Elwood: At one time, the brothers split, and there were two carnivals. Then when the two Brodbecks split, then Rockwell started. At one time, there were three carnivals.

Joan: So they were all winter-based here.

Elwood: Right.

Joan: Okay, I have that straight now. So tell about the café. What was the name of it?

Elwood: Ann's Café.

Joan: And the name came from?

Elwood: That's what it was when the folks bought it.

Sue: I asked your mother one time, and she said that was whoever was the first owner that had it, and they kept the name.

Joan: And where was that located?

Elwood: 110 East 6th, catty-cornered across from Young's Club.

Joan: What did it serve?

Elwood: Just a normal café, everything.

Joan: Soda's, ice cream and all that? French fries?

Elwood: Oh yes, and my dad made wonderful chili. He taught me to make chili.

Joan: Was that one of his specialties of the house?

Elwood: Yes, everybody liked his chili. He was different from most people. You take you hamburger. Most people broil it or put it into a pan and cook it. My dad boiled it and strained it and that got rid of all the grease. That way you don't have grease in your chili. That's what made his chili different.

Joan: My brother worked for a man who did the same thing.

Elwood: That's how I make chili. A friend of mine came over one day when we lived in Dallas, and he said, "What in the world are you doing?" And I said, "I'm making chili." "Boiling the meat?" he asked. "Yep, I said." "I've never seen that done." From then on, he boiled his chili. But I do it for spaghetti or anything else we cook; I do it that way too.

Joan: Yes, I can remember my brothers when they were teenagers.

Elwood: I remember when Kenny had the Ford Garage, I can't remember what his name was, he and his wife came to the café every night. I knew exactly what time they would be there, and they ate the same thing every night. They'd sit down, and we'd give it to them. And I can't remember what that guy's name was. But every night, same order, every night.

Joan: Not the same order on every Monday night, but the same order?

Elwood: Every night. They had the same food every night. They had steak, I know, every night. I don't remember what all they had with it, but I remember they had steak every night. I cannot remember that guy's name.

Joan: Were there any other specialty besides the chili?

Sue: His mother's pies, probably.

Elwood: My mother's pies.

Joan: What were her pies?

Elwood: Oh, she made all kinds of pies. She could take ten pies in there and usually by suppertime they were gone. People would come in there at dinnertime and drink pop and eat pie.

Sue: Probably chicken and noodles.

Elwood: Oh yes, my mother made chicken and noodles, you can believe that. My sister took after my mother. She cooks chicken and noodles all the time. They had just normal café food. Then when they had the bombing range south of town here, they fed the G.I.'s. It worked out there was about 25 of them, and they stayed up above the Safeway. The Tew's had a hotel up there, and they stayed there and ate at the folks'. I had a lot of fun with those guys. They always had something to tell you different.

Sue: His folks could get meat real readily during the war because they fed the G.I.'s.

Elwood: Yes, they could get food stamps, more than they needed.

Joan: Okay, we may have to come back to that, because one of our interests has been World War II. Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

Elwood: I do not. I heard of it on the radio when I was little, but I never knew what went on. The folks had one of those old funny looking radios. It came up to a point on top and had a little dial in the middle and they'd listen to it. I remember them listening to it, but I didn't comprehend what they were talking about.

Joan: You said that the guys at the bombing range were fun. What did you do with them?

Elwood: We fed them.

Joan: You fed them, and they talked to you?

Elwood: Oh yes, they were the friendliest bunch of people you ever saw. They knew we had food stamps, and they could eat all they wanted. The government was paying the folks so much a meal. They'd eat and eat and eat.

Joan: Did you ever get to go to the bombing range?

Elwood: Nobody got to go to the bombing range. They'd bomb out there at daytime at targets,

and at night they'd set up light targets, and they'd bomb light targets. Usually this would be every other night or so.

Joan: And this was south of town.

Elwood: Yes, about ten miles out there.

Joan: I had heard something about them using sacks of flour?

Elwood: They dropped flour, in the daytime usually, and some practice bombs. At night they always dropped bombs. It seemed like it because you could hear them in town. Of course, I lived clean down there on South March, where you didn't have nothing between there and the river anyway. But they'd bomb at night on light targets. Sometimes in daytime they'd do it.

Joan: Well, my husband was in Pratt, and he got a little uniform and everything. Did the guys ever give you anything? Or was it just talking to you?

Elwood: They just talked. They ate there so often and knew us so well that they just talked about their home life, just like normal people of the town. They were real nice.

Joan: And you mentioned the rationing and the stamps there. In the café, were there any other changes that the war brought about?

Elwood: No.

Joan: So it stayed about the same. Is there anything else you remember during the war years about how your life was affected?

Elwood: No, I can remember going to Jack Moletor's gas station with my grandpa. We'd sit there and watch troop trains go through. Jack Moletor's station was on that side of the highway with the train station right there. You'd see them go by.

Joan: Did you wave at the G.I.'s?

Elwood: Oh, everybody waved at them.

Joan: They didn't usually stop in Kinsley, did they?

Elwood: Usually not. They had to stop about two miles out there on a siding, on account of the north and south railroads come together out here. But two miles out of town or so, it went into one to go over the Colorado mountains. So you always had a lot of trains come through here. Lots of them.

Joan: And they'd have to wait until the track was clear.

Elwood: Right. If there were two coming, one of them would have to sit on the siding. They'd be going in the opposite direction, and one would sit on the side. Sometimes if you had a train hauling tanks and stuff, and you had a troop train, they'd set the one hauling tanks and stuff out there and the troop train would go on through. So we had a lot of trains through here with the

military.

Joan: The café never tried to feed them?

Elwood: No, they fed them on the train. C-rations, probably. But they always went on through. They had no reason to stop here. I remember when I was a kid, though, I got to go over to Moletors. They used to come through here with sugar beets, and when they went around that curve they'd fall off. My grandma would always say, "You make sure you go over there and get me some sugar beets!" She would cut those suckers and eat them.

Joan: Boil them up like regular beets, right?

Elwood: They were regular beets. And she liked them raw. She cut them up and eat them.

Joan: Any other stories about the train that you remember? Did you ever travel on the train to go anywhere?

Elwood: The only time I ever traveled on a train was when I joined the air force. I went to Dodge City and joined, and I had to ride the train to Kansas City. It was the first time I'd ever ridden a train. Funny thing about it, I was living in Wichita and I came out here and a bunch of them was going into the service. They were going the next day to Dodge City to get their paperwork and stuff, and I went over there with them. I hadn't planned on joining nothing. I sat down next to the air force recruiter because I wasn't doing anything, and the next thing I knew, I was signed up to go to the air force! And off I went!

Joan: I'm going to come back to that. How about the end of the war? Any memories about when the war ended? The celebration or anything? Did you have relatives or anybody else who served?

Elwood: I had uncles in it. I can remember when Warren came home.

Joan: This would be your mother or father's brother?

Sue: Dad's brother. Warren was your dad's brother.

Elwood: No he wasn't. His wife was. Edith was my Dad's sister. He was his brother-in-law. I can remember when he got home he bought himself a '40 Ford that had the rumble seat in the back. I thought that was the greatest thing to ride in! When Orville came home, before he left Germany, he sent home a big long radio. He told them not to open that radio until he came home, "Do not try to work it." When he got home and sawed off the top of the case and pulled out a Thompson machine gun.

Joan: Camouflaged in the top of the radio.

Elwood: He had that above his bed until he left Wichita and went to El Dorado. I imagine in El Dorado it probably went above his bed again. That was his pride and joy; he carried it all through the war.

Joan: That was his personal weapon.

Elwood: Yes, he carried it all through the war and brought it home with him which he wasn't supposed to.

Joan: Right. He was your dad's brother? And he served in Germany.

Elwood: Yes. He served all over, because he was in Darby's Rangers. He was telling me that at night they dropped his outfit into where Hitler's summer house was because they knew he was there. They missed him by 30 minutes. Then he said they had to get themselves back across enemy lines. He said that was the fun part about it. He was always telling me that story.

Joan: Are there any other stories he told you that you would like to put on the tape?

Elwood: That's all he ever told me about it.

Joan: Going back to the café a little bit, about how many people could you seat in the café? Did it have booths and tables?

Elwood: Yes, it had booths and tables.

Joan: Did it have counter serving too?

Elwood: Yes, they had a counter, a small one.

Joan: Did they have a jukebox?

Elwood: Oh yes, they had a jukebox. The old jukebox man would paint nickels with red fingernail polish and you could play music with it. Then when he opened it up, he give them back all the red ones. They'd let us play it free. But it played all the time, especially with the G.I.'s.

Joan: But there wasn't room to dance?

Elwood: No, I don't think it held over 25 people or so. It was a small place.

Joan: And your mom and dad ran it, and I bet your sister was a waitress. What were your chores?

Elwood: No, my sister never was a waitress that I know of. I don't remember her being a waitress there.

Joan: Did you have a part in it?

Elwood: I got to wash some dishes! I learned how to cook from my dad, and I got to wash dishes once in a while, especially when the dishwasher didn't show up. I don't even remember who he was.

Joan: So they had a dishwasher, did they have waitresses or not?

Elwood: Yes, they had a waitress. I don't even remember who she was.

Sue: They had that man that worked there.

Elwood: He was supposed to have been the dishwasher, when he showed up.

Joan: Was Saturday night the big night?

Elwood: Really, not much bigger than any other night because the same people that ate during the week, ate there during the weekends.

Joan: So you had a lot of regular type people. Were you open seven days a week?

Elwood: No, on Saturdays the folks ran the little café out at the stockyards. Mom made pies, and they had pie and coffee out there.

Joan: Was this one closed down then?

Elwood: Oh no.

Joan: They were both going. Did they take any time off?

Elwood: Very little. Go anywhere? They went nowhere. They went to Idaho one time to see my Dad's brother. That's the only time, well no. One other time they went back to Illinois to see some of the Agnew family. That's the only time I ever remember them going anywhere.

Joan: And they didn't regularly take Sunday off or something.

Elwood: No, because Dad worked on the merry-go-round horses on Sundays. My folks just hardly ever took off, hardly ever went anywhere.

Joan: Hard-working people.

Sue: After they retired, they loved to go camping.

Elwood: Oh yes, after they retired, they loved to go camping all right.

Joan: Then you said in 1950 your dad went to Wichita to work for Beechcraft?

Elwood: Yes, he worked for Beechcraft.

Joan: Were they making planes for the Korean War? Or just for pleasure? Do you know?

Elwood: He worked in shipping and receiving, and a lot of it, most of it, was civilian aircraft. Yes, where he was, they would send parts out to airports.

Joan: What made him make the switch from being a café owner and carnival person to that?

Elwood: He just decided he wanted to work for somebody else. He was tired of traveling; they were tired of traveling. He went up to Beechcraft and put in for it. He had a hard time getting to work for them. He didn't have a birth certificate, and he was born back close to Louisville, Kentucky, and finally he ran down two aunts who signed the verification that he was born and when to get a birth certificate. He went through heck getting that birth certificate. People with

birth certificates, it didn't mean nothing to them. Now if you don't have one, you can't do nothing.

Joan: You've got to have that Social Security Number. What about your mother? Did she work when they were in Wichita?

Elwood: No.

Joan: She was a housewife?

Elwood: Yes.

Joan: Okay, the downtown areas. It was a little different than it is now.

Elwood: It was a whole lot different than it is now.

Joan: What was it like back then?

Elwood: Well, the buildings were busy. Down on the corner, across from the clothing store, there used to be a bakery. I used to go down there at night and those guys would feed me cinnamon rolls till it run out my ears. But they had a good bakery down there on the corner. And in the town, I don't think there were any empty buildings. You had the Safeway here, and Weidenheimer's down there. I guess the show's still open, from what I understand. It was there. I think they changed shows on Wednesdays and Fridays or something like that. There were only two a week.

Joan: Back then there were two a week?

Elwood: Oh yes, back when I graduated in 1955, there were still two a week. The thing that always tickled me about it was they always had the cartoons first. Buck Rogers or somebody like that, but the town then was lively. I can see now that it ain't as lively.

Joan: That's why I wondered about Saturday night, because Saturday night used to be a big deal down there.

Elwood: Well, Saturday night all the farmers would come to town and do their shopping and stuff. It was usually Saturday night, you would have everybody in town. Usually there was no place to park. They'd do their shopping in the stores. About 9:00 you'd look around, and they were all gone. It was just a normal little old town out in the country.

Joan: Okay, I want to get up to where you were going into the service. With your family never going anywhere, you did everything in town, doctoring and bought everything.

Elwood: Oh yes, I was born with Dr. Armitage.

Joan: In the hospital?

Elwood: They didn't have a hospital here. I was born in the house. When I went, I had to have surgery. I went to the hospital and filled out the thing. This young girl said, "You didn't put down here about being born in a hospital." And I said, "I wasn't born in a hospital." Dodge City

was the closest hospital when I was born. I can't remember the other doctor's name, I think it was Schnoebelen or something like that. One night at basketball practice, I broke my nose. Went up for a rebound and got hit. I went to his house, and his wife said he was at the show. I went to the show and they went down there and got him. I was holding a towel to it. He said, "Go over and sit down on them steps." I went over and sat down on the steps, and he walked over there and he kind of wiped the blood off and he stuck a finger on each side of my nose and went, "Plunk." He popped it back in place. For a long time, at night, I could hear that crunching in my ears.

Joan: I'm trying to think, that was probably Dr. Schnoebelen?

Elwood: Yes.

Joan: His wife is still alive.

Elwood: Is she? He set it right there on the steps of the theater. I'll never forget him.

Joan: She'll like that. We interviewed her.

Elwood: I'll never forget that. There's just something that has always stuck in my mind, that crunching noise.

Joan: And he didn't miss the movie?

Elwood: No, he didn't miss the movie. He just said to go over and sit down on the steps. I thought, "This is going to be weird." Well, it was weird.

Joan: That's a good story. So, let's see. When your folks moved to Wichita, did you have a job too? Or did you just go to school and play sports?

Elwood: I stayed here and played sports.

Joan: But you didn't have to have a part-time job or anything like that?

Elwood: Well, when I was a junior, I worked for Al Nall. He had the produce and bought chicken, eggs and cream. The Ford Garage sat here, the next street over was a gas station. The next building to the gas station was where he was (*210 E. Fifth St.*). Across the street was where he kept the chickens.

Joan: Okay, it was basically chickens and produce.

Elwood: And cream. He bought a lot of cream. He bought a lot of chickens. A semi would show up on Saturday night about 10:00 and we'd put about half a load on a semi. He bought a lot. He was the only place around here in these whole parts where you could just buy and sell your cream and milk.

Joan: So the farmers brought it in to him and then he resold it.

Elwood: Right, because every night...on Saturday night we'd load up cream cans and take them

down to the depot. Then when the train came through about midnight they'd stick them on the train and away they'd go.

Joan: What was your job when you were working for him?

Elwood: Oh, I candled eggs and fed chickens and took chickens and put them in, took eggs from the people.

Joan: Ok, the chickens are life at this point?

Elwood: Oh, very alive.

Joan: You didn't ship the chickens out?

Elwood: A truck came by and picked up the chickens.

Joan: And they were still alive?

Elwood: Oh yes, they were still alive. They had crates, and you'd just take them out and put them in the crates.

Joan: So you weren't butchering chickens. You just took care of them in the process.

Elwood: We'd have to candle eggs and take them. We were right behind Weidenheimer's grocery store, so we'd candle eggs and then take them over. When they called and said they needed some eggs, we'd candle them and take them through the back door to them. That's where they got all their eggs from.

Joan: And the produce, which way was the produce going, in or out of the town? Was he buying it and selling it out? Or was he getting it in and then taking it to grocery stores?

Elwood: The only thing he took to the grocery store was Weidenheimer's chicken eggs. That's all, everything else was shipped out.

Joan: Well, that was quite a business. I wish Rosetta were here, she would have more questions about that.

Elwood: After basketball or football practice, I always went over there and worked. I'd go over there about 12:00 on Saturdays. We'd get there and then leave about midnight after the egg truck showed up.

Joan: And you were in the graduating class of 1955? Anything else about the school years you'd like to record for posterity? Any good stories from then?

Sue: Watch what you say!

Elwood: Some you don't want to know about. When I was a junior, I got engaged.

Joan: Oh really?

Elwood: Yes, I got engaged to Leoma Rehmert. When she graduated, she went to Denver to a business school. When she got back, she went to Wichita. When I got out of school, me and her broke up, and I decided I didn't want to see her again. So I took and joined the air force. Then one day, about five or six years ago, we were going through Mother's pictures and I found a wedding picture where she got married. I found his last name and got on the computer and I could only find one Leoma Haggins. So I called and left a message. When we broke up she had said, "Call me some time." So I went through there and found her name. One day I was sitting there and thought, you know? It's been 50 years today. I called her and got an answering machine. The next day she called back and said, "I didn't know if I wanted to call you back, the way we broke up." And I said, "You told me to call you sometime. Yesterday was 50 years, and I thought I'd call you." I thought that was kind of neat.

Joan: What did your parents think when you told them you were engaged as a junior?

Elwood: Oh, they liked it. They liked her.

Joan: Did you buy a ring and all that?

Elwood: Oh yes. We planned on getting married. We just didn't quite make it.

Joan: Because she was going to school away and you just grew apart?

Elwood: No. There were other reasons than that.

Joan: Okay, we'll leave it there. So you went with these guys who were going to sign up for the air force.

Elwood: Most of them went to the army or the paratroopers, mainly. Ronnie Winkler and all that bunch.

Joan: But you went in the air force. What did you think you were going to do in the air force when you signed up?

Elwood: I had no idea. And when I had to go take that test, electronics was my high score. The only thing I knew was how to turn a radio on and how to turn it off, and to plug a light in.

Joan: So you didn't have dreams of being a pilot?

Elwood: I never wanted to do that. When we went to Denver, I was a radar technician. I went to basic and got out of basic about two days before Christmas. The second of January, I reported to Lowry Air Force Base in Denver. I went through seven months of radar school. Then I went to Valdosta, Georgia. Not a good place. Okefenokee Swamp came right back behind that place. We had mosquitoes like humming birds. At night, they were bad, but I enjoyed it down there.

Joan: And what did you do there?

Elwood: I worked on radar systems on airplanes.

Joan: Was that repair? Or was there a plant?

Elwood: No, I was in a regular fighter squadron. Interceptor. What we were was a training base. We trained pilots. I had FA 94's, and then when they got rid of them, we got F 86's.

Joan: So it was sort of maintenance.

Elwood: And then we had a sister squadron that was in Denison, Texas. They built a new museum there a while back and we went to it. They had a lot of stuff in there about Moody Air Force Base. They were tied together, you know. Then I got out of there and went to work for the air guard.

Joan: This is the Korean War, right? At this point?

Elwood: After the Korean War. And when I got out I went to work for the Kansas Air Guard and did the same thing. Then when we got rid of the Interceptors, we went to F100 fighters and I went to electric shop. I left there in 1966 and went to Dallas and went to work for Braniff Airlines as an electrician. About six or seven years later, I went and got my AP license and became a mechanic. After 52 or years of working with them, I retired. I had enough of airplanes. I don't care about flying them; I just worked on them. I don't mind flying. But when we go somewhere, we don't know where we're going. We have an idea where we're going to end up, but we have no idea how we're going to get there.

Joan: Or what's going to happen while you're gone, like an interview.

Elwood: We go down the road and see some sign down there, we go find it. One day, we'd been over to Fredericksburg. It's an old German town down by San Antonio. Going down the road, it said Luckenbach, Texas. So we turned around in the road and went back. We didn't see anything. We stopped and had a meal, and the old boy said, "Oh go on down the road. On the second road, you'll see a couple houses. Turn there and go by them." They were just little buildings down there. At one time, there was a little old grocery store. In front of it, it still had all kinds of canned goods and stuff. In the back, they had a bar. The reason the guy moved there and started the bar and stuff, he said at one time Fredericksburg was just too big for him, and he'd moved his family out there and started that little town.

Joan: That's a fun way to spend retirement.

Elwood: Oh yes. But we've done a lot of traveling. We've seen a lot of things.

Joan: So the reason you originally left the area was because you broke up with a girl. Did you want to see the world?

Elwood: I just joined the air force.

Joan: But you didn't know it was going to be a career choice at that time.

Elwood: And when I got out to Denver, they were sending people overseas. I wanted to go overseas, and I got to Moody. I never did get to go overseas. I spent about 3 ½ years at Moody and at Valdosta, Georgia. Which is 12 miles from the Florida line. The humidity was horrible.

Joan: Was your family church affiliated when you were here? Did you go to church?

Elwood: I did some.

Joan: We like to ask people about the minorities in town. There weren't too many blacks, I don't think, at your time. Two?

Elwood: Skeet Winchester and his wife. Everybody knew Skeet.

Joan: Do you remember discrimination or anything like that?

Elwood: Not until I went into the air force.

Joan: Oh, you saw it in the air force?

Elwood: Oh yes.

Joan: Even after WWII?

Elwood: Oh yes, I was in the south.

Sue: Especially when we moved to Dallas in '66.

Elwood: When I went to work in Dallas in '66, they had blue doors and they had an ochre door. The ochre door was for the colored people and the blue one was for the whites. They said if they caught you going in the ochre door, they'd fire you. I learned fast.

Sue: They still had separate water fountains and everything.

Elwood: That was in 1966!

Sue: He came home from work the first day, and he said, "Do you know they have segregation down here?" And I said, "What?" He looked at me and said, "Well, we're close to Louisiana." I had spent part of my life in Louisiana.

Elwood: Well, I'd never been around anything like that.

Joan: In the air force, like in your unit, were there blacks? Was it an integrated unit then?

Elwood: In my squadron? I think there were about two or three.

Joan: And the pilots, probably not?

Elwood: I don't know. We had so many pilots come in because we trained pilots. We just saw them come in and go out. Come in and go out. We hardly ever saw a black pilot. Down there, you didn't hardly see any blacks on base, period.

Joan: Now, could Skeet and his family eat in your café?

Elwood: Oh yes. At that time, every day at noon you'd go down to the drug store and all of them would be sitting down drinking coffee together. Him and everybody else. I mean, Skeet was just like anybody. I can remember going with my grandpa over to Skeet's house one time. They had a hard wood floor. You could see yourself in that floor. That thing shined. But he

cleaned all the buildings in town. That's the only one I ever knew before I went to the service.

Joan: How about Hispanics?

Elwood: Chacons. That's the only ones I knew, Louis Chacon. I ran around with him some. His sister married Nick Castaneda. I haven't seen her in years.

Joan: Now, at that time, where did they live?

Elwood: Somewhere back off over here. It's been so long, I couldn't tell you. I don't even know where my Grandpa and Grandma lived, it's been so long. Well, it used to be on the highway you came over there. And there used to be a little grocery store.

Joan: Sure, it's empty now, but it was a Duckwalls building.

Elwood: Well, there was a little grocery store. I came around there and that little grocery store wasn't there, and I thought, "I'm lost."

Joan: Well, that's what happens when you don't go back.

Elwood: We came through and pretty much missed town. I saw all this out here and thought, "This doesn't look like nothing I know." When I was here in '80, it didn't look like nothing I knew.

Joan: But again, the Hispanics were pretty much integrated into the community? Or was there some prejudice there?

Elwood: That's the only ones I knew. The railroad used to come in here on the siding. They had Hispanics, but they slept on their train cars and ate on the train cars. We hardly ever saw them in town. Now, you'd see the Castanedas come in from Lewis. But there were a few times when they'd come over here to buy groceries. But they'd buy their groceries and leave.

Joan: Okay. I've got here that you should summarize your life after you left here. You had four children.

Elwood: Four boys, and that's plenty, about four years apart.

Joan: You said one passed away in the air force and the other three, what did they end up doing?

Elwood: Well, the next oldest one is a warehouse manager. We got one that goes and comes. Right now, he's living with us. The youngest one travels with a band.

Sue: He called, but I forgot to ask him where he was.

Elwood: He travels with *Flogging Molly*; it's an Irish rock band. He does everything. He tunes the guitars. He's a sound tech and sets up and down and everything. When I talked to him last week, he was in Europe. They play a lot in Europe.

Sue: He called from overseas when he called a while ago, so he's still in Europe.

Elwood: Sometimes they go over there and stay. They usually travel to about 11 or 12 countries. They've been in about every country.

Joan: He got that carnival gene.

Sue: Yes he does. He's got the wanderlust.

Elwood: He says one of the prettiest places he's ever been is to Moscow, to all the temples. He said they're open. You can just walk into them. He said they are beautiful. But he travels all over, and he's got a little boy that's six years old.

Joan: That's my next question, do you have grandchildren?

Elwood: You can tell he's an Agnew, because he's ornier than heck.

Sue: We have twin granddaughters that are 30. They had a brother that died nine years ago. He had a brain tumor, so we lost him. We have a great-granddaughter that's nine, and we have another great-granddaughter that's three and then we have a grandson that is six.

Elwood: And ornery. He takes after his grandpa!

Joan: Like I said, it's in the genes. Looking back, how do you think growing up in Edwards County has affected your life? Good things or bad things.

Elwood: Oh yeah, there were things that were good. I mean, when I got out of school, I had a good attitude. I didn't like school, but I got out with a good attitude. School wasn't for me. I had English. That was fine, but I hated it. The book part, you know, where you had to write stories. I liked that part. But boy, when it came to other, I hated English with a passion. I could care less what was a noun, pronoun or any of that stuff. My spelling is horrible. I read very fast and remember about 90% of what I read. That's my big gap. She's got a guy over at the care home that keeps asking me questions, and I keep answering for him. That makes him so mad. But like I say, I read stuff and I remember it. And in working on airplanes, that came in real handy. When I was working for ATI in Little Rock, they'd call me up in the middle of the night and say, "We've got this problem, what should we do?" I'd tell them. I thought, "Look, I've already put my 12 hours in." Because we worked four 12 hour days. FAA required maintenance controllers, you have four 12 hour days and you're off four days. That's just standard. I could be on my days off, and they'd call me up. I'd just get them out of there, because, you know, I went to work in 1967 on DC8's and I was still working on DC8's when I retired. I'd been with them all those years, so you know...when I was in Dallas, we tore them down to nothing and then put them all back together for an overhaul. We'd strip them down to just bare airplane, pretty near. You learn a lot more than you do over on line, but I enjoyed my career.

Joan: And you said sports were important to you and you got to play them here. Is that something you probably look back on as a good thing about living here.

Elwood: Oh yes! I met a lot of good people here, I had a lot of friends here. I had a lot of fun here. A lot of people didn't think I did, but I had a lot of fun.

Sue: There's a lot of good people in Kansas.

Elwood: Old Cliff Kirkbride was nice, he wasn't a constable, he was just town security. He always followed us, and we'd hide somewhere. We'd pull in an alley and turn the lights out or something. He'd get going down the road, and we'd get in behind him and follow him with the lights off. Eventually, he'd figure out we were back there. We were over at Young's Club celebrating and getting ready to go to service. Old Cliff came in and said, "I'm sure going to miss you guys when you leave because I ain't going to have nothing to do!"

Joan: Now, you didn't have a motorcycle, did you?

Elwood: No.

Joan: Well, a lot of guys here had motorcycles.

Elwood: I rode with David Eslinger one time on a motorcycle. That was the only time I rode on a motorcycle. When you get down there and ride on the railroad ties, that was enough for me. I never rode another one.

Joan: Now didn't you tell me before we started the interview, that your dad did some trucking too?

Elwood: No, my uncles did. My uncles and my grandpa.

Joan: Were they independent? They had their own trucks?

Elwood: They hauled cattle and wheat. Every Sunday morning, we'd go down to the stockyards and pick up the cows and take them over here to Weidenheimer's. They'd cut them up and cook them and put them in the locker.

Joan: Well, what else would you like to have on this interview? Can you think of anything or remember anything that...

Elwood: I can remember lots of things, but she won't let me say them.

Joan: I'd probably like it, but I'd probably have to turn off the tape. We've interviewed several men who were ornery when they were young.

Elwood: Well, I had fun when I was little, and I still have fun. We went out there to Colorado to see my sister. Her daughter sent her son up. He'd been in Iraq or Afghanistan, and she told him, "I want to tell you one thing. You're going to see a whole different side to family when you meet him." And he told me, "Yes, I have really met a different side of the family. I like your side of the family."

Sue: It seems like that side of the family is more serious.

Elwood: There ain't nothing serious about me. I like to have a good time.

Joan: So what did you do for entertainment when you were in high school? That you can tell us. Where did you go on a date with that gal?

Elwood: Well, usually Larned drive in. There wasn't anything around here to do.

Joan: What kind of car did you have?

Elwood: '41 Chevrolet Coupe. Wish I had it now.

Joan: How did you get your car? Did you have to earn the money yourself?

Elwood: Oh no, the folks bought it for me, when I was about 15.

Joan: I get the feeling you were sort of spoiled.

Elwood: A little.

Sue: His mama spoiled him.

Joan: Everybody seemed to.

Elwood: Well, I had a good time then, and I have a good time now. Over where she works, I take her supper, and I eat with her. There's an old man there that I've got real attached to. I stay there because he tries to stand up, and if he does he falls and hurts himself. So I stay with him for two to two and a half hours until the aids get everybody else to bed. Then they get ready to put him to bed. I've been doing that for about eighteen months now. Then, she's on the board at the Crisis Center. I volunteer at the Crisis Center, and they all the time have something for me to do. Then they have an old fort there that was built in about 1840, and I volunteer down there. They weren't going to have it open this year, they thought, because all the old volunteers quit. They put an ad in the paper, so I went. They got so many people, I work on Friday afternoon.

Joan: Now what do you do for them?

Elwood: Oh.

Sue: Sit in the gift shop and keep the doors open. Just sort of monitor.

Elwood: Tell people. I give them a taste of Bonham because I have sat around and read the books. I remember about it all, and Al Jolson was in Bonham in 1900. Bonham had the first electric company in north Texas and had the first water plant in north Texas. It was the biggest town in north Texas. At one time, Bonham County had 2,200 square miles and it went clear out past Wichita Falls. Then later on they broke it up into 13 different counties. We're in the fourth county up there.

Sue: Sixteen.

Joan: And you know them all. I guess I should have asked you, how big was your class when you graduated?

Elwood: I think there were 52 of us.

Joan: So it was a pretty big class.

Elwood: The biggest share were boys. Whole lot more boys. Every once in a while I get

something when somebody from my class dies. I got a deal the other day where Wayne Steinkuehler died. He graduated with me.

Joan: We're certainly glad you came back today and were willing to share this interview.

Elwood: I wanted to come back and see things. It's been 15 years, and I wanted to see it. I just wanted to see what Kinsley was like, and I don't know anything about it because it doesn't look the same.

Joan: Well, tell me how it's changed.

Elwood: It's got so much bigger.

Joan: Kinsley's bigger!

Elwood: Area wise. Population, there aren't nearly as many people here now. I think it said 1,410.

Joan: That's high. It's probably close to 1,200.

Elwood: Well, go to the computer and pull it up and it says it's 1410.

Joan: Well, the county.

Elwood: No, for the city. I think when I was here it was around 2,000.

Sue: Out by the railroad tracks where we came in, he commented, "All of this wasn't here. They've built up more out that direction."

Joan: They just lost a building. They just lost the KP&L building just last week. That was down by the tracks, it was sort of an English Tudor big building. They just tore that down. The light plant.

Elwood: The last building going out that way would be _____.