

Interview with Elmer LeRoy Sparke

March 16, 2011

Conducted in the Sparke home, Kinsley, Kansas

Interviewers: Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff, Kinsley Library

Joan: What is your full name?

LeRoy: Elmer LeRoy Sparke.

Joan: Where do you currently reside?

LeRoy: 915 East 7th, Kinsley, Kansas.

Joan: When and where were you born?

LeRoy: I was born in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Joan: What were the names of your parents?

LeRoy: My parents were Elmer Ray Sparke and Ada May Zion Sparke.

Joan: And then your grandparents' names, both sides?

LeRoy: My grandparents' names on the father's side were John Raymond and Esther Gray. On my mother's side were LeRoy Zion and "Grandma." And Grandma's name was really difficult, it was Overholser. Her first name was Lily June.

Joan: Can you describe the make-up of your family? Do you have brothers and sisters?

LeRoy: I had one brother and two sisters. My brother's name is John Raymond and my oldest sister is Shirley Carpenter. And then Carole June was the youngest girl's name, and she has passed away.

Joan: Where were you in that birth order?

LeRoy: I was the oldest. I was 4 ½ years older than my brother. My folks were married in '27. They graduated from Manitou Springs, and they lived out there at that time. Dad finished school out there, and of course Mom lived out there. So they graduated from out there. Grandpa was out there then.

Joan: So they both graduated from college?

LeRoy: They both graduated from high school. But he went to work for Platte Weber Oil Company out there.

Joan: What did Platte Weber do?

LeRoy: They hauled fuel up in the mountains, and they had trucks that hauled up there. Anyway, I came along in '29 then. So Grandpa got sick, and he went back to the farm. He had a farm down south of Fellsburg. So that's when we came back from there, and I was only four months old then.

Joan: 1929.

LeRoy: '29, yes.

Joan: So your great-grandparents were from the Fellsburg area?

LeRoy: Yes, they were on Dad's side. My mother's folks and grandparents were from Colorado Springs.

Joan: What brought your dad's, your grandfather's parents to Edwards County?

LeRoy: Like everybody else, they trailed through on about the same trails down through the years. But anyhow, they settled in Russell County, south of the Smokey Hill River. Of course, it was ranch land up there then, they did break out some it, of course. But Grandpa busted rock up there. He made a bunch of those posts (*fence posts made out of local limestone called post rock*). They would take two posts a day and go set fence, on a buck wagon. That's the story I've heard, anyhow. They built some bridges on the smaller streams up there out of that same kind of rock. But anyhow, they were all hard workers; they all were down through the years. They were just workers. But they had a chance; they'd heard about this opening up down here in Edwards County. So in 1900 they came down here and purchased a half-section down there, my granddad did. My Uncle Tommy, who was Dad's half-brother, was up there too, of course. And they came down here built on the houses and property before they brought the family down here. They worked down here a lot during the summertime. And my Uncle Tommy, he had quite a family. But they lived $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile north of us, where we settled down there four miles south and a mile west of Fellsburg.

Joan: What was life like on the farm?

LeRoy: Well, that's all we knew! You had chores and...

Joan: Were you both, did you have animals and grow crops?

LeRoy: Yes, they had cattle and hogs. We provided for ourselves, and we canned a lot of stuff. And in the fall the neighbors would go together, and we'd butcher hogs. We had a big old vat out there, and you'd fill it full of hot water and then scrape the hair off and you know, butcher them. We cured them out and hung them on the north side of the house, that where they hung in sacks up there. Then we'd just get it as we needed the bacon and hams and stuff. It was the same way with the beef. We'd do beef, but then we cold-packed it. You'd put it up in little jars, and you packed it in the jars. Of course, everybody had cellars, and of course the well. They had a well out there, and in the wintertime they'd lower stuff down the well and that's what they used out there. The well had a big tank out there that in the well-house, and the water ran from the well through that and on out to the two tanks that we had out there for the cows to drink out of.

Joan: So that was your refrigerator, the water?

LeRoy: Oh yes, we didn't have...we never even had ice until later on. So yes.

Joan: Did you ever have an icehouse? Did you harvest ice in the wintertime?

LeRoy: No, they brought it around finally, but we didn't do that. There's no river down there, nothing like that.

Joan: So what were your chores as a boy growing up?

LeRoy: Getting in the kindling, the cobs, you know. We'd raise corn and bring a few cobs in to get things going. We had two round bellied stoves: one in the kitchen and one in the living room. Of course, the bedrooms were always cold. We had a lot of comforters then! You always ran in and warmed your pillow up in the wintertime, and then ran to the bed.

Joan: Did you take the hot bricks with you?

LeRoy: No, I heard of that. But yes, that was the good life. We enjoyed it. And sometimes we had big snows. When I was a kid, I remember when we'd sled down on the south side of the house while we came off the peak and then it had a porch roof that just sloped. We went off the house on the south side where the snow whirled up. We used to have some big snows. But we always had plenty to eat because you provided for yourself. You always canned stuff and everything. But yes, it was a...in the wintertime we had this hedgerow out there, tougher than nails. I'd go out there, I'm sure we didn't get off my dad's lot, but we'd go out there with a saw. He'd run one end and I'd be on the other end and saw those trees down and saw them up into logs. He'd do the splitting for us, but I had to get the stuff into the house. That was my job. And another job I can remember, I was always in trouble about...I'd forget to empty...after they started delivering ice in later years, it was my job to keep that pan emptied of water from underneath it. Oh land, pretty soon I'd see it out on the kitchen floor, and uh-oh, I was in trouble. Of course, I'd always spilled most of it before I could get that out. So then I had to clean that up. But we had hogs, and you know.

Joan: Did you have milk cows?

LeRoy: We always had at least four to six milk cows.

Joan: Did you do the milking?

LeRoy: Not when I was young, but in later years, yes I had to do the milking too. We always had, everybody always had, one old cow that kicked real bad. She kicked a harvest hand. We had a harvest hand, of course. It was in harvest, and it kicked him out of the barn one time. So, he wasn't going to do that anymore. Anyhow, it was getting pretty late, and Mom said, "Do you want to try milking the cows?" And I said, yeah, I guess. I didn't want to. But anyhow, I went up there and talked to old Whitey just like Dad talked to her, which was pretty rough sometimes. Anyhow, she never kicked me at all. So from then on I learned how to handle that old cow.

But we did have difficult times with the hogs. We had a number of those hogs around there. In fact, when I joined 4H at 10, I was in 4H for 10 years, and we got up and we had 200 head of hogs running around there. When I bought my first hog, I had to go to the bank to borrow the money! That was part of it, I guess. Forty-two dollars and a half, I gave for that old sow. Well, she came to and delivered a big litter, more than she had table for! She had 13! But anyhow, they did real well. But of course, we'd keep saving the oats and fatten the boars up and sell them, or the other way around. Dad did all that handiwork too. I was good at catching them and throwing them, and we did the work on them. We just did things like that all the time, I mean it was no big deal. Yes, we got dirty and stuff like that. But that was part of the life. You didn't worry about things like that. So we enjoyed it.

Joan: So you raised the feed for the hogs?

LeRoy: Yes, for my part of it, Dad let me have 10 acres. I raised wheat, and I raised feed for the other.

I had a calf to show calves too. So I raised milo and feed. Dad gave me 10 acres, so I had to take care of that. It all had to be separate and everything. But yes, that was part of the training of it. I had to keep books on it.

Joan: And this was dry land farming?

LeRoy: Yes, we dry land farmed all the time.

Joan: What would your yields be?

LeRoy: All the way from hardly nothing up to maybe 20 bushels. Big farm, you know. And the weeds would be so high we'd put a log chain between the lister deals to drag the weeds down sometimes so the dirt would cover them over and have a chance to start rotting and stuff before we had to slide it back. Yes, it was a long siege down at Fellsburg. We farmed three quarters over south of Trousdale that Inez Crabtrees had over there. They came from up in the same neck of the woods, a lot of Crabtrees and Newsoms. There were quite a few of them that settling down in here.

Joan: Were you too young, or do you have recollections of the Dirty Thirties.

LeRoy: Yes. I remember the Dirty Thirties.

Joan: Tell us about them.

LeRoy: They'd come in...we raised our own chicks then, you know. You'd set your own hens. We had coops out there. I remember it drove in from the northwest one time about dark. It would get so bad. We'd take old sheets and crammed them in around the windows and stuff to keep half of the dirt out. We just had kerosene lamps then. We didn't even have Aladdin lamps. We just had little old kerosene lamps and lanterns that we took out to the barn, but we never noticed any difference. That's the way it was until we got an Aladdin lamp. I remember that! Millers and stuff would get in there, and of course you had to put on a new deal (*cloth mantle*) all the time because they'd get down in there blow that. So we'd have to redo that again. But it made a lot brighter light.

Joan: Do you remember grasshoppers or anything like that?

LeRoy: Yes, they came through. We were on the way out to Colorado Springs to see my grandparents one time, and I couldn't believe it. Out here along the border, they were just sticking on the buildings. Just a mass of them sticking on the buildings. There were so many of them. They ate the bark off of everything. There wasn't anything there, they just cleaned it! Yes, I remember that too.

And in the Dustbowl days it covered up machinery and fencerows. What we'd do there where we were at, we'd just put up another fence when the cows would start walking over the fence. We'd just put up another one on top of it. Yes, there were three bad years when Dad, well nobody, raised much of anything. Everybody was in the same boat. Dad went to work for the WPA. We had two horses, and he pulled a fresno (*scraper*) to move dirt. The curve as you're going on the east curve as you go south towards Greensburg, he worked on that until he got that curve built up.

Joan: That's on Highway 183.

LeRoy: Yes, it was old No. 1 then. They did that, and then he worked over by Rattlesnake Creek over by Trousdale. Over there he had to do the same thing. But yes, he'd leave early in the morning and

have to feed the horses and go over there and everything. He left the horses over there, of course. And then it would be late when he came home. That's what we did then. Of course, we got our groceries and stuff, what we needed, at Mr. Nehrt's over at Centerview.

Joan: How do you spell his name?

LeRoy: Oh I don't know. He eventually moved up here to Kinsley, up here south of the courthouse. Anyhow, that guy, he kept everybody in some groceries, their needs, down there that they needed. But it probably got so bad that he needed some money too. So a bunch of the guys had to go in and sign papers, and Dad was one of them. He was able to get some more then. In later years, Mr. Nehrt got a bunch of houses moved in there, or they built some more, and they were built for the teachers down at Centerview. Dad and those guys worked on those things then to kind of help him back on that because that's what people did in those days. They just helped each other. Money wasn't the thing back there. I mean you just helped each other out which was a good thing.

Joan: So during the Dirty Thirties, did your father cut back on raising cattle because of the lack of feed?

LeRoy: That was a survival deal. You didn't carry an excessive amount. Uncle Tommy had six horses up there; he always did have. Because he had some ground and he bought some more ground down south. Ed, his oldest boy, moved down there. Anyhow, the pastures and dry weather got so bad the cactus was just growing up. He had quite a few children then, a lot older than I was, of course. But anyway, they'd go by and have the wagon full of those cactus. They'd take them down there, and they'd throw them in the blowouts where it was blowing down south in the pasture. It was all pasture; they had five quarters down there. So anyhow, I remember doing that. Ed also drug the roads and used a pair to drag with. These little graders you know, that they had in rural area then. He'd drag the road down there. Oh, us boys would go as he'd come by our house. I remember, we'd go out there and grab on to the axle. And the poor horses had to pull harder because we were dragging our feet. But Ed was always good. But yes, life was fun all the time. We'd make us a "T" and get a steel ring that used to come off the outside hubs of the wagons. Anyhow, we'd run them down the road to see who could get the farthest. We'd get them to rolling and keep 'em going. But that was our entertainment. We had great big barns. I mean, we had big haylofts, and we'd go down and get a bunch of feed bundles, and we'd take it back to the back and then you'd drop it. Uncle Tommy had one, and we had one there on our farm too. So everything was inside the barn, feed and grain and stuff for the cattle. But winter times got cold. Sometimes we needed a rope almost to get out to the barn. You couldn't hardly see, it would be blowing through that. And Grandpa planted a lot of fruit trees then, too, so we did have some fruit. But the Thirties were pretty bad. It done away with them, and we never redone it down there. We did up here, of course.

Joan: So where did you go to school?

LeRoy: Well, I went to Fellsburg School down there. I could have been a good student, but I'd rather be out on the farm. Mrs. Grunder, she was a good teacher, I'm sure, but I wasn't going to go to school one time and Mom took me up there. But I didn't go that morning that Mom took me up there. But when I got back home, Dad brought me back, and I never had any trouble going to school after that.

Joan: Did he convince you?

LeRoy: Yes. It took a little convincing. But we all went through that.

Joan: How many kids were in your class at Fellsburg?

LeRoy: There were four in my class at that time.

Joan: Did you go all the way through? Or did you have to move when they consolidated?

LeRoy: Yes. We consolidated, or course.

Joan: Who did you consolidate with?

LeRoy: Well, that district was split. Some of them went to Centerview and some of us went to Trousdale. That's just the way it was.

Joan: Which way did you go?

LeRoy: I went to Trousdale. Jack Sparke went to Centerview, but it closed down, so he graduated from Trousdale, so the last year he had to go over there too.

Joan: What grade were you in when you went to Trousdale?

LeRoy: Well, I'd have been in 7th grade. We only had six grades there, three in one room and three in the other room and two teachers. Then we went down there.

Joan: So you graduated from Trousdale?

LeRoy: No. I went down there a couple years and then we moved up to the farm, up here between Lewis and Kinsley. The Joe Barret farm. Dad bought that and we moved up here then. So, then we was practically on the border in this deal. But we went to Lewis, so I went over there three years and during the time had polio, horrible that polio, and my brother had polio, too. We ended up at Grace Hospital.

Joan: Tell us a little bit about that. Nobody remembers polio in this country.

LeRoy: Well, yes, Dr. Jerrot down there, he was a cripple himself. Grace Hospital down there was full of it. They finally put us clear up on the third floor. But when we first went in, they were doing it down in the basement because they'd hot pack you and everything. You had to do your stretching exercises.

Joan: How old were you at this time?

LeRoy: Oh, I was probably 15 or 16. I thought that I had the flu or something, you know. I was out on a tractor when I got sick. In fact, when I got to feeling better, we had to run a tractor all the time because we farmed so much ground. They backordered for me an 1938 F-30 International. (*The International company was still called McCormick-Deering*). So anyhow, I went back out after dinner and went down the corner west and north half a mile, went and drove off into the field. I started back, it was time to cut the ridges back, that's what I was doing, and I got sick again. I did go back home, but after I got back home, I didn't remember getting up there. So I was looked at pretty close then, so then they knew there was something wrong because I couldn't whistle or anything like that. It was dropping here (*on face*).

Joan: So there was some paralysis on your face?

LeRoy: Yes. So Mom said, "You got polio." So Dad told me to get in the car and to Hutchinson we went. Well, it was just a couple weeks later when they brought my brother John down there. He was having trouble and, well in fact, it was his legs. He couldn't control them.

Joan: So it only affected your face? Not your legs?

LeRoy: Yes. It didn't bother that part at all. So I got to do other things later on. I always had trouble. It just never did come back quite right.

Joan: Was there a lot of polio?

LeRoy: Yes, in fact, in 4H, there were seven of us in the Lewis area that had polio. They treated my oldest sis at home because Mom, seeing there were so many of us down there, the parents took different times to help put the hot packs on us kids down there. They took different days doing that.

Joan: How long were you there?

LeRoy: I was five weeks down there. Anyhow, that's the part of life about polio. But it was a big bunch of us, too.

Joan: What kind of farm of implements were you using at this time?

LeRoy: We listed and sledged back then and tandem disced or single disced. You know, it was sandy ground and they've changed that, thank God. They've got it changed now to no-till farming. It's much better. The ground got to blowing back in the thirties so bad. Everybody'd broke this land relatively new. They were breaking too much out there. And then we went back to leaving strip farming, or we even would hook behind the tractor three of these little old horse drawn deals that went between the rows of corn or planted feed that you listed. Well, at that time, we had these planters that turned and maybe it made a good plant and maybe it didn't, but that's the way it was back in them days. You didn't have these good planters like they have now. Anyhow, we would drill wheat in between that, so that helped prevent the wind erosion and everything. And you know it changed the ground and everything. It made it difficult. And the little eight foot tandem disc, one you just went every third row, it would go down in between those and you'd get the ground raised for the wheat then that way. But after that was down, you just planted over the top of everything. There were just different ways they were trying to take care of the erosion that happened back in the thirties then. They don't moldboard plow like they used to, everything like that just not necessary anymore. We never fertilized. The only fertilizer we done then was cleaning out the barns and the chicken houses and everything like that. We put that on the ground, of course, and scattered that out. That was always the job nobody wanted, but that's all right. Anyhow, we never fertilized, even after we came up north here. We never fertilized. We moldboard plowed a lot, about every third year we'd moldboard plow up here. But the ground was more solid up here.

Joan: What kind of a tractor was it that you used?

LeRoy: This was that F-30 International. Originally, it was about 25 horsepower, and we put it on LP gas. At that time it was about 6 to 6 ½ cents a gallon. That's all it was. And then the big tank on there. That's the way we farmed after we moved up here. That was another thing that showed the difference. Dad bought that 10 foot combine when we were still down in Fellsburg. He bought that up here at Lewis! They had a deal up there where we bought International machinery. He bought that up there for

I think it was \$1,100 or something like that, brand new, Waukesha engine on it. The next year the tractor he was pulling it with didn't work out. It was on lugs, and it didn't work out very good. So then he bought this F-30 International in 1938. He gave \$900 for that, brand new! He'd missed some payments on it, I guess, because of the blowing and everything. He only owed \$450, and they were going to repossess it. Dad, of course, bellered that they wasn't going to take it. Well, they'd have to go back to get the sheriff and a paper so they could get it with the sheriff. So in the meantime, Dad went up to the bank and got \$450 and paid it off. They never come back. But anyhow, it was tough times. And all the fuel, even the little swamp... I was a little, thin kid, but I was pretty tall. Anyway, I'd climb up there, but how did you put fuel in tractors then? We didn't have these tanks. We had 55 gallon drums, and you'd lean it over, by gosh, and run it into this can, this deal that you poured out of. Of course, we had funnels, and then you'd have to get up on the tractor and pour that into the funnel. That's how you fueled the tractor. It was a lot of work. They don't understand now. We scooped all the wheat and everything. That one summer after we were up here, I ran a tractor a lot at night, and then in the daytime we had a hired hand, but I'd catnap and haul the wheat in the daytime. I catnapped in between. But we just had to work long hours. Sometimes we'd just sleep on the load of wheat till the next morning. It was cooler! What the heck, Saturday night was when you got a bath. The little ones were always first, of course, I don't know when the folks bathed. But anyhow, I remember that, and the kitchen floor with the big tub dragged out there. We'd get ready for a bath. We went to church, usually on Sunday morning. We went to a little church over in Red Mound; it was a Quaker church at that time. They always had somebody over there. Then later on it closed down, and we went to the U.B. church over in Fellsburg.

Joan: Okay, you've lived in Fellsburg, farming, and then in Lewis. In Fellsburg, did you have electricity? What did you do there?

LeRoy: No, we never got electricity until after we left down there. Then we came up here. When we moved up here, we had a 32 volt plant, with a motor on it, and we had a wind charger. That was only 32 volt. We had a Cheval deal that we run off of LP gas for a refrigerator up here.

Joan: When did the electricity come to that area?

LeRoy: I'm not sure.

Joan: Was it before the war?

LeRoy: No, it was after the war. Yes, it came through from Pratt. They built it up this way. Now, KP&L did go out here, but it didn't get down our way here. But I think it must have been about '46 or '47.

Joan: Right after the war.

LeRoy: Yes, it was in there sometime because we were up here at the farm up here. I know when we got that. We were so glad to get that.

Joan: How about telephone? Did you have that in Fellsburg?

LeRoy: Yes, that was one of those memory things. A long and two shorts, I remember the ring down here. What the number was, I have no idea. But anyhow there would be eight of us on the line down there. Of course, you had batteries in there, that was the juice that carried it. Sometimes you'd have to

ask some of them to get off the line because you couldn't hear; there were too many eavesdropping on what was going on on the line all the time. It rang on everybody's phone. But anyhow, those were the good old days. That was a crank phone then.

Joan: How about the communities? What was Fellsburg like when you were living there? Trousdale and then Lewis?

LeRoy: The communities down around Fellsburg, we neighbored a lot then. You didn't travel much. In fact, during the bad thirties there, we didn't hardly travel at all. In fact, we got two tires from Hap Craft up here. My gosh, we were about out of tires to go anywhere with on the vehicle.

Joan: What were the stores in Fellsburg?

LeRoy: The grocery store. They had a post office. The little bank had closed when I can't remember. The bank (*building*) is still down there, where the bank was. And of course the garage was always there. The lumberyard was gone. I don't remember that, but they did have a lumberyard down there because that's where Grandpa got a lot of his stuff.

Joan: Was there a café?

LeRoy: No, there wasn't nothing like that. You just went in and they'd slice you off whatever meat you wanted and stuff. It came that way.

Joan: And then Trousdale, was it about the same size?

LeRoy: Yes. It was a little larger than Fellsburg was. As far as what was there, the Aunt Nancy (*Anthony & Northern Railroad*) well, it wasn't called Aunt Nancy till later. But the railroad, it's what settled all those little towns down through there, clear into Pratt. Yes, our neighbor, Ed Johnson, he came down from up there too, in Russell County. But he settled over by Byers to start with, but then he came back. He was just a quarter mile north of us and back in the field a ways, was where he lived. So we neighbored with them a lot, and Charley Bradley. Dad, when he came back, he helped Charley Bradley. He was a mile south of us. Of course, Uncle Tommy up to the north. I mean Ada Bradley I got real bad sick one time, and she walked that whole mile and brought a bunch of stuff. She put a mustard plaster....

Joan: Who was she?

LeRoy: Mrs. Bradley, Charley Bradley's wife. Dad helped him, and he had a farm down there too. And anyhow, she heard that I was sick, and she put a mustard plaster on me one time. And by gosh, it worked! I mean, it broke it up, but yeah, I was... My mom didn't know anything about that. My mother, her mother was a good cook, and she had a lot of dishes and things like that. Well, that's a bunch of them right there yet (*in china cabinet*). She already give the girls some of the things. She loved dishes, so she'd put on out in Colorado Springs there, they'd put on a deal and she'd cook for them. But anyhow, Mom didn't ever learn to cook. She couldn't hardly break an egg when she was married. Grandma just did it all at that time. "No, get out, I'll do it." So anyhow, she had a lot of lessons to learn when she came back to the farm. It was quite a tussle for her.

Joan: So your grandmother wasn't a farm woman.

LeRoy: No, she wasn't.

Joan: So your mother wasn't a farm woman.

LeRoy: No, they had been railroad workers. Some of them ended up big dogs on the railroad. They had been on the railroad side. They were big-boned people, German people. Anyway, she didn't have the chance farm girls had. Grandma Johnson, Ruth's mother, they cared for her mother too. She couldn't talk English very good. Anyhow, she taught mom a lot about how to do things. That's where all the canning come in and everything. In fact, I remember when we'd make sausage. They had a machine, a deal that you'd crank the sausage in. You'd clean up the insides you know, and then you'd crank the sausage in. Well, everybody got to do that, and tying off and everything. But anyhow, Mom thought that was terrible. But heck, it was good! There was nothing wrong with it. But, we weren't sick a lot; really we wasn't back in those days. There were only about three medicines, you know. Castor oil was one of them. They had guys that came around and sold stuff like that.

Joan: You think your mother adjusted to being a farm wife? And was happy?

LeRoy: Yes, I think she finally did. But they finally got up here and things...they said, "You've got to get bigger; you've got to get better." Well, it had been a battle all the way. So she started working in town. Well, she went to work in the hospital up here. We needed more money, you know, us kids were getting up there and needed, you know. So she went to work up here at the hospital over here on 5th street. A lot of them clear from Trousdale even worked up there then. But anyhow, that's how it was there. Then she went to work for the Kinsley Bank. She was, I can't remember his name now, (*Mr. Parker's*) secretary.

Joan: So she was supplementing the income, and then your father. You said he had harvest help. Was that the only help he had besides you boys?

LeRoy: Yes, he never did have but one. He'd get somebody to help in Harvest time. I started in when we was clear over south of Trousdale. That's where I first started. I ran a tractor; I was 13 then. Dad, of course, ran the combine. He threw a lot of handfuls of wheat at me. I was supposed to slow up or speed up or something. But anyhow, I learned, pretty soon, to listen to the motor on the combine. When it got to running pretty free, I was supposed to speed up. And when it would get to lugging down, slow it down. But I learned. Anyhow, that's where I first started running a tractor. I like it.

Joan: So you came up to Lewis, and you graduated in what year?

LeRoy: I graduated from Kinsley.

Joan: How'd you get to Kinsley?

LeRoy: Well, I was traded around. That's another story. Mr. Eggleston, he was the principal over there. He got a little irritated with me. One teacher over there was always sending me up to the office. Anyhow, the health teacher, it was her, it wasn't just me. But I had to go to the office one day, and I waited and waited and waited. Pretty soon, he showed up. He came on in and sat down over there and was doing whatever he needed to do right then, I guess. Pretty soon, he swung around in his chair, and he said, "I don't know what to do with you, really." And I said, "What do you mean?" "Well, you know," he said, "you've been coming up here so much. I guess you can just come to school if you want to, or you don't have to."

Joan: How old were you at this point?

LeRoy: Well, I was old enough to know better.

Joan: 15 or 16?

LeRoy: I would have been around 17 by then. That was after my deal in the hospital. Anyhow, in fact, after I came back I took two English classes over in that one year, I remember. Mrs. Garrison was glad to do that. It was on account of how much I'd missed. I had to redo some of that. So I finished up over that year, but then I came over to Kinsley. I went two more years over here. I took a whole bunch of courses; I took a full course again over here, my fifth year, really because I didn't even have American History. So I had to get all the things like that. That's the reason I spent so much time. I was 20 years old before I got out.

Joan: And graduated what year?

LeRoy: 1949. And then the next year I went to Dodge City Community College and spent a year out there. Then I went into the service.

Joan: In high school, were you athletic?

LeRoy: Oh yes, that's the reason I went to school.

Joan: All the sports?

LeRoy: Yes, I lettered in track four years, and football of course. We was undefeated when we were in football. And basketball, we played on the cement floor at Lewis. In Trousdale, I played over there. Most of them are dead and gone now. I was pretty fast then, and could steal the ball and stuff.

Joan: Were sports an extra-curricular activity?

LeRoy: Oh it always was.

Joan: Someone said they had the last hour of the day for athletics.

LeRoy: Yes, the last two hours over at Lewis, I think, were. Anyhow, they had study periods and recess. It was set up different than it is now altogether.

Joan: And your father encouraged you in athletics and let you out of the farm chores?

LeRoy: Dad, no, you still had your own chores. That was...no, he always encouraged me. Everybody encouraged all us kids. That's one thing parents did. That's another thing I remember. Any older person, it was always Mr. or Mrs. or something. You never called them by their first name. You just didn't do it. Your teacher and all. That was just the thing that parents taught their kids then. You didn't get away with such bad mouthing as they get away with now. It's changed. Now they say you can't do this and you can't do that. But that's kind of the way we learned back then.

Joan: You went to Dodge City Junior College? Did you commute and live at home?

LeRoy: No, I stayed out there. I lettered in track out there. I went after football. I didn't make it out there in basketball. But it was...I run mostly long races. My senior year, I did about everything.

Joan: So how fast were you?

LeRoy: Not very fast. I was quick, but I mostly ran quarters, halves and mile runs.

Joan: What was your mile time?

LeRoy: I don't remember; I bet that's in there somewhere too. Anyhow, on half mile, around 2.2. I don't remember what we run, but it was way up a lot more than five minutes. I don't remember what the heck it was even, then. But I used to like to run. But that's all I did. I played myself for four and a half years, you know. I'd go out there and throw the ball up on the wall and learn to catch it. Dad was gone all the time trying to make a living too, so I didn't have anybody to play with when we were around there for quite a while. Then John came along. John was a studious kid. He never cared about doing things like that as much as I did, it seems like.

Joan: He was probably trying to live down your reputation.

LeRoy: I don't know. My brother made the statement a few years ago, about that. He said, "It seemed like you and Dad always did everything. There wasn't anything for me to do." I said, "Well, I didn't mean to." And I guess that's the reason he felt like he was left out, I guess. I don't know. I missed that. I didn't notice that until he mentioned it here a while back. He worked for Merle Mundhenke for two years; well, I was gone then.

Joan: What was Kinsley like when you were growing up? Let's have a description of Kinsley and what you did for entertainment.

LeRoy: That's where we traded all the time after we moved up here, you know. Yes, we used to come to Kinsley even when we were down in Fellsburg, once in a while. It was a thriving little town then. Gosh, you had any kind of implement you wanted to buy there was a dealer here, and cars and trucks. You could get anything you wanted here. There were what, three grocery stores that I can remember anyway. There were some more meat counters, meat places too. Yes, there were clothing stores. We bought, even after we moved up here, we needed something and she'd just tell Al Akers (*Al's Clothing*), and us boys would go in and get our clothes in there. Of course then Mary (*Fox*) was running Ehlers store. We went in there when Ehlers was too. We'd just go in and get our stuff and then Mom would pay the bill later. Workey's was always good too. He'd have you try britches on, clear down west there. Well, we'd start out with the Sears and Roebuck Catalogue. We got two pair of overalls. Mom made our shirts sometimes. I never did like those shirts that she made. But we bought feed, you know, and we always used those darn feed sacks for whatever. So a lot of women made their girls' clothing out of those too. But them shirts mom used to make, I never cared much for them. But anyhow, shoes. You always got a new pair of shoes to start school.

Joan: What was your entertainment on a hot date in high school?

LeRoy: I never dated. I hardly ever dated. I don't know.

Joan: Did you go to movies?

LeRoy: We never went to movies very little. Once in a while on a Saturday night, there'd be such a crowd there it would be terrible. But you know, the town was full of people until midnight. I mean there were a lot of people. They'd be around visiting, you know. I guess they hadn't seen each other

since the last weekend. But we didn't come up all the time; we traded up practically all together. We all hit the Sears and Roebuck or whatever catalogue we had. The old radio, I remember when Dad first got that radio. It had three big old batteries in the back of that thing, and they didn't last too long either. Those old batteries run awhile, but... And then the well, that was down at Fellsburg. But anyhow, he had to put in a new well down there, the old well went bad. It was just a wooden tower down there, of course.

Joan: I just realized that we skipped over... What is your memory of Pearl Harbor or WWII?

LeRoy: I remember when that happened, but you know...

Joan: Where did you hear about it? Where were you?

LeRoy: I was here or at school. I don't know where I was at, I just remember us talking about it, I thought, gee whiz, where was we at? You know, they were pretty close to us. You know, as a kid, you'd think people 40 years old, they was getting old. But I always had a feeling as a kid, somebody always was in charge. They knew how to do everything, it seemed like, could take charge. But I remember when that happened, gosh, I thought, where in the world was we at? Why would we have all those ships in one place? Of course, the war was going on all over Europe, but when we got hit, that was quite a shock.

Joan: Did it affect your family in any way? You had no relatives that had to fight. Do you remember rationing and that sort of thing?

LeRoy: Well, yes, I remember that. That's when we had trouble getting tires. And we needed two tires bad, we was still down in Fellsburg then. Hap Craft only got a hold of two tires. We was in bad shape. We ate some jackrabbits and things like that.

Joan: Do you remember the jackrabbit hunts?

LeRoy: Yes, I was in on it there south of Lewis. Jackrabbits had took in four sections there. They let guys out and we kept walking in, and they had this pen and they run them over in there. In doing so, they got three coyotes too, but they shot them for us. Anyhow, then you just went in there and clubbed them down. Killed them that way.

Joan: And then what happened to the rabbits?

LeRoy: Well, they took their skins or whatever they did with them, I don't know. I don't know who was in charge of that, but it happened out there a mile or two south of Lewis.

Joan: About what year would that have been? How old were you?

LeRoy: Gee whiz, how old was I? I don't know. Everybody was there. I was 11 or 12 years old, I suppose. I can't remember. I just have no memory of that. But I remember, I thought that was a slaughter. I seen them doing it.

Joan: Did it bother you?

LeRoy: It did when it first started, but then it was just a thing that had to be done. They were eating the

bark off all the trees and everything, even the shelterbelts, that's another windbreak thing. They had a tool up here; you got it from the Extension Office. It had a wheel on it and a deal that you run it down through, and go in and out around all them trees. Dad would run that thing and I'd run a tractor down through there pulling it. We worked all the shelterbelts that way, and then we had a little disc that we pulled down there. After they put those belts out, then we worked a bunch of those belts.

Joan: Was it just to keep the weeds down to give the trees a chance?

LeRoy: Yes, the only water they got was what the good Lord gave us, that was it. Yes, that was another thing that we worked. Where were we? Oh yes, about the war days. You asked about the shock of that, I hadn't paid a lot of attention about the war over in Europe until then. But when that hit, I thought, "Gee, that's pretty close to home." Then it turned into such a terrible tragedy. Of course, in later years I worked for Lester Peterie out here. He was a prisoner of war for 18 or 19 months. The death march and everything he went through. But I worked for him. I covered a lot of this country driving tractor, and I worked for a lot of different people, clear down through Trousdale...

Joan: So by the end of the war, you were a teenager. Were you thinking at that time that you might have to go to war?

LeRoy: I never thought about it then, but see, I went to Dodge City Junior College in '50, and it (*Korean War*) broke out. They needed help pretty bad, the thing of it is. They was drafting then. Anyhow, after I finished that year, I knew I was going to get drafted, so I never went back.

Joan: Okay, so let's go on then. When you were drafted, that was in '51, right?

LeRoy: Yes.

Joan: Where did you go for your basic?

LeRoy: Well, I was inducted at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Then I went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I was in the combat engineers down there. That's setting up bridges and things ahead of the troops and stuff and bearing points and things at that time. That's how we...our artillery, we could tell where it was coming from, but we had to wait in lines out ahead of our troops and stuff so they could move on. Anyhow, we spent 14 weeks there, and then we went to, or joined up with the airborne unit, I and another guy. He was from Coldwater.

Joan: Why did you do that? Why did you make a change?

LeRoy: Well, he talked me into it. He said, "Man, that thing's \$50 a month more!" Well, we didn't make much money, you know. So I said I didn't care. I was already in good shape. I was always in pretty good shape, as an athlete. Anyhow, we joined up and went down there. He flunked out, he didn't make the physical. I made it, so anyhow I went ahead and stayed in. I went down to Fort Benning, Georgia, took my jump training down there.

Joan: How did you feel about jumping out of airplanes? Did it scare you?

LeRoy: No, not the way they do it. They start you out on a little platform jump, make a good PLF, (parachute landing fall) fold up right. Then you go to four foot, then six foot, and then you jump out of a mock tower. It's something like an airplane, and then you run down this cable onto the sawdust. But

the hardest part of what I did was, every time you made a mistake, it was a mile around these four towers and you made another lap around the deal, or pushups. Anyhow, that's how you got it, and yes, I've done a lot of pushups. Every time you made a PLF, it was, "All right, give 10, give 10 more."

Joan: What's a PLF?

LeRoy: Parachute landing fall. Of course, then we just had 46 and 47 jump planes where we were.

Joan: What's that mean?

LeRoy: Well, that's the type of airplane it was. Anyhow, you could jump out, they could run two out each door you know, two sticks out. Two platoons, there'd be 16 of us in there they'd jump two out. The prop blast on them was terrific when you'd first go out because they're a two motor job. That prop blast really hit you. One time, it tore my gun loose, they call it a piece. But anyhow, I tore it loose, and my leg, you tied that up with string wrap that was supposed to hold it. Either I didn't get it tied good or something. That gun came loose and hit me in the helmet. It come off and hit me because you've got it on your belt too. It hit me in the helmet. Well, it turned me in the air. Well, I knew, mercy me, and when that parachute opened then, it really flopped me around the other way. I never did forget that. But anyhow, that's how you learned all of that. Then I got hurt up there, jumping at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I was stationed there with the 82nd Airborne.

Joan: Were you on your way to Korea?

LeRoy: No, they never did go. I got hurt in a jump down south. We were jumping in another jump zone. It was another one of those massive jumps, Bill John (*Bidleman*) knows what they're like, too. He got it down in Texas. But anyhow, it was a massive jump, and I was in a headquarter outfit, but we were some of the last to jump. Somebody got on top of my chute and I didn't know it until...I should have checked it before...he was clear down on my chute folding me up. I knew I was falling fast, but there's so many chutes, you know. And I should have grabbed the other chute. I could have went down on his risers if I'd have just checked my folds. But I didn't do it. After I missed his risers, then I looked up and saw what the deal was. Man, I'm going down by the treetops. My reserve, that's out. The only good thing you can think about is make a good parachute landing fall. I did all right until my butt hit, and I busted my back. It split my vertebrae. You know, I got fixed up and walking.

Joan: What hospital were you at and how long was your recovery?

LeRoy: I was right there, thank God. There was a huge hospital right there at Fort Bragg. I was right there and spent quite a little time in what's called "Tiny Town." That's where they rebuild you and get you going. When I went back, I wasn't able to go back into the Airborne, then. So they sent me to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. That's where I ended up in over down there. I worked down there and started in the reception center until one time I got into it down there with an old boy. He wasn't too happy with me, they all took off one time and I sent a kid over, and here come a whole bunch of damned orders. Silent orders, and I said, "Good Lord. Who in the world?" so we didn't do it. We just took off and went to town too. The rest of them all went to the ball game. So we took off and went to town. So the next morning, they weren't very happy. They said I should have done that. Well, I didn't do it, so I ended up the last three months, they wanted to give me a tough job. Well, tough job my foot. I didn't like that either. Anyhow, I ended up doing the mail in Company C. So I did the mail. And we were...every month, they'd recruit a lot of guys, from 700 to 900 go through there. And that's what we had to do. It was mostly forwarding mail. You're not supposed to route a lot of mail, but yes it was

terrible that month, and I got caught twice doing that. “Well, I’ll just go out and get me some recruits!” I kind of looked down the table, and I gave ‘em a bunch of this mail. And of course, you know, they were supposed to readdress them darned things. Well, they told me a couple different times about that. And I said, “Well.” They had footlockers full of back mail when I went there. They hadn’t had nobody for a while, I guess. Well, it ain’t long until you get an ungodly lot of mail piled up. So I said, “How do you expect me to get this done?” Well, you know, that’s not the reason, so I said OK. Anyhow, when I left there, there was none left in footlockers. And the other guy didn’t have all that to go through. But I had to go back through reassignment orders and make out a lot of cards and things before you could readdress this stuff. They hadn’t even been doing that. I was unhappy with all that, but I guess that’s how I got my mail business interest from. Ronnie (*Sidebottom*) come over and jumped me when they needed some help one day, and I said, oh naw. But anyway, I gave in, and almost 11 years I spent at the post office here.

Joan: When did you start that? Here at the post office.

LeRoy: Oh, let’s see. When was that? I don’t remember, I’d have to look up that too. I kept all that, it’s all in a drawer in there too. I think, I’d say I was probably about 42 maybe.

Joan: So somewhere in the ‘60’s.

LeRoy: Yes.

Rosetta: I remember you as the postmaster.

LeRoy: No, a city mail carrier. I took a disability. My back got to raising heck with me. I’ve had two back operations, and it got to bothering me again, and I got out. I took a disability from the post office. It doesn’t pay nearly as much, but that’s alright. I draw 100% service disability.

Joan: Okay, so you got done with your stint in the service. And you came back here and worked for your dad, I think you told us earlier. And somewhere in there, you’re going to meet your wife.

LeRoy: Oh yes, well, my dear wife and her mother, was a good cook. She worked at the lunchroom, and made meals for different Rotaries....

Joan: What lunchroom?

LeRoy: Up here at the Northside school. Well, when they built that, yes. She and Mrs. Smith and then Mrs. (*Mabel*) Schroeter, she helped her. That’s what she did. She hurt real bad. She just popped little pills all the time. Her husband, she lost him in a bad wreck, and she was boogered up pretty bad. Anyhow, that’s what she had to do. She had a lot of children. She worked a lot of jobs. She got so sick, and Ethel was working up at Topeka in the State house, and running machines up there and doing real well, but she was the only one that wasn’t married. So she felt like she needed to come home and take care of Mom. So she came home and went to work for Dr. Atwood. He had just come to town and was up overhead where Al’s Clothing was. He was up overhead there, then. She worked for him, and we met out at the skating rink. We liked to go skating at that time. Feldman brothers had a skating rink out here, Marvin and Chet. So we skated out there a lot. Yes, I knew her. I never did see her up at Topeka. I used to go down to the drugstore down there during the break in school. The day she went down there, I guess I didn’t show up that day. So anyhow, that’s how we met, down here at the skating rink, most of the time.

Joan: But then you got married and moved home.

LeRoy: Yes, we took off from there because I didn't have any money, and she didn't have any either. So I said, "That's all right, we'll just go down here." So I had that old black Chevrolet; I had an old '48 Chevrolet. So we went down there and got married. She always tells the story, she said, "Yes, we got a new car after we got married." And we did, a '55, I bought a '55 Chevrolet. We drove it for quite a few years. But anyhow, we was young then. I haven't got that much guts to go and do stuff like that anymore. When you're young, you don't worry about things like that, I guess.

Joan: What were you doing when you married her? What was your job?

LeRoy: That was when I was working for Harley Thompson.

Rosetta: That was the lawyer.

LeRoy: Yes, he and Marvin, he used to come down, but he didn't carry a lot of books. He'd come down and I'd have to look something up for him sometimes. He was a comical sort of a guy. I worked for him about a year, and Dick Fox came over then. He was working for C.O. Mammal's Food Store, and they were needing some help. So I said, "Well, I guess it would be all right." I was going to make \$54 more. I worked 54 hours for \$1.00 an hour. That's what it was back then. And so I got \$54 before anything was taken out there.

Joan: What did you do at Mammal's?

LeRoy: I worked mostly in stocking and I worked produce. That was the main thing I was supposed to do. Harold Lear came, and he went off on vacation, and something happened. He was gone one time, and they sent some kid down from St. John to manage it. That didn't bother me, but Swede came in there one evening, and he was aggravated as all get out because the produce wasn't up like it should be. He needed more of this and he needed that, and we'd be tearing it all up first. You always had to take everything out and clean all that before you leave every Saturday. Anyhow, he got mad about it and I didn't put up with that either. So anyhow, he fired me, right there. So I just walked out. Well, old Harold, he was unhappy about that. But that was all right. I went down and went to work for Bob Weidenheimer down at the store down the street, where the paper is now. I worked for them until...well, I helped move back over to the new store. But, then I worked for Cross Manufacturing about five years.

Joan: What did you do there?

LeRoy: I ran two automatic lathes. The big machines that you have to turn and set all of it up. I ran backs and pistons at that time.

Joan: About how many people worked for Cross at that time?

LeRoy: I have no idea. I don't know, there were really quite a few. Yes, there was a lot of them working up there then. Shorty (Clarence) Johnson was in the tool room. He'd sharpen the tools for us, and then we had to reset all our own tools.

Joan: How did you get trained for that job?

LeRoy: Right there on the job. Oh, I can't think of his name now; he's gone too. He trained me how to do it and everything. About every 30 seconds, they'd kick out another part. One would set this way and another would set over here, I'd just chuck that one up and put it in the can. It was just routine, the same thing all the time. That's where I got to smoking too many cigarettes. You always had a cigarette in your hand, it seemed like. Gosh darn, or in your mouth.

Joan: When did you get started smoking?

LeRoy: I got started smoking when I was in the airborne, down there. I smoked for about 30 years and I was up here when my dad had problems and seen the trouble he went through. That came from smoking too darned much. He had cancer. It just went all through him. I quit in '81. Like I said, I smoked about 30 years.

Joan: Now were you and your wife living in Kinsley all the time?

LeRoy: Yes, we lived in Kinsley for quite a while. When we first got married, we moved in with her mom because that was the reason she came home to start with. But then when the seed came along, we moved back along 4th Street in one of those duplexes. We moved around quite a few places. Block south of the school, I don't know how many places we did live in until we bought this place. Well, we lived out on the farm. After Dad moved into town, we moved out there. Well, that was when I was working at Cross.

Joan: About what time were you working at Cross'? What years were they, about?

LeRoy: There you go again. I don't remember.

Joan: Did you have all your children at that time?

LeRoy: No, we didn't. I think there was, maybe, I don't think Peggy was born yet. It was probably in the late '50's or '61 or '62 maybe until then. I expect we moved back in here then. She never liked to farm, though. Well, she didn't drive, you know. She doesn't drove yet today. But I couldn't get along without her. She helps me with all my paraphernalia and what I have to do. She's very good at it.

Joan: Where were your children born?

LeRoy: They were all born here in Kinsley. Dr. Atwood. She never messed around. In fact, I missed Brian, I believe it was. I was running a truck out here for (Lee) Strawn. We were putting ensilage in the silo, and I was running a truck out there for them. Lee came out and said, "You're wanted in town! your wife said." And I said, "Oh my gosh." So I went up town, and yep, she was in there, sure as the world. And I said, "Gee whiz, I'm dirty as all get out. I'll run home and get cleaned up." But I didn't get cleaned up and back before he was already here. But I was up there, and I helped. In fact, When Steve was born, I gave her some oxygen and stuff every once in a while when Dr. Atwood was having three babies up there all at the same time: Brown, and her and somebody else, I can't remember who it was. Anyhow, they were wall to wall. So he just had me stand in there. I did that, and he did the rest of it. Yes, that's how it was.

Joan: We should maybe mention that Mr. Sparke has six children. Steven was born in '55, and then Scott, Shelly, Brian, Douglas, and finally Peggy Sue was born in '64.

LeRoy: I'm not sure. '64 or '65.

Joan: About ten years worth.

LeRoy: It was something like that. I think Scott was only 13 months or something like that after Steven was born.

Joan: I don't know if you remember during that time, the kids were going to school here in Kinsley, or maybe Lewis part of the time, right?

LeRoy: They all went here.

Joan: So they were always in Kinsley.

LeRoy: Dad janitored Southside Schoolhouse. He worked at the school for nine years. Mom, after she left the bank, worked for Mr. (*Lee*) Parker. She was secretary for Mr. Parker. Then Mr. (*Harold*) Dawson got her to come over there and she worked there for 11 years. She kept books and everything.

Joan: What did Mr. Dawson do?

LeRoy: He was superintendent of schools and made something like \$12,000 a year, I think. But you know, people didn't make money then.

Rosetta: Mr. Dawson was superintendent and principal. And your mother did everything. She was the only secretary for the whole school district.

LeRoy: She did. She did a lot of it.

Rosetta: And she worked late and came in early.

LeRoy: Carol, my youngest sister, she's passed away now, but she was kind of like that. It didn't matter, she worked down at Wichita for a while and just anywhere, it didn't matter. One more job didn't matter, it seemed like. She was able to do it. But I kind of get in a pattern myself.

Joan: When did you get TV? Did you have it at your home? Or later? Did you have it when you were still living on the farm before you went to Korea?

LeRoy: Yes. Oh yes, we got TV in about 1951. In fact, we had TV here right after the electric come through, maybe.

Joan: The electricity was so late; it might have been right on top of that.

LeRoy: That's when we got TV out there.

Joan: What changes did you see? Of course, by now you were pretty much not farming, I guess.

LeRoy: No, I farmed...

Joan: What changes have you seen in farming in the '50's and the '60's? As opposed to when you were growing up? We've already talked about fertilizer...

LeRoy: Yes, they did it so much different. It's a lot better now, but it's a lot more expensive. You know, it's a much better way, but this is the thing that always bothers me, and I'm bad about I guess. Because our country...we spent more than we were able to produce. We're not worth what people wanted. Back in those days, you know, we survived. We took care of our needs and things like that. Everybody looked after their needs. But, nowadays the biggest thing is that we missed teaching our kids is the value of living. We've forgotten what we were really put on earth for, to help each other and love our neighbor and everything. We've got completely away from that. I think that's the biggest thing that really bothers me. Farming, yes, it has improved. But big business always comes to a full house. What happens when big business comes to a full house? Everything goes down. Back in the Dust Bowl days, the banks closed. They just closed the banks. There were a lot of little banks then you know. Well, we've come around. Us people had to pull the banks out again. For what reason? I use a spiral notebook each year. I keep all my stuff in one spiral notebook. I keep them in drawers. That's all I use. I don't have any trouble keeping my business straightened out. I don't understand how people can get so far in or want something they really don't need. Their needs need to be changed. I think that's the biggest thing that makes me feel bad about. We've taught our generations the wrong things. Reading, writing, arithmetic is the main...all this extra stuff, that's extra in life. But you have to know computers. Weston (Steimel, Leroy's grandson) works up at Manhattan now. He's got a job there in Manhattan, working with computers. That's what he's staying with now. That's Peggy's oldest boy.

Joan: Okay, we've got our declining population. Where are your children? Are any of them in this area?

LeRoy: Yes, Brian is here in town, of course. He and his wife run the Colony Greenhouse. He works for the county out here too, and does yard work. But anyhow, Scott is in the insurance business in Kiowa, County, but he sells insurance everywhere. They built a new house over here between here and Lewis, after their house was demolished down in the Greensburg in the tornado down there. Steve, our oldest boy, is out at Garden City. He went 20 straight months at Pittsburg State and learned this heating and air-conditioning down there. He stayed with it all the way, and he works for Webber's out there in Garden City. But he's over the guys that work out in the field. He does all that. And the people who gripe about paying their bills and stuff, he settles all that. But he's of course married, too. Let's see, who else....

Joan: Shelly?

LeRoy: Shelly. She worked down at the bank in Hutchinson for years. Then she got a chance to get in with Silver Dollar City. (*She lives in Kimberling City, MO and works in the offices at Silver Dollar City.*) She wanted to go down there to live, so she went down there in 1996 and worked in the accounting department keeping books. Now, she changed and works in the merchandizing office. She has to see that they get the new stuff into Silver Dollar City. She's into all that. She got out of all the bookkeeping. Her husband works in the heating and air-conditioning business. He makes all their duct down there. They're involved in a lot of things.

Joan: Douglas?

LeRoy: Douglas, yes. He had friends here in Kinsley. He and the Frame boys, and we had a lot of them around here. It was a good thing when Doug finally went up to Kansas City. My brother and his wife were teaching school in the Shawnee Mission School System, so he went up there and started a shingling business up there. Doug and my brother worked up there on their days off in the shingling business, and did quite well. He finally got out of that and got a chance to get in with a guy up there that

did the insulating for hospitals and big boiler rooms and different things like that where they have to have insulation done. He never has taken the old asbestos off. He don't do that part of it. He just redoes it. So anyhow, he worked up there for that outfit for quite a few years. His wife got a job back in Indiana. She was working out there too, but it was such a crazy money thing that she had to go back and change jobs. So Doug said, "Okay, I can find a job anywhere." Well, he did. He found a job back there in Indianapolis. He's been at it ever since and he's got 80 guys working under him. They do the same thing putting insulation in buildings and hospitals and stuff like that. That's what he does.

Joan: How about Peggy?

LeRoy: Peggy, she's Peggy. She has three children and they're all very studious kids and have done very well.

Joan: Where does she live?

LeRoy: She lives in Hoyt, Kansas, now. It's 11 mile north of Topeka. She works for the State. She travels around different places and makes sure they're doing their business right and that they've got their schooling. That's her job now.

Joan: So your children have settled half and half. Some have stayed here in western Kansas, and some have left.

LeRoy: They've gone where the jobs have taken them. All of them have survived all right. Scott's done very well, but he's had to do a lot of schooling. Every week he's going to meetings all the time. It's just the way life is, everything's being changed, you know.

Joan: What other changes have you seen in Edward's County? Being that you've been all over it in a way, growing up in the 50's and 60' and things since then.

LeRoy: The thing that's sad, when I was kid, there was a property on pretty near every corner. If you had a half section, you were doing good! There were a lot of people all through there. Of course they were just getting started. Now, it's so sad. It's just big farms. I've got a grandson working out there. They farm 32, 33 to 34 quarters or something like that now. Less than 11 irrigation systems, I mean they're working on machinery all the time and have motors to change on the systems. It's a madhouse, but yes, he makes good money. It's a need that we have to have, but what's going to happen pretty soon? I keep looking, and I'm supposed to not worry, but I've seen this happen in my lifetime, before. At some point, and it's going to be through technology, that's what they thrive on, technology so much. These kids are going to have to know this because that's our future. We've done everything there is around the Earth. Now the ocean floor, we don't know a lot about the ocean floor yet. But you know, space and everything, yes, space has brought us into stuff. But right now we need technology. There's many people on this Earth that we live on, and we've got to figure a way that we don't do away with everybody and yet furnish enough food and things that people are able to survive. You cannot keep making bigger and bigger money. I don't care how you do it. If you get millions more people, they have got to have some kind of living. The only thing that supports things like that is what we're worth, if we're not able to make something worth something. So where does this come in? There's only so many dollars. That's what gets me.

Joan: What do you see for the future of Edwards County in regards to the technology and the bigger farms?

LeRoy: It's all right. I mean we'll survive out here a lot better eventually than the people back east. There's so many of them and so many towns because we're used to this. Just us worrywarts that worry about it I guess. But yes, we'll get along out here, but don't you think that we've got to quit this irrigating. We've only got so much water, and this is the thing that I think we should strive on. We've got to learn how to raise this stuff and not have to pump all this water all the time. I think we've got to learn because that's hard to replace. When that water's all gone...I mean, that happened to Indians when they came down through here. They always had to move on, that's the reason they migrated too. So eventually, if we let that happen, that's what's going to happen. Keep planting this corn. We know that when people first came out here, there were no trees out in this country at all hardly, just a few. Down through the years, that helps out and hopefully the rain and things will eventually come up. Pasture ground is what makes the streams. We were down here in the south not too long ago, we like to drive down there. We were down in those little towns, and it is still running down there because of the pasture ground. Here, the Arkansas won't even run. Farming does away with that. It doesn't reserve the moisture like pasture ground does. So, hopefully, we need more pasture ground right today. They've been going down in there for years. But anyhow, these are the things that we always have to keep ahead. Our children, I don't know where they're going to end up. We need industry, that's the thing that we need, even in Kinsley, Edwards County. See, we have not one car dealer, not one machinery dealer. We've got Circle K Auto Parts, that's in Edwards County! This is a farming/ranching community. Where did we lose out? What's happened? Well, see, there again, big business is buying direct, big quantities. That leaves the little guy out. So, what kind of an industry do young kids start in anymore? It's like going down here on Saturday morning to bake pies and stuff like that. I mean, that's something like this and little things like that, maybe get you started and if you like to do it that's fine. That's the only thing I know to do. I mean, if the kids...all kids are not made to be smart. But they like doing things. Everybody needs jobs, that's all there is to it. Everybody needs jobs, and the kids today, across the way, some of them don't have jobs. But I don't know what you do. I always thought that when they put that law in that you couldn't work a kid until he is sixteen, if you don't work him until then, he's already set in his ways! That was foolish, that was crazy. About not harming a kid, I always thought that was the reason we had courts for, to handle those situations. If they were being abused, well, that's not right. You don't have to do that. Our court system (not the one here, but I mean around in general) I feel like they've failed us in a lot of ways. So have our congress and senators and our other forms of government. As far as presidents concern, we've had trouble with pro's and con's with all of them. I don't care for it. I don't like politics. I'm a Republican, but that don't matter because I like a chance to get ahead, and I don't like a lot of rules and regulations. But too many of the people anymore, there is no rules and regulations to...the millionaires, crybabies, I call them, on Wall Street, that get million dollar raises. Well, who's worth a million dollars? Nobody. Nobody is worth a million dollars. I don't give a hoot how many houses they have; that's not right. But we have no way to control it and the CEO. There's no control. And you get in the oil business, that's been growing rapidly forever, and they still have guts enough to come out and put that in papers how much they've make each quarter. Yet, how are we going to buy a gallon of gas. So these things bother me a lot. It's a big change, but you see that all small towns are dwindling away. I've seen it all down through the line where I used to live. They're gone. They'll all be gone through here one of these days. I don't know just where we'll end up. Eventually, I'm a guy that thinks everything revolves. Everything goes around, the Earth, everything, the bad season and the catastrophes that we're having. Even Australia this year got drowned. Their wheat crop's no good. And Japan, terrible things happened (*catastrophic earthquake*). But it's happened all around. Well, eventually it's going to roll on around, and we'll be wet here again. I mean, you know, it's not too bad, but it has been a little dry around here, western Kansas especially. But everything revolves around and you just have to do your farming and everything accordingly. Big business is hard to plan anymore because of the changing times. Everything is always changing. I guess, I have talked on so much changing. But we live in a changing world, and there's no

way out of it. So that's the way I feel about it. The Good Lord gave us things on earth to work with, and we've kind of abused ourselves in our way of doing things down through the years. We've just kept getting worse and worse.

Joan: Is there anything else that you would like on this tape about your life that we haven't brought up? Have we covered it?

LeRoy: No, I've had a good life. I've been in a lot of hospitals and had a lot of operations, and I'm never going to have no regrets about any of them. It's always been good, and my care has always been great. I always try to be a good patient, but I think I must have been...I think the Good Lord has helped me a lot of times.

Joan: And you stayed in Edwards County.

LeRoy: I've been here ever since...

Joan: A good place to have lived?

LeRoy: Yes, oh yes. We've been on a lot of trips around, after we got started going. We spent 13 years wintering down in Texas, and a lot of summers we've spent out in Colorado and various places. But you know, you get close to here and you're always glad to get back home. It's just a different life. It's a good life out here, it's just... We just need more things for the young people to be involved in or get to doing. I don't know. Everything's got too much emphasis on, "It took too much money." Both parents had to start working, and that kind of lost control of the family and everything like this. We, as people, wanted too much. That's all. That's it. Someday we'll get it figured out.