

**Interview with Donna Newsom**  
**February 26, 2011**  
**Conducted in the Kinsley Library, Kinsley, Kansas**  
**Interviewers: Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff, Kinsley Library**

Joan: Donna, what is your full name?

Donna: Donna Rae Scott Newsom.

Joan: Where do you currently reside?

Donna: 1072 210<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Lewis, Kansas.

Joan: Where were you born?

Donna: I was born July 17, 1941, in St. Luke's Hospital in Great Bend.

Joan: And what were the names of your parents?

Joan: My mother's name was Ethel Mae Massey and my father's name was Donald Raymond Scott.

Joan: And the names of your grandparents?

Donna: My maternal grandparents were Millie and Truman Massey and my father's parent's-- I have to stop and think a minute because his mother died when he was eleven. Her name was Bessie and his father's name was Ray Scott. And then his father remarried a woman named Delia (Williams).

Joan: Can you describe the make-up of the household you grew up in? Brothers, sisters, that sort of thing.

Donna: Well, I had kind of strange growing up because I was raised by my grandparents. When I was eleven months old, I need to back up just a little bit because my mother had a sister who was eight years older than she. Her name was Thelma (*Binns*). She was killed in a car wreck out by Garden City. Thelma's husband was a coach in Garden City and she left a five-year-old daughter. My Uncle Cliff (*Binns*) was a coach, and he didn't know what he was going to do, so he gave my maternal grandparents, Millie and Truman Massey, Kaye to raise. She was five. That was just about the same time that my mother gave me, at age 11 months, to my grandparents. My mother did this because my father enlisted in the, I believe it was the Army Air Force, at that time. My mother wanted to go on, she was very, very bright, very musically talented. She wanted to go on to college. So my grandparents took my cousin Kaye at five and me at 11 months. So it was different.

Joan: So what brought you and your grandparents to Lewis?

Donna: What brought my grandparents to Lewis?

Joan: Well, whoever was here first.

Donna: Well, they were here long before I was. It is interesting. My great grandparents on the Massey side came from just over the line into West Virginia, I believe it was. I'm trying to figure, it must have been in the 1890's perhaps. My great-grandfather brought my grand-dad Truman and his older brother Floyd, and they traveled by train. They got off at Garfield and looked the land over and purchased some land. Then they moved the entire family by train to this location. They had a family home on the (Edwards/Pawnee) county line, the Massey family did.

My grandmother came from Wayne County Kentucky. All the children weren't born at that time, but it turned out to be a family of ten. Her father went through the Oklahoma Land Rush and acquired some land around Nowata, Oklahoma. I have many interesting stories. My great grandparents on the McClendon side, that was my grand-mother's maiden name, they lived to be 96 and 97. So growing up, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, going down there. I was able to visit with them and to listen to stories of going through that period of history. My great-grandma would tell how the Indians would-- they had a little soddie first-- and the Indians would run their horses over the top of it, trying to break down the roof. Or set fire to the prairie grass, which was so very, very tall. They would set fire to that, trying to drive them out. Or else they would just come into the home and want food or something. I heard a lot of interesting tales from her.

My grandmother and her sister went to Tucumcari, New Mexico to work as young women. My grandmother met and first married a gentleman whose last name was Jones. He was very wealthy and owned a Hotel in Mineral Wells, Texas. He passed away and my grandmother stayed there and maintained the business. My grandfather, as a young man, had Rheumatoid Arthritis. He had gone to Mineral Wells for treatments in the hot springs. Everyone told him that he should meet this beautiful young woman who was running the boarding house. That is how my grandparents wound up getting married and moving to the farm. They didn't start out in that home. They built a home one mile south of the Massey family farm on the Edwards/Pawnee County line which caught fire and burned. Then they bought a farm four miles south of Belpre, where they raised Thelma and my Mother. So as near and I can calculate, about 1939, my grandfather bought the farm where I now live. It belonged to one of his sisters, Maude. She had married Harry Bridges. She died in that flu pandemic of, I believe it was 1918. Harry had two sons by Maude. But my grandfather bought that farm and moved from the Belpre community to the Lewis community, at about that time, from what I can figure in my mind. That's how Kaye and I came to live in that farm place three miles east of Lewis.

Joan: That's a lot! It was a long way getting there. Was your grandmother a Harvey Girl?

Donna: No, she wasn't. I do not know whether they had friends...I don't believe there were any relatives there. I don't know what drove or took her and Dona (*McClendon*) there to work. But someway or another they wound up there. That was a part of my grandmother's life. because she had married and he had died. Really, I was one of the few people who knew that. My grandmother did not share that or mention that to many people. Perhaps in that time...I don't know what would have been her reason not to share. But she did not. So that part of her life was private, why they went there...I don't know.

Joan: That's really interesting. It's nice that they lived long enough to for you to be able to hear those stories, that they had that longevity. I don't imagine you remember too much about WWII?

Donna: Not too much. My father was in WWII. I did not know my father. I got in touch with him and met him when I was 36 years old. He made the Air Force his life long career. He told

me quite a few stories. In WWII, he flew a bomber. He was stationed in England and flew out of England. There were quite a few stories of him staying. You can imagine him sitting around having a quick breakfast and everybody leaving on their flight to bomb and not everyone coming back. He was shot up many times, he lost his...when his bomb bay was hit he lost some of the personnel on the plane, but they managed to cripple back into base. His bombardier was dead. So fascinating stories that he shared, but no...and what kind of an impact did it make on the household, being raised by my grandparents who had...

Joan: Well, that would have been the biggest impact because your mother went to college and your dad went there, so that was a big impact. It shaped the rest of your life.

Donna: Right. In rural Kansas, it didn't make that big a difference. I really kind of think that because my grandparents had survived so many hardships and gone through the Dirty Thirties, that they knew how to exist. Grandma raised chickens, we had cattle. She always canned our food. So if there was rationing or things, as a child I was unaware, because we ate the same dastardly breaded tomatoes that I hated as before.

Joan: You don't make that much anymore do you?

Donna: Not at all.

Joan: That must have been a WWII thing because I remember eating it too.

Donna: The slimy bread in the tomatoes.

Joan: I love eating hot tomatoes, but not breaded tomatoes. So, let's see. So where did you go to school?

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Donna: I went to school at Lewis.

Joan: Do you have any memories about elementary school or high school there? What it like? How many were in your class?

Donna: We had the smallest class in school. I was trying to think, you know, the enrollment in Lewis at that time must have been between 180 and 200 because we had the smallest class. But most classes had between 16 to 20. And yes, you know there is such a difference between now and then. We would go outside to play. You would take a stick and draw a house and build houses out of tumbleweeds, and we would play. It wasn't all organized play. We went to school from 8:00 to 4:00. The last hour of school was sports. If you weren't out for sports, which they didn't have a lot for girls at that time, we had study hall. We had a wonderful English teacher, Mrs. Garrison who did study hall and recruited many people to learn to be librarians. So we always sat in the back room and glued or repaired books and that kind of thing. That's one of the major differences. Everyone went to school on the bus and everyone rode home at 4:00. We had one game, generally on a Friday. So you did not have the schedule that the kids have now. We did not. Long bus routes, I know Kaye and I would get on the bus when it was dark. We had Hugh Schnoebelen as the bus driver; he loved to make a little dust! We traveled fast. But there were, I believe, three major bus routes. There was ours to the north and the one that was went down south, and then we had one that was kind of on the south and east. Lots of rural kids to pick up, a lot of them on the farms, which is different now. You didn't see so many kids have

cars driving to school. We all traveled on the bus. My first grade teacher, Mrs. Rankin loved to give discipline with a very sharp pencil.

Joan: Rapping your hands?

Donna: Rapping your head with the pencil which would probably be grounds for dismissal now. Spankings were more prolific in those days. You could tell when the superintendent, Mr. Johnson, was mad; his face got as red as a beet. And we had a one-armed superintendent, Mr. Eggleston, who demanded a lot of respect. When they fully retired, I believe they were in the Larned area. Fabulous teachers, I must say, all through the school; our high school teachers were just tremendous. Mrs. Garrison, our English teacher, was not too looked forward to by most kids to be in her class, but when they got to college, they so appreciated having had her. She was tough. Our math teacher was very gifted in math. He had a very hard time explaining to the kids that did not understand math. So even though he was excellent, he was not the best there was because he couldn't reach the kids who couldn't understand. But we had such a great faculty; we truly did.

Joan: That's nice!

Donna: Now I will have to interject that there was a period in my time of going to school, my mother remarried. She was at Wichita State University, and she met a gentleman by the name of Robert Williams, who was head of the radio TV program at Wichita. She married him when I was about ten. He took a job in Birmingham, Alabama, and was manager of a radio TV station, mainly TV, WSGN in Birmingham. It had a subsidiary all-black station, WBCO in Bessemer, Alabama. So she took me to live with them for a few years, and I went to school in Birmingham, Alabama.

Joan: Tell us about that! How was that different from Lewis, Kansas?

Donna: Oh my goodness, you know, you're looking at the early fifties. It was probably the loneliest stretch of my life. Plus, I was removed from my home situation. My mother had been in and out of my life all the time because this was her family's home. But then I was living with her, and I didn't know Bob Williams. And I'm backing up on a lot of things too, but an interesting thing with Mr. Williams, he wrote the Buck Rogers comic series under the pen name of Bob Barton. Every Thursday, he would take to the airport the comic strip for the following week and mail it to Chicago. He was extremely intelligent.

Life in Birmingham was very different. The school was old; the name was Shades Cahaba. And of course the blacks. The biggest thing I can tell you because, you know, water fountains were restricted for them. Their schools were just so shabby, no windows or doors. I can remember they had no sidewalks.

Joan: Your school was not integrated; it was just white?

Donna: It was just white. It was very lonely for me in the home life because the families of the kids that I went to school with looked upon me as a Yankee, a northerner, for number one; I was from Kansas. And number two, my stepfather's affiliation with an all black station. No kid was allowed to come to my house. There was one other girl in the school, a Jew from New York, and we were a duet. But our home was out on Lake Shore Drive at the time, and it was kind of in a wooded area. I did have a dog that was my best, best friend, a collie. Because kids just weren't

allowed to associate with me because of where I was from and my stepfather's affiliation with blacks. The whole thing is true about the back of the bus being the main back seat and two in front for the black people to ride on. It was just phenomenal, and I will have to say, every morning we pledged the Rebel flag in our classroom. We sang the Alabama State Song, and we went to the auditorium and watched old reruns of Civil War movies. They just kept hounding, you know, that the South did not lose, they just gave up. It was like a step back in time; the way they were living. Such indoctrination of the kids; they just lived in the past.

Joan: Did you have any relationship with black children? Or was that not allowed.

Donna: No, there weren't any black kids (*in the school*). I just the one New York Jewish girl. It was a dreadful time.

Joan: Do you know why your stepfather was managing a black station?

Donna: It was a subsidiary. It was owned by the same corporation that owned WSGN radio TV station in Birmingham.

Joan: You probably don't know, but it would be interesting to know where that ownership was out of. If it was out of New York or something, rather than the south.

Donna: That I can't answer, but I spent a tremendous amount of time at the station; I loved it. I loved watching and listening to them and still, to this day, I have contact with a friend, Bob Bandy, who was an announcer on the radio and TV station. He has since passed away, but his wife, Kathleen, we called her "Kat," is still living in Florida and I maintain communication with her. They were tremendous family friends; they really were.

Joan: Now at that time, did entertainers come in and do interviews and things? Or was it basically records and...

Donna: A little bit. They had people come in that they interviewed on the air. So yes. It was fascinating. I loved that.

Joan: So when did you come back then? And why?

Donna: The marriage failed. I came back every summer to the farm, and at the end of my 7<sup>th</sup> grade my mother sent me back to live. So I came back to Lewis for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and finished high school with my grandparents. Now my mother moved back to the area. At that time Belpre and Trousdale had consolidated, and she taught music there at the Belpre school. We are looking in the mid-fifties because at about the same time in the early fifties, '52 or '53, Centerview consolidated with Lewis. That's really how I met Dean. You know, things were different in those days. I did not know a lot of people in the Centerview area. We just didn't. You went to church and did your own community thing here and we had what we needed in Lewis. So this is about the time that Dean came up, I'm thinking around '52 or '53 maybe that Centerview came. But anyway, Belpre and Trousdale had consolidated at about the same time and my mother taught music there.

Joan: Do you remember anything about that consolidation? How the communities felt or...?

Donna: It seemed very smooth. I do not remember any rivalries or any bad things being said. You know, they were welcome to come. I never gathered that from Dean or his younger brother, Keith, that there was ever any problems with having to come to Lewis.

Joan: Centerview had probably gotten quite small by then. Maybe the kids were happy to have more kids.

Donna: Yes, I think Dean's father, Harold, I believe there were just two people in his class. I mean, you're looking back quite a ways. But, it was interesting. It really was. It was where I finished out my high school years.

Joan: In high school, did you have a job as a teenager? Or chores at home? What was...

Donna: A little bit of everything. I think, I don't know whether I would have been this way, had I lived with my mother and father, but having been raised with my grandparents I was in with older generation people. It just seemed that I was always old for my age. When I host my class now when we get together for reunions, when I have them come back, I listen to the tales of what they did, and I did not participate. So to answer your question, it seems like my better friends were my teachers. I babysat for my teachers. If they had a problem within the structure of the class, quite frequently they would ask me what my opinion was. So, it just seemed like I was always old, born old.

Joan: Well, your experience going to Alabama would have aged you.

Donna: Well, and being raised in a generation above where you would have been. The people that I grew up knowing were my grandparent's friends. My grandfather's family settled mostly all around here. So his brothers and sisters, though they were my great aunts and uncles, I just called them "aunt and uncle" because that's just the way it was. I was just always around older people.

Joan: So you met Dean then. Did you start dating in high school?

Donna: Yes, about the...Dean graduated two years prior. But about the time he was a senior, in '57, we started dating, and he went to Southwestern (*College*).

Joan: What was dating like in Lewis? What did you do for entertainment?

Donna: We had drive-ins. We did have a drive-in movie; there was one in Larned. Maybe we went to a movie once a week, perhaps, but quite often, you know. He had work to do too, and we just didn't date an awful lot. But in the summer, if he was in the field or whatever, he would just come up to the house and we would watch TV with Grandma and Grandpa.

Joan: When did you get the TV?

Donna: It must have been (*the early 1950's*), somewhere in that vicinity that it seems like we had TV (*on the farm. I did have T.V. through the years in Alabama.*)

Joan: Just one station or...?

Donna: Maybe three at the most. It wasn't a lot. It brings back a funny story to my mind. My grandmother was in Oklahoma visiting with her sisters and seeing her parents. It was school time, so I was home. Dean was up, and we were sitting in the living room of the house where I am now, and Grandpa was in his usual rocker. The TV wasn't coming in very well. Grandpa said, "I'm going to get the shotgun and go out and shoot because there's birds on the antennae." They were making a lot of snow on the screen. Dean and I were sitting there, and we heard this loud explosion in the kitchen. You know, your heart is beating and you think, "What in the world?" I heard Grandpa laugh, you know, and Dean and I went into the kitchen. My granddad had his work boots on, and he'd put the barrel of the shotgun just here on the rim of the sole of his shoe and pulled it back to load it. He still had arthritis; he had to have been in his '70's at that time, so when he brought the stock up like this, he pulled the trigger. It shot a small little hole down through the kitchen floor. But you know what the shot did downstairs with all of Grandma's canned goods. I heard Grandpa laugh, so Dean and I went out there. He looked up, and he said, "Won't Mom snort when she sees this!" I tell you, we had that hole patched and the mess cleaned up before Grandma got home. But the birds left!

Joan: But there wasn't any TV left, you had work to do.

Donna: There is nothing like a shotgun in the house to get your attention!

Joan: This house that you were growing up in, we didn't ask you this earlier, but did it always have electricity when you were there? And indoor plumbing and water and...

Donna: Yes, I was very fortunate in that respect except when the power went off. The house was all electrical. We had a washhouse to the north of the main house, and it had a coal burning stove that we used when the lights went off. We'd have to dig through the snow to get to it. As near as I can remember, even when my grandparents had their home south of Belpre, they had a Delco plant down in the basement. I still have a big glass container like this (*about 15 inches*) that I subsequently learned housed the batteries for the Delco. I have seashells in it. But yes, we always had electricity.

Joan: OK, so we have you dating in high school, and then you were going to talk about Dean going to Southwestern?

Donna: He went to Southwestern to study. He thought he wanted to be a minister. He studied for two years down there. During that time then, when I graduated, I went to K-State. He transferred up to K-State then and found that he was really interested in education. So he got his degree in math to be a math teacher.

Joan: So you were writing and corresponding while you were at different colleges. Did you know that early that you were going to get married.

Donna: Oh, you know, probably so. I had never dated much; Dean probably had more than I. Once we started dating; we just stayed as a couple for several years. I went down to Southwestern for a lot of their activities, homecoming and that type of thing. It is a beautiful campus.

Joan: Was Dean a Methodist and you were a Methodist? Southwestern is a Methodist school, I'm just trying to think. At that time, were you going to church at the Methodist?

Donna: Well see, they had the little church down at Centerview that has since been moved up here (*Kinsley*). It was more affiliated with Friends, than the Methodist Church. So many of Dean's and the Newsom's, Dean's relatives, were there. His cousins, aunts and uncles. Some of his family that came up from Centerview went to the Christian church, like Aunt Berniece. Some of them, Dean's parents and Uncle Merle, went to the Methodist church. But I believe it had a little bit of a Friend's background because I went to church several times down there, and the way the service went (*made me think that*). Yes, we were always Methodists. When he taught at Riley County, we went to the Methodist Church.

Joan: What was the Methodist Church in Lewis like during the 50's?

Donna: Well, it was an older church. Let me say this because I know that our youth group met in the Christian Church at that time because there were more youth that were involved in the Christian Church. So we would meet on Sunday nights, the young people would, at the Christian Church. Wayne and Esther Bell, Monte's parents, were in charge of the youth group at the time. So we had a lot of people in the church, but they were mostly all older ones, it seems like.

Joan: Maybe that's something, you know, me coming into that community, the churches seemed to cooperate. That sounds like they were cooperating back then too. Is that sort of a tradition in Lewis? Have the churches done that? Or not always?

Donna: Yes, to a certain degree. But you know, when it came to a point when they talked about maybe unitizing and just having one church that did not happen.

Joan: But they did talk about that at one time

Donna: At one time, I think many years ago. That had been when the Methodist Church was getting into rack and ruin, you know, crumbling away. (*Also the Christian Church had burned down.*) They had talked about that. There was talk about it. We even had a Church of Christ (*this was corrected*).

Joan: I think somebody else mentioned an Assembly of God.

Donna: Yes, over there by where the Fankhausers live close to the high school, close to the school. There is a small, little church building. The Heacocks went to it. I think it got down to such few members that finally it closed up. We had a large Baptist Church because of the Wheaton families. A lot of them were on the school board. But at that time, yes, the youth group met in the Christian Church.

Joan: And there wasn't a Catholic Church.

Donna: Not in Lewis.

Joan: Were there many Catholics that lived there?

Donna: The Schnoebelen Family, the main Schnoebelen Family, Hugh and Eileen, and all of their family.

Joan: Would they have come into Kinsley? Gone to Belpre?

Donna: I'm sure they came into Kinsley. If I were to remember right, I believe they came to Kinsley to church because their Uncle Rene, Buzz's husband (*Schnoebelen*), I believe they came over here to church. There got to be a time when a lot of Catholics in our area went to Belpre too.

Joan: I think we learned Castaneda's came over here.

Donna: Yes, and I believe the Schnoebelen family did. I'm trying to think, you know. We had the Castaneda's in our community. We always had such good families. The Martinezes, you know, they worked for the railroad. They lived in the little yellow houses on the north side of the railroad that were supplied for railroad workers to live in. So we did have a lot of Mexican families in Lewis. We really did.

Joan: Did you have any Hispanics in your class in school?

Donna: I didn't, but there were a lot of Castaneda's. They were good, good families. Fabulous athletes...Pete, Frank, and Nick.

Joan: From your viewpoint, were they well-integrated into the community? Did you see prejudice?

Donna: None whatsoever. I never felt that. They were just part of the community, always.

Joan: I guess there were no blacks in Lewis?

Donna: I can't remember any, no.

Joan: I can't get over your living in Alabama. That must have been quite a change!

Donna: Yes, it was. It truly was, in every facet. Home life, you know, where you really didn't know my mom or my step-dad at all. And having such biased opinions, you know.

Joan: And your mother and step-dad would have been liberals, or considered, right?

Donna: Yes, my mother worked as a secretary for a dinner club called *The Club*. It was up on top of the mountain. WSGN Radio Station was about halfway up, and my mother worked all the way up to the top at a club. And jumping back to those days, another interesting point about it, Birmingham was such a steel manufacturing city, that at that point in time in history, the big concern was if the United States was attacked, that would be one place that would be hit. As students, we had to wear dog tags.

Joan: Oh, my goodness.

Donna: That was wonderful because the kids had all these young love affairs, you know. Everybody was switching dog-tags. Nobody kept their own.

Joan: But this is the Korean War era, rather than WWII. So they're worried, they're in the

Korean...like an attack that happened...*(this would have been the threat of Russia during the Cold War.)*

Donna: And instead of having tornado alerts, you know like they have for the kids in school here. We were trained for bombs, how we were to crouch down in the hall and cover our heads. But we all had to wear these dog-tags. I have thought of that, it is so ironic. Nobody would know who was missing because nobody had their own dog-tags. If you had a boyfriend or whatever, everybody switched them. Yes, we had to wear dog-tags for identification in case the city being bombed.

Joan: That's an interesting...we didn't ask if the Korean War affected you at all.

Donna: Well, not knowing, that's the only way it was.

Joan: So, you went back to K-State, and you became engaged sometime.

Donna: Yes. Not at first, when I went to K-State, not at first. I studied law for three years at K-State. Then about that time, when Dean and I decided that we probably would get married, we looked at the situation. You know, how would law be that good for me. I changed to the field of education, primarily because it was the department that would take all of my crazy hours of law and criminology, German, everything, without me losing a lot of hours. So, I went into special education.

Joan: I think the community could have used another lawyer; you should have stayed!

Donna: Yes, I have sometimes questioned that decision. After having three years in it, why didn't I pursue it?

Joan: Were there many women in law school at that time?

Donna: No, not too many. Of course, this was preliminary law.

Joan: Pre-law.

Donna: Yes, it was all pre-law.

Joan: And you were thinking about being a lawyer, not a legal secretary.

Donna: Right. I was thinking about being a lawyer. I had not decided if I wanted to be corporate law, or family law, or what. I had always thought that would be fun. I liked to mix things up, I guess.

Joan: And your grandparents were funding your college?

Donna: That and scholarships.

Joan: Did you work?

Donna: I lived in the dorm and worked, and Dean worked. So then we got married in '61 and I

still had college to finish. That was Dean's senior year. He worked at several jobs, you know.

Joan: You were in married housing then?

Donna: No, we lived in a little apartment on Poyntz, on Main Street (*in Manhattan, Kansas*). Then when he graduated, he started looking for jobs. There was one in Green Bay Wisconsin that I thought would really be nice. But he wound up taking a job at a consolidated high school, Riley County High School. It was a consolidation between Keats, which is outside of Manhattan, and Leonardville and then Riley. The school had been placed between the two little towns of Riley and Leonardville, which did cause a lot of problems with the people in Keats. When Dean went to work there, it was his second year (*of consolidation*). He taught math there and coached.

Joan: And you still had another year of college?

Donna: Yes, I was still going to college. We rented. Well, first of all, when we were first married, we rented a house in Leonardville. It was a three storey home. The football coach lived in the basement, and Dean and I lived on the main floor, and a single elementary teacher lived upstairs. We lived there, and our son Derek was born while we lived there in '63. Then we rented a little house and lived in the town of Riley in '65. Ultimately, we built a home in Riley in '67 and lived there. They were wonderful years. All the kids were born in that area, and we still have such tremendous friends from that time.

Joan: So it was really education that took you out of Edwards County? You did not come back right away.

Donna: We didn't come back. We came back every summer to the farm. Dean was farming for his father. Then in '75, '74 or '75, Dean's father wanted to go into irrigation. And there wasn't any way really, feasibly, that we could be 200 miles away from the fields and irrigate. So Dean had to decide to either stay in the teaching field, or to come back to the farm. So, he left teaching, and we moved back to the farm in '75.

Joan: Do you know what went into making that decision?

Donna: The love of farming. He loved to do it. And he just couldn't bring himself around to saying, OK, I won't go back and do anymore farming. They'll just have to get someone else to farm the land." Because with irrigation, you needed to be on top of it, and the school season didn't allow that. So we came back.

Joan: So your father-in-law didn't start irrigating until 1975? He didn't irrigate prior to that?

Donna: No, he dry-land farmed. So we came back. When my grandmother passed away, she left me the farmhouse out here. So we fixed it up, it had been broken into so many times. But you know, even though we came back every summer and boarded it up and stayed there, it was just sitting idle. So that brought us back to the farm. We added on to it, fixed it, and changed it around a little bit for our family to grow up in. The boys all went to school at Lewis, graduated from Lewis.

My key interest, when I was...I'm jumping back now to when Dean was going to Southwestern. As a senior, I went down for homecoming. I was staying with Beverly Clutter in

the dorms for homecoming. Beverly and her boyfriend and Dean and I were in church the Sunday morning when they came to her and told her that her family had been killed. Just a little piece of history where...

Joan: You were in church, and they came to the church to tell her?

Donna: To get Beverly out of church. Her oldest sister lived in Kansas City.

Joan: And that spared her. When we read, *In Cold Blood*, we knew she wasn't home.

Donna: We were together in church, the four of us when they came to get her out of church. It's funny how historical things sometimes touch, you know.

Joan: Did you know her?

Donna: Having been down before, you know, yes. Not well, but yes, I knew her. And that's how I wound up staying with her when I went down to stay for the weekend.

So let me see, agricultural changes...

Joan: Well, yes, if we're talking about when you were in high school or whatever. And I don't know what farm I'm on here to talk to, did they pretty much do their own farming? Or did they have hired help?

Donna: Yes, my granddad did most of his farming. However, I can't tell you his last name. We had on the farm where I lived, we had a little bunkhouse (it was called) just across the driveway. We tore it down when Dean and I moved back. We started cleaning up; the boys and he tore down several old buildings. But there was a gentleman by the name of Hugh; I do not know his last name. He came every summer and stayed in that little bunkhouse and helped my grandfather and his older brother Floyd who farmed four miles north of us on the family farm.

Joan: Your grandmother never worked?

Donna: She cooked. Oh she cooked!

Joan: Yes, we shouldn't use the term, "worked."

Donna: Lots of hard work.

Joan: Outside the home. So she canned, and put up most of your food and that sort of thing?

Donna: I remember my grandmother telling when she and my grandfather were first married. They lived on the family farm up on the county line until they built their home. In those days, they had threshing crews that came around to do wheat. My grandmother spoke about the monstrous amount of cooking that she had to do. How many loaves of bread they made every morning, and set up tables out in the yard, you know, for the crew to eat at. And they slept in the barn. She talked about how much work it was to do their laundry.

Joan: By the time you were around, mechanization had made it possible not to have all the threshing crews.

Donna: With the combines, you did not have the threshing crews. We had combines, small, but combines.

Joan: Did you have chores during harvest?

Donna: Yes, I did, driving the truck.

Joan: And you took the grain to Lewis?

Donna: Well, some, but combines were so very small then that when we were cutting wheat down on the farm south of Belpre, we would go over and stay in the house over there. There was a beautiful home down there. Two weeks it would take us to cut, so, just...

Joan: So did you take the grain to Belpre?

Donna: Yes, to Belpre. And then, when I got old enough, I drove the tractors for Grandpa. We didn't have cabs; we were out in the elements. No cabs on tractors, no cabs on combines, lots of hard work.

Joan: Did you like that?

Donna: I guess it was fun, you know. Grandpa would set me out in the field to work, and he'd say, "Just pick a point straight across and drive for it. Try to drive as straight as you can." I drove tractor for him a lot. He had a small amount of cattle, and I helped him with that. It seemed like they always had calves in the dead of winter, and I would take a sled and he and I would go out there and load the baby on the sled and I'd pull it back to the barn. We had horses to ride. My grandpa had to ride horses as a kid, and he never could understand who in their right mind would ever want a horse just to ride for no reason. If you ever had to sit on one all day, for days on end... But he made sure that Kaye and I had a pinto mare that we rode as kids.

Joan: Did anybody help besides your grandfather and you? Were there relatives or anybody that came in? Or was it just the two of you?

Donna: No, just this Hugh that came up in the summertime. I don't remember anybody else.

Joan: Your cousin that was living...

Donna: Yes, my cousin Kaye.

Joan: Where was she at this time?

Donna: Well, you know, it was hard for me to kind of understand at the time. I was a kid, and had no negativity toward my grandmother. She was such a loving person. But when my grandparents, my grandmother was 55 and my grandpa was 62, when they got Kaye and I. My grandmother was so full of grief with Aunt Thelma being killed in such an horrific crash that she just took Kaye and just kind of suffocated her. You know, she just took her under her wing. Not to say that she didn't pay any attention to me, but I was with my grandpa. My grandpa took me in the pickup. When I had earaches, he would hold me on his lap and blow the smoke from his pipe into my ears. He took care of me a lot. You know that's hard to say without making it look

like my grandma was indifferent. She wasn't indifferent to me. I understood it when I got older. She just suffocated Kaye. Kaye had hay fever quite bad, so she could not be out in the elements. You know, she couldn't go out in the pickup and help with us. So, Kaye was just kind of mothered and kept in the house and had a little different lifestyle than I did.

Joan: Well, you had more of the role of boy.

Donna: Absolutely.

Joan: She probably helped more with the cooking and the housework.

Donna: Yes, much to her dislike. Kaye could run like the wind. She was a tremendous athlete. It's too bad we didn't have good sports when she was young because she was a good athlete.

Joan: Did your grandfather use, do you remember using fertilizers, pesticides?

Donna: We didn't use so much in those days. You know, you allowed more Mother Nature to take its course as to what your yield was going to be. And we did not, I say, we did not have the corn that you see now, and certainly not the beans. Yet, when I get to talking with older farmers, they did have a special glove and kind of a special hook that they used when they used to go out to shuck corn in the field. But our main crops were just wheat and milo, that's what the country was designed for at that time.

Joan: Do you remember the yields at all for wheat when you were doing dry land?

Donna: Oh goodness, it could be anywhere from five to 25. You didn't have these hellacious kind of yields that we have now, because you pump on water and all the other nutrients and pesticides. We just didn't have it. I often think how my granddad would view the cost of machinery now. I mean, now you can get into the cab of a tractor or combine and put on your GPS system, and sit back and watch a movie in the cab while it drives for you. It would be quite a shock. And the cost of things would be phenomenal because my granddad, I'm sure, was not any different from most people of his generation. If they did not have the money to pay for it, they didn't buy it. So, you would have to have quite a fortune now to pay for these \$140,000 pieces of equipment and on up.

Joan: So Dean came back, and he ended up with his father's farm and your grandparents' farm. So you inherited it all, sort of?

Donna: No, not really. We rented it. Kaye and my mother inherited my family's land, Kaye coming in because her mother passed away. Dean's parents were still alive, and they owned their land. We rented land from Aunt Berniece and Uncle Merle (*Newsom*), and subsequently through the years, as the years passed by, Harold's (*Newsom*) cousin, Ralph Newsom, we farmed for Ralph Newsom and for Lee Newsom, that older generation. We rented their land, a lot of dry land. It kept us very busy, with four sons. Our sons can attest that their dad loved to wake the birds up in the morning. At 5:30, he started the tractors in the fields and worked until it was dark. They put in long hours because we had a lot of dry-land to farm at that time. That was before the CRP programs came in.

Joan: OK, and you told us ahead of time, but maybe we should go through it here. Your oldest

son, Derek was born in '63, Darin in '65, David in '67, and Daniel in '73. Are any of them farmers?

Donna: Derek, the oldest son loves to farm. They all farmed; they all worked hard on the farm. Our third son, David, was a writer, and he's an English teacher now. To him, it was the most worthless amount of time, going from one end of a field to another all day long. He would never have returned to the farm, but he did it at the time. But it was not his forte in life. He loves what he does, he teaches English in a school outside of Chicago. He loves it.

Joan: Darin?

Donna: Darin enjoyed farming. He wound up doing what he loves to do, too. He's a chief grain analyst for DTN, which is a data networking system for farmers. He's based in Omaha, Nebraska as their chief grain analyst.

Joan: So I'm guessing he maybe went to K-State, or?

Donna: No, he went to Hays.

Joan: So he's in agriculture, but not in the production.

Donna: That's right.

Joan: And David?

Donna: David is the third son who is an English teacher. Daniel was in landscape design. He went to K-State and was in landscape design for years. He loved it, absolutely loved it. It was very, very hard work. But when he married, he stayed in landscape design for a while, but he married an only child of a gentleman who was in the computer business. They sold huge Risograph copy machines that hospitals and churches and schools use because it made such a large amount of copies in a short amount of time. My daughter-in-law's father, Ken, persuaded Dan to come to work for him. So he's in the computer business, but he's still loves...and someday, maybe just on weekends, would like to do landscape design. The farmer in him still likes to do that.

Joan: What land does Derek farm?

Donna: Derek farms all the land that Dean and I have. So much of Ralph Newsom's and Lee Newsom's land is in the CRP, so many people went into that, that you know, you're just kind of an overseer of that land. You maintain it. He farms our land and that's about it. It keeps him busy.

Joan: The reason I went through that is just to show the change, how Dean went away and then came back. Then out of four children, only one is here.

Donna: Derek did go away for a bit. He went to Dallas and worked. But you know, the draw of the farm brought him back. I think our younger son Dan could probably have been drawn back to the farm. Out of all the boys, David is the one that absolutely would not come back. But Darin loved statistics in college, so he really, really enjoys it. The only thing he didn't like was

when he was handling other people's money. If it rained in Spain and the price went down, you hate to lose money for other people. But he enjoys and loves what he's doing now.

Joan: Do you think there are any prospects of your grandchildren wanting to farm?

Donna: I can see Derek's children because they are the most involved in it. You know, the other kids live in Omaha and Kansas City. Our third son, David, and his wife adopted two little girls from China, so there's no prospects there. Derek's two older boys are learning to drive equipment. They may, but it is hard to say.

Joan: When Dean came back and started farming with his father, did his father retire at one point?

Donna: Shortly after we came back. He just...we bought out Harold's equipment, and Dean just took over. Harold was ready for that. Dean's parents, his mother was a registered nurse, and she worked for Dr. Schnoebelen and in the hospital for years and years. At that time, she was one of the charge nurses at the Larned State Hospital. When farming was just really tough, Harold went up there and worked also on the Dillon Building. So you know, they both drove. And Aunt Berniece (*Newsom*) worked up there. All three of them drove to Larned and worked to augment the farm.

Joan: The Dillon Building, what's that?

Donna: That was for the hardened criminals. That was the ones that had committed murder.

Joan: We had somebody else tell us that that was a job for farmers after they retired and things, to go to Larned.

Donna: Absolutely, to help augment the salary from the farm. Harold was still farming at that time, though Dean was coming back every summer and helping. Then when we moved out in '75, he took over and just rented the land from his father. Then Harold didn't work much longer at the Larned State Hospital. I don't know how many interesting stories you want. There was a man, by the name of Carl McKittrick, that killed the Sparke's girl. Ed Sparke's girl, on the streets of Dodge City. They had been dating, and she wanted to break it off with him. Downtown, with many people watching, he stabbed her more than 25 times and killed her. He was a patient at Larned State Hospital under the care of my mother-in-law, June. Whoever decided that he was rehabilitated decided, and he was set free. I encountered him many times. When Doerr's had the implement repair place, a department you could go in, Dean would send me on runs to get repairs. He would be working there. You would see him around Larned. I think that if you had never known that he had murdered someone, you would still say he was kind of a creepy person. So let's fast forward to about nine years ago, when Dean's mother had colon cancer surgery. She was in the hospital in Great Bend. When they sent her up on 5<sup>th</sup> floor for rehab, I went up on a Saturday morning to visit with her and be there for a while. When the shift change came on, I looked out to the desk, and who was coming on duty, Carl McKittrick, as the charge nurse. And I tell myself, what is going to happen when he walks into this room? He came in and took her vitals, and I could see by her eyes...and when he left, she said, "Donna, is that who I think it is?" And I said yes. She was petrified. She said, "He knows who I am. He's in charge of my meds. He's in charge of everything. I stayed with her until he went off duty at 11:00 that night. There was no way to get a hold of the DON (*Director of Nursing*) that

weekend, but when I called to say, “How can this even be possible? Do you know his history?” And was told he’d been rehabilitated, I said, “By whose standards? Do you realize how many people this affects in this community?” Because I have since learned that other people like Esther Bell and other people have been in that hospital who knew this gentleman, and they were just petrified. My mother-in-law was scared to death. So you can’t help but...and I still see him to this day. I sing with a group in Larned. He comes and is in the audience when we sing. Your mind says, “How? He cold-bloodedly killed this young, beautiful girl. How is he justified to be out in this community and participate? So those are the things that come along in your life that make you just wonder how it can be? Yes, that was in Sentinel not too many months ago, they were looking back and they reviewed that situation of Louise Sparke having been killed. And there he is enjoying life. So that’s back on track now; I keep jumping off the track.

Joan: No, we’re doing very well. I’m looking at my questions, and we’ve covered an awful lot of it.

Donna: Another facet I could jump back to, having had, like I said, my great aunts and uncles be my aunts and uncles. I wish there was a time then that I could have acquired the knowledge that I wish I had now. My Uncle Rudy was married to my granddad’s sister, Pearl. He and my granddad’s sister Mae’s husband, Homer Polson, lived in Garfield. Uncle Rudy had the bank in Garfield. Rudolph (Rudy) Slepake rode the orphan train out from New York. Obviously, when he got off on the platform at the railroad station in Garfield, some family (Slepake was not their name. It must have been his family name and they maintained it.) I wish that I had known to gather some information from him. His two daughters, I have written to. One is in Texas, and one is married to a heart surgeon back East. They don’t even have a lot of knowledge about him. People just didn’t garner this information.

Just jumping aside on another track, when I had Dean at St. John for those two years. (*Dean Newsom (1939-2008) had early onset Alzheimer’s disease and spent his last two years in a care facility in St. John, Kansas*) What a wealth of information there was there! Just down the hall from Dean was an elderly lady by the name of Opal Moody who I know was probably one of the last Harvey Girls. And she was very deaf, but I would go down and visit her. I would say, “Did anybody ever copy down anything of what this woman has to say?”

Joan: Well see, that’s why we’re doing you today before we get to the nursing home.

Donna: I would go down and try to talk to her. She had been stationed in New Mexico and hated every moment of it. But you know, you had to shout and yell, but I could get Opal to tell me a little bit about it, and I thought, “Here is all of this history!”

Joan: Well, knowing his name and things, I was just thinking there are records of the names of the children who came out. They’ve done so much research in the last 15 years, that there might be something.

Donna: I would like to just know the name of the family who took him.

Joan: You don’t even know that!

Donna: I don’t know that. Because I didn’t know him until he had married my Aunt Pearl.

Joan: I wonder if some of the old church records would help figure it out.

Donna: Yes, they had a Methodist Church there.

Joan: See when he started going to church and maybe you could connect him there. Whether he was baptized or not, that might have been something people would have thought about, not knowing. I don't know; I'm just throwing that out.

Donna: I want to interject another thing. I'm always interjecting things, but the Massey family had all of those children living up there in that big house on the county line. They were rather affluent. They had acquired a considerable amount of land. It was important to my Great-grandparent Masseys that their children all be taught music. So they hired a gentleman to come out in a horse and buggy from Larned, and he stayed one day and all night and the next day and gave the kids music lessons. My granddad's oldest brother, the oldest one in the family, was the organist for the Methodist Church in Garfield for 30 some years. My granddad played the piano. The girls sang; most of them played the piano or the organ. The youngest brother, my Uncle Harry, who married a lady at Belpre and they lived at Belpre, he went to the Belpre Methodist Church and played cello and sang in church all the time. I thought it was fascinating that all of these nine kids were trained musically in that day and age.

Joan: And they had a piano in the home.

Donna: Yes, they had a piano in the home. We always had a piano in the home. I've still got the one that I grew up with in my home today. So you know, my mother's love of music, she was a music teacher and later on got her doctorate in special education. Music has just been an integral part of our lives. And Dean's family, those four kids, Dean and his one sister and two brothers stood beside the piano as soon as they could stand. Their mother played and they sang. But to me that was amazing. I mean, I can still hear...because for the first part of my life my grandmother had such a hard time giving up the community of Belpre. We went to the Methodist Church in Belpre when I was very, very young, until I started school and my friends were over to Lewis.

Joan: So in the 50's, when you were still in the home, did you gather around the piano and sing? Was that part of the entertainment or not?

Donna: Yes, but more so in Dean's home than mine. My grandmother did not play the piano as well as my mother. She could play anything. If you asked her, she could play anything by ear. She was fabulous. I've always sung. I've been told that when I was little bitty, standing by my grandmother in the Methodist Church in Belpre, that the preacher, Pastor Brooks said, I would just sing and sing and sing.

Joan: And still singing today!

Donna: Still singing today. Dean and I sang an awful lot in our lives together, and with our sons. Music has just been a great part of our life, and I look back to the forethought of my Great-Grandparent Masseys' insisting that they learn music.

Joan: What were your great-grandparents' names? We didn't get that.

Donna: I have to stop and think. Granddad's mother's name was Susan. I know his father's name was so well because I've looked it up. I will have to look it up (*John Massey*). They died

very young. My granddad's father died of pernicious anemia, in those days they couldn't do too much about it. They had moved off of the farm and moved into, as you're going up the Garfield road, the farm where Matt Hall lives now (It's right before you go over the railroad tracks) was where my great-grandparents moved (*when the left the farm*).

Joan: Let's start with Belpre and then go to Lewis, what was Belpre like in the '50's? Do you remember much?

Donna: Not too much of Belpre in the '50's. It was in the 40's when I went to church over there.

Joan: What was it like in the '40's?

Donna: I just knew it mostly from the church because we were living where we were by Lewis.

Joan: And there was a Methodist Church. Were there other churches?

Donna: Oh goodness yes. There was a Catholic Church, a Baptist Church. Yes, there was that gorgeous Catholic Church. A lot of the people I knew from Belpre were my grandparents age that I grew up knowing. There was another family of Breitenbach that were Methodists, Roy and Esther Breitenbach. They weren't related to the Catholic Breitenbachs. We knew all of them, the Breitenbachs, and the Sette family over there.

Joan: And there was a grocery store over there?

Donna: And a post office and yes, but I do remember most about Lewis. The two blocks in Lewis! When I was growing up, we had a Ford dealership: Baird's and Schnoebelen had a Ford dealership and Carney had a garage there. We had a little café where ultimately Nick Castaneda had a pub. But at that time it was the...B & H (Betty and what was her husband's name? (*Howard*) Anyway, there was a little café here. We had Brumfield's Grocery Store, and we had the Lewis Press. We had a drugstore. The post office was on the corner for a long time. It has since been torn down. On the north side of what's the pub now was a round building that used to be the post office. The bank was across the street over here, you know, where the senior center is now. We had...Mabel Mettling did laundry in the little grey building across here. Hiram Butler was a lawyer. We had Dr. (*F.G.*) Meckfessel; on the east side of the street, Dr. Meckfessel had an office. His house was where the Grubers live now. Dr. Crawford was a dentist. He lived on the street going to the high school. So we had a dentist. Carney's had a Jewelry Store there. That would have been Kaye Carney's husband's, Wayne Carney's, family, his sister, June McClaren. So there was Carney's Jewelry Store on the east side, and again, this would have been north of the old grocery store. So we had Carney's Jewelry Store, we had Dr. Meckfessel's office, and we had a bank, and we had Brumfield's. Pop Barnes had a big drug store across the street. Oh, and I think we had a hardware store there. I can't think of their names. In two blocks, there were a lot of businesses. There really was.

Joan: Did you go to town on Saturdays?

Donna: Yes, Kaye and I. Now this was the generation where it was the good thing to go skating. The Feldman Brothers, Chet and Marvin Feldman, had a skating rink over here in Kinsley. It was out toward the VFW. Kaye and I went skating every Saturday night. We had little felt skating skirts. I still to this day have my roller skates. Shoe skates. But that was our

entertainment, great fun, good fun.

Joan: Did you come over to the movies, or not?

Donna: We didn't go the movies as often as we went skating. It was our Saturday night thing. Grandpa would come drive us over here and sit and watch us speed round and round and round. But you know, it was wonderful fun. I'm going to have to throw in another little story about my skates. Because when Dean was in the care facility over at St. John, there was an east wing on the facility that they weren't using anymore. It was just mostly for storage, it had a long hall. So, I would get Dean down, and I visited with a lot of the residents. I would stay quite late sometimes, and this was not without permission. I hauled my skates over there and I would skate up and down in that vacated hall. Just to practice a lot with my skates. They're semi-precision wheels, so you can't use them on concrete. I had to have a floor to use. So I carried those skates in the trunk of my car. I never will forget the first time I took my car into the Co-op in Lewis to have it serviced, and they popped the trunk open so they could release the airbag. Heath Smith said, "I've never seen skates like this. What kind of skates are these? These are '50's skates!" They made so much fun of my skates.

Joan: Well, I know what kind of skates you're talking about. Shoe skates.

Donna: Yes, that was our activity. I remember skating far more than I do movies. Now Dean and I, like I said, we went to movies when we started dating. My Cousin Kaye met and married her first husband, he was a Feldman. His father was a brother to the Feldmans (*who owned the skating rink*), his father was Earl Feldman. Kaye married Meredith, but we called him Bud. Kaye married Bud Feldma. Anyway, that was the main entertainment.

Joan: Rosetta, do you have some questions for her? We've covered a lot of ground; it sort of just went along. OK, concluding thoughts on the highlights of your life in the last 40 years? Were your children involved in 4-H? And then your singing? We want to get yours about Dean's singing in here.

Donna: I was involved in 4-H, my children were not involved in 4-H.

Joan: You were involved in 4-H!

Donna: Kaye and I. We raised sheep.

Joan: Was that the Lewis? You're the first one around that's been in 4-H.

Donna: Oh really? Boyd should have been. They were, he and his sister, Minnie Lou.

Joan: No, maybe we didn't ask. When you were in school, was there FFA?

Donna: No, there wasn't. Now when Dean was teaching at Riley County, they had a tremendous FFA program. We did have 4-H, but we didn't have an FFA program.

Joan: And you raised sheep.

Donna: Sheep were on our farm.

To try to summarize, being a caregiver, as I have been these last 45 years, I see such a difference in children. When I was growing up, we played outside. You made up your play. Like I said, you built houses out of tumbleweeds; you took sticks and drew houses. We rode bikes; we climbed trees. Kids nowadays, everything is so programmed and set aside for them. They don't know how to play. I look back on those days, you know, when we just made up our own play and just didn't have to have all these mechanized things to play with. It was such a wholesome experience. I had a teacher in college at K-State. It was a creative writing course that I was taking, and the very first thing that he did on the first day of every class, was he challenged himself to go around the room and tell who came from the city and who came from the farm. He contended there was just such an all-together wholesomeness about the farm kids that exuded and there was a street-wise sense that came from the city kids. He was almost always right. I wouldn't change the life that I had for anything because I really do think that it gives you...it just grounds you so. I wouldn't change the way my life was.

Joan: That's my next question: looking back overall, how do you think living in Edwards County has affected your life. I think you just said that.

Donna: I wouldn't change it. I wouldn't change a thing. Even though my life was different, so to speak. The life experiences that I have had, good and bad, have made me who I am and I wouldn't change anything. I wouldn't change a thing.

Joan: OK, we're sort of exploring the declining population after WWII. It's continued to decrease until, I guess, right now. We're sort of leveling off. How have you seen the declining population affect the life of people in Edwards County?

Donna: The younger people do not stay around. Farming is a very expensive venture. If you are not fortunate enough to have inherited some land or you have help to get some land, it's very expensive for people to just get into. They have found that there is life outside of rural Kansas that appeals to so many. It's just so much more difficult for kids to come back home to the farm unless there's an established family farm, and a real desire for them to do it. And to knuckle down, it is hard work, and when you don't have a monthly paycheck coming in, you have to learn to live from crop to crop, season to season. And that's a hard adjustment to make.

Joan: What do you see for the future of Edwards County?

Donna: I hope the pendulum starts swinging back the other way. I truly do. You know it's a great place to be, a great place to live. I can't imagine any place that has any more diverse elements to live in, weatherwise. You know, it makes you strong, forms good character. I hope to see the pendulum swing back, I truly do, with young people coming in and businesses coming in.