

## **Robert Weidenheimer interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas**

This is an interview with Robert Weidenheimer, part of an oral history project entitled "Patchwork of Dependency: The Effects of WWII on Edwards County, Kansas" conducted by the Kinsley Public Library. The project was supported by a Kansas Humanities Council Heritage Grant. Robert talks of his family, education, military career, and the home front during WWII.

Creator: Weidenheimer, Robert Russell

Date: March 19,2009

Callnumber: 2010-176.01

KSHS Identifier: DaRT ID: 227292

Item Identifier: 227292

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## Robert Weidenheimer interview, WWII oral history, Kinsley, Kansas

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**Interview with Robert Weidenheimer**  
**March 19, 2009**  
**Conducted at the Bob home, Kinsley, Kansas**  
**Interviewers: Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff**  
**Present at the interview: Nancy Weidenheimer, spouse**

Weaver: This is an interview with Bob Weidenheimer.

Bob: Bob Weidenheimer.

Weaver: and, Weidenheimer. See, that's okay, messed up, Weidenheimer.

Bob: Not Weisenheimer, Weidenheimer.

Weaver: And this is Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff, are interviewing, Rosetta, you want to sit over here for purposes of questioning so we can hear. It is March 19, 2009 and we are in Bob's home at 203 Elizabeth. Okay Bob could you tell us your full name?

Bob: Robert Russell Bob.

Weaver: And I guess we already said where you reside. When and where were you born?

Bob: Born in Hutchinson August 11, 1931.

Weaver: And what were the names of your parents?

Bob: My father's name was Dean. My mother's name was Louise.

Weaver: And your grandparents?

Bob: My grandfather's name was Louis and my grandmother's name was Emma.

Weaver: And what were their last, Emma's last name?

Bob: Weidenheimer.

Weaver: Well, what was her maiden name?

Bob: Her name, maiden name?

Weaver: Maiden name.

Bob: Freeborn.

Weaver: Well maybe, I guess your mother's maiden name, do you remember that?

Bob: Her maiden name was Russell.

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Weaver: That's where you get your middle name from.

Bob: Right.

Weaver: Can you describe the household that you grew up in, you know, brothers, sisters, or that sort of thing?

Bob: I'm an only child. That explains that in a nutshell. Well, I grew up mostly in a grocery environment, store environment. Dad also had been a school teacher. He was a superintendent for two different high schools, when I was a youngster, a little youngster. Mostly I've been a grocery man, a caste system butcher most of my life.

Weaver: Where were the grocery stores at?

Bob: Grocery store here in Kinsley, been here since 1919 basically. He and his brother had taken it over from their father in about 1928, and dad came back here a little bit later then that, I think I was about four years old when he got involved back here in Kinsley. He was a superintendent of the high school in Raymond.

Weaver: So your grandfather had a store.

Bob: We had the first, the store was originally here in, down where Dottie's shop was. It was just a meat market.

Weaver: When did your grandfather start that?

Bob: It was started in 1919 I think when they came to Kinsley from up in Washington County on a farm up there.

Weaver: He'd been a farmer before that?

Bob: Well they, yeah, farmed and had nine children. They all grew up in that house, most of them except my dad, down where Arensman lives on Main Street. That big house they got it painted blue now. Next to Arnold Kamphaus house.

Weaver: You know the address of that house?

Bob: Can't think of it right off hand, but that's the old Weidenheimer house, not the first one they lived in here, that's the one that I knew most of my life, all my life. (516 E. 6<sup>th</sup> St.)

Weaver: So there were nine children?

Bob: Nine children and they are all gone, yeah.

Weaver: And he had been a farmer and then came here.

Bob: Well, had been a farmer; they'd come up here from Washington County. They stopped in Lyons for awhile, had a meat market, and then maybe another one in some other little town I can't remember. They ended up here in Kinsley in about 1909, somewhere in there.



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Graff: 1909 or 1919.

Weaver: 19 you said originally.

Bob: Hey Nancy, when did Weidenheimers stay right here in 1909?

Nancy: 1919.

Bob: 1919. See I told you I need help.

Weaver: Well, but you were right the first time.

Weaver: We just confused you.

Bob: Lie a few years; it helps. Dad always told me that the truth made a poor story.

Weaver: So okay, grandparents were here and then your dad was one of nine children and when did he marry or leave or you know, how

Bob: Well, he kind of left; he was in the later part of World War I, and he was, he got his degree. I think at Pittsburg. He went to school and worked his way through school down in Pittsburg in a meat market. And then from there he went to superintendent of the high school I think in Ellington, Missouri where he met my mother. Way down in the Ozarks. And they came back to Kansas, and he was superintendent of the high school in Raymond. That's when I was born in Hutchinson when he was superintendent of the high school in Raymond. And then when I was about four years old, they came to Kinsley.

Weaver: Okay, so he got a degree in education?

Bob: Oh yeah. Uh huh.

Weaver: And then he took over his father's business?

Bob: He and his brother eventually took over, Louis, the old man's business, yes.

Weaver: And the brother's name is?

Bob: Maurice was here all the time. Maurice, a little short man with a big gray mustache. She remembers him. But he was a bachelor that never married. And they decided to start another store later in Harper. Maurice got drafted because he was single and he was a bachelor at the time, or something like that. Being single and they got hard pressed for recruits and they drafted him. And so they sold the store in Harper, and we came back here.

Weaver: Maurice was running this store and your dad was in Harper?

Bob: Right, yes, in Harper. And when Maurice was going to have to go to the Army, he had to close this place here, which is where the old newspaper office is uptown now. Was, yeah, it is now. And we came back here. And Maurice had been drafted, and they had sent him away. They closed this store when Maurice was going to, in pretty short order, was going to get out. And so dad taught school here a year. When we came back here he taught in Kinsley.

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Weaver: What did he teach?

Bob: He taught history and mathematics, math.

Weaver: So when you came here, how old were you?

Bob: Came back?

Weaver: Yes.

Bob: I think I might have been, I think I remember going to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade up here when we came back. We left here, like it was about the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and then we came back.

Weaver: So you were at Harper about three years?

Bob: About two and a half. I think we came here, I told Nancy I think about the latter part of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but I'm not sure. I had Gale Graff. I think I was here a whole year in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. We lived down there in that neighborhood across from Jerry Wilson's old house on the corner, the old gray house. And dad taught school that winter, and then the next year we opened the grocery store again. That's all I've known every since, I guess, just about.

Weaver: Okay, so what, do you have some memories about the depression and the Dust Bowl days?

Bob: Living in Harper I certainly do. Yeah. Had lots and lots of dust storms. People were really hard up naturally. Use to run around with a wet wash rag around your face all day, try to keep the dust out of your system. It was not a very pleasant scene down there. It wasn't anywhere I don't think. I think we lived in Harper when Pearl Harbor. I remember being over at somebody's house, listening to an old radio when Pearl Harbor happened. That must have been just not too long after we got down there.

Weaver: Do you remember your dad talking about the grocery business and the Depression and how people were buying food and stories of that.

Bob: Yes, I remember that, absolutely, I spent time going through bad accounts. Saw plenty of those from Harper, here and all over.

Weaver: Did your dad carry people and help them out or?

Bob: Oh yes, we charged a lot of groceries. We lost a fabulous amount of money doing that. Dad died in 1967. And I use to wonder why he let people do that, but when I was in charge, I remember lots of times I did the same thing. People would come into the store with a big family, really had children and sad eyes and have a little bit of groceries and what can you do? And I always sold them to them and knowing I would never get paid. Which I didn't; most times I didn't. But you did it anyhow. You have enough to eat yourself you worry about other people some. And I got beat out of a lot of money. I wish I had all that I got beat out of. I could have retired several years earlier, probably. But, that's neither here nor there. Everybody's in a sorry situation now, I think.

Weaver: So you were ten years old on Pearl Harbor.

Bob: Yep, that's about it.



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Weaver: And you've already told us one way, did your uncle go into the service? Was it right away?

Bob: Yeah, it was pretty much right away. 'Cause he was about ready to get discharged because of his age, I think. He was going to get to come home, and we sold out down there. Then he didn't get home when he thought he would, and we came back. So dad taught school that whole winter up here at Kinsley High School. And then we opened the store I guess.

Graff: So there was a time period when there wasn't a Weidenheimer's?

Bob: There was a period there when, yeah,

Graff: About a year?

Bob: Almost a year, I would say.

Weaver: Did you have any other, your dad's family was large, any other uncles or anybody else who served in World War II?

Bob: I don't think so. We had Dick who was here and he did not serve. Then Uncle Drew lived in California, I don't think he did either. He was probably, pretty close to Maurice' and dad's age, so I think he aided his wife who was totally blind so I don't think he served either. That was about the size of it. Merlyn he was on the Fire Department over at Dodge City Air Base for quite a while during the war, but I don't think, he didn't go to the Army, I don't think. May not have been able to, I don't know.

Weaver: And what branch was your uncle in?

Bob: Maurice, he was the Army.

Weaver: Army? And how did he serve. What was his duties?

Bob: He was a mate and food buyer for Tripler General Hospital in Honolulu. He was a staff sergeant, master sergeant. Quite appropriate. He knew all about the meat business by the time he got over there.

Weaver: Do you know about when he got there?

Bob: I don't recall. I don't remember.

Weaver: Can you describe how it was when you went to that neighbors and heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and as a child what your reaction was?

Bob: Well, at 10 years old, I didn't have much of a reaction as I recall. Nobody else was all upset about it. They tried to explain it to me but I didn't much care. I was out wanting to go fishing or something, I don't remember at that age. I remember when it ended. I was in Hutchinson on a bus. It was quite exciting that day.

Weaver: Well, go ahead and describe that.

Bob: I had been swimming in Hutchinson, at the Municipal Swimming Pool, and the news came on while I was on the bus and boy people were hugging and kissing and having a real field day and I

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thought what in the hell is going on. There were a lot of young ladies on there. I probably entered into it some.

Weaver: I kind of think you would have been

Bob: I don't remember too well.

Weaver: How old would you have been then?

Bob: Old enough to know the difference.

Weaver: 16 or?

Bob: Oh yeah.

Weaver: About somewhere in there?

Bob: Somewhere in that neighborhood.

Weaver: So this was a municipal bus then?

Bob: Yeah, uh huh. I was visiting down there, my cousin, who is a doctor in Tulsa now. Lived down on Northland Road, and I took a bus from their house clear out to the swimming pool out there where it is, that's in Cherry Park, down in that neighborhood. Anyhow, it took me a while to get home.

Weaver: So how was the news announced on the bus, or where was it announced.

Bob: Oh, they were, they were blaring it from some speakers on the streets.

Weaver: On the streets?

Bob: Yeah, people were out running around, couldn't even drive uptown. Yep. It was something else. That might have, I can't remember if that was the end of the war in Japan. Yeah, I think that was.

Weaver: That was after

Bob: After the Atomic Bomb.

Weaver: So, I'm trying to think. You said 1941 you were back here.

Bob: The school house burned down in '41, and I think we were here when it happened, from Harper. And we came back not too awful long after that.

Weaver: Now I just read that in something else last night about school house burning during the war. That would have been a difficult thing for the community to rebuild

Bob: It was, it was. Kids went to school for several years in the church basements and then just different odd places clear up to when Nancy and I were in the first year this new school was opened, we were in junior high. She says '43, '44. And then four years of high school. We were the first class of junior high to be in the new building up there.



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Weaver: So they did, they were able to build a school during the War though?

Bob: They had it going, yeah, started. But it opened, you know I say we were in the first class to go up there in '43 I think. We were in junior high. Had the junior high and high school combined. Yeah, that was, that was pretty much a kid in '41 and '42.

Weaver: What other ways do you think World War II affected your growing up years, those teenage years?

Bob: I don't know. I was pretty much protected I think. Not protected, but, as I say, I use to end up not paying much attention. I'd go up and sack groceries, sack potatoes and working the meat market and help dad butcher cattle and everything else. We use to do all that right in the same building. Butcher our own cattle right in the back of the old Mercury Office. So I was pretty busy.

Weaver: Well in your family unit, and your father wasn't fighting, so,

Bob: He was a butcher all his life too. That was how he worked his way through college doing that and making a living with being a good teacher, I'm sure. He probably had a good reputation. Mother about killed him for not staying with it instead of coming back to the grocery store. He would have liked to have.

Weaver: Why do you think he did that?

Bob: Oh, old German families are pretty tight knit people. He didn't have the opportunity to do a lot of other things and go other places and be closer, at the time. And I think I can say that because I might have done that myself. I wanted to stay right where I was.

Graff: When Maurice came back, shortly after that, you built the store where the locker plant was and the meat market?

Bob: Built that in '46. *(Corrected: It was actually built about the time the store at 218 E. 6<sup>th</sup> was built, around 1930 and was rented out until about then, 1946.)*

Weaver: In '46.

Bob: '46. I think Grandpa Weidenheimer owned that business too, at the time, back, back in those days.

Graff: And that was started out as a Western Auto store?

Bob: Yeah, Dick had a Western Auto Store there at one time.

Graff: Before it was the ...

Bob: Oh yes, and Merlyn had a place up front there. He sold Crosby Cars, and then the Lustron houses and then Whirlpool Appliances for a while until he left and went to California about the time I went to the service, in 1951. December, '51.

Weaver: Do you remember when your uncle came home from war? Was there any kind of a celebration or a party or?



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Bob: No, they didn't celebrate; they just appeared. No wingding about it. They just was there one day; next day he went to work on the store.

Weaver: Did the community celebrate in any way? Were there parades or anything or

Bob: Oh no, gosh no.

Weaver: No.

Bob: I'm trying to remember. No, we didn't overhaul the store until '55. When I got home they were overhauling that old store over there quite a bit. And that's about the time we opened the locker plant. We took the kill floor out where we use to butcher and all that and put the locker plant over where Jack Lancaster's got his junk heap now. But, like I said, we did all the butchering and everything over there then. I don't remember a ruckus; nobody cared much.

Weaver: One other thing we were certainly interested in was the Hispanic and black community in town and

Bob: Well, we always thought they were just part of the community back then. There were maybe a couple or three colored families. And they were all just like the rest of us: the Winchesters, the Gaines, and Buss Martin, and the Grebbs. We just accepted them just like we did anyone else. Never thought anything about racial prejudices back then.

Graff: They couldn't, they couldn't sit downstairs in the theater.

Bob: I think they had to sit up in the balcony. And that depended a lot on who was running it at the time. But Mexican families, no gosh, there weren't but two or three families.

Weaver: Well, there was a community that lived on the other side of the railroad tracks there that worked on the railroad. Does that

Bob: Well, they did part of the time, the Amaros did. They lived down in that shack, place along the tracks, you know. Alphonso was in my class and we didn't, and Reyes just died here a while back, we never paid too much attention to that. We played with all the kids and went to school with them and never heard anything and never said anything about being "niggers" or Mexicans or any of that kind of stuff. Never thought about that.

Weaver: So they could have lived any place

Bob: Yeah they did. They did live places, well, one of them lived on that field right across from the high school. One lived in a little old house over Chacon, you know big momma Chacon had several children.

Graff: They lived there later.

Bob: Huh?

Nancy: They lived there when we moved.

Bob: Sure. They did.

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Weaver: But, correct me if I'm wrong, when Dr. Schnoebelen came, the Hispanic people mainly lived in this area.

Bob: Doc. came here in '46.

Weaver: And there was so much TB and stuff that he had it closed down, had it closed down that year.

Bob: I don't, I don't know, I couldn't say.

Weaver: That's the story that we were told.

Bob: Well that might have been, but, yeah. Yeah, I remember when old Juan Amaro lived up there, He had his own marijuana plants and everything. Nobody thought anything about it. Youtsey took over up there after they left. Turned into a junk yard, but yeah, he was like a year ahead of me in high school.

Weaver: Lee Youtsey's place was on the north side of the highway or the south side?

Bob: Lee's mother lived over just by the Easy Stop or the Greasy Stop, or whatever it is. Had a little stone house that sat right back by the liquor store, down there on a lot back there. And his name was Charlie. His mother's name was Dorothy. And, matter of fact, Grandpa Weidenheimer, I think, bought the meat market uptown to start with back in the early years from a feller named Youtsey I'm not sure, it wasn't Charlie Youtsey wasn't anything to do with Lee, but it might have been a relative.

Weaver: But the Hispanic community lived south of

Bob: They said east of the tracks. On the other side of the tracks from the highway, yeah. I'm all turned around, yeah. But you had to go across the tracks down here to get to it. Yeah, I've been down there visiting when they lived there. But they migrated all over town after awhile. Chacons use to be down around, they lived here in town too, can't remember where. But, of course the Gaines were all accepted people. Bill Gaines was the one who shined shoes up there above the barber shop. Junior Gaines married Norma Winchester. Norma was in Nancy and my class in school. She was about a year ahead of me and Nancy. Yeah, she was in a chemistry class I had.

Weaver: How big was your class?

Bob: Oh, I don't remember. I think probably about 40, somewhere close to that. Kinsley was a bigger town then; 2600 people here about the time I was in high school. Now, its not over 1600 I don't think. But the Gaines boys all did fine. And you remember Norma's son, (*Kenny Gaines*) was such an athlete. He's up in some education deal now. I can't remember what he does. He a college professor or

Weaver: He's a professor and the head of the Law Department.

Bob: Yep.

Weaver: South or North Carolina? I can't remember, one of the Carolinas.

Bob: His dad was Dorsey Gaines. Unfortunately he was killed in Kansas City somewhere in a bar. But they were all well-accepted around here. And Skeet Winchester's kids were all OK, most of them are. Big family, so they weren't all perfect.



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Graff: Did your mother help out at the grocery store?

Bob: Oh yeah, occasionally she did. Not as a regular thing she didn't. No, she was housewife I guess.

Graff: That's I remember about her.

Bob: Yes, when she got older, she use to hang around there just for something to do at the new store. We built that in '64. Dad was alive when we were building it. He died just shortly thereafter. He died in '67.

Weaver: You had a long tradition of being in the grocery store business.

Bob: I certainly had, I was there longer then any of them. I was there pretty regular from, well Nancy and I were married in '51 and I was in there then, and most of my high school days, or the days I was in college, after we were married, spent a lot of years in there, after dad died, a long time. We put Dick and Maurice in the grave out there. Dick never was in the grocery store. He sold tv's over there where Maurice was, sold RCA televisions, which I was involved in too, that and the locker plant both. Thank heaven, that ended very suddenly.

Weaver: As a child and young person, I know after World War II, I'm a little younger then you are, and my brothers and things would play War games and did you do that sort of thing during the War? Pretending to be

Bob: Oh, everybody had a bunch of lead soldiers and stuff that they use to play with and had army uniforms on and guns. Yes, I probably did.

Weaver: I know my brothers had little, they got the air force helmets and you know,

Bob: We use to, I can't remember if we had gas masks, use to run around with those damn things on all the time. I remember that. Well you had to have fun wherever you were I guess, couldn't spend all our time fishing, which we did. That didn't cost anything. Use to walk down to the creek and fish constantly when I wasn't working.

Weaver: And you were of German heritage, right?

Bob: Yeah, my mother and grandmother were Irish, Scotch Irishman. Grandmother's brother was a lawyer. But she was a Scotch Irishman, spoke better German then most of the Germans did.

Weaver: And this area had a lot of German in it, didn't it?

Bob: Oh my yes.

Weaver: Did you notice any treatment because of Nazi Germany and the War or was that

Bob: Not too many instances of it 'cause there were so many Germans around here. But one thing I remember was that where my grandpa lived and my grandma lived, like old Feldman use to come down and visit with him on the front porch and Harry Alering. They were all old buddies. Grandpa and they would sit out there and talk German. Grandpa escaped but most of those other fellows were held and questioned 'cause they weren't speaking English all the time.

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Weaver: Who questioned them?

Bob: The law did.

Weaver: Local?

Bob: It wasn't local. Somebody turned them in the authorities to look for, it was during the War,

Weaver: So the Federal people.

Bob: Federal people questioned them.

Weaver: Questioned them.

Bob: And they got out of it. He said well you can't deny us our native language. And they didn't do anything to them, but they were watching them. Anybody that spoke German. Dad spoke a little German. He, could speak German better then the rest of his family could. He took it in college besides. He use to translate the wills so these old German people could get a lawyer. I'm trying to think of some of them that he did it. Names escape me now, but I remember several people he made their will for them, translated a few letters for them. But he did, he spoke good German. All I learned of it was the bad language. I could make myself understood though.

Weaver: Probably to people who don't even speak German.

Bob: Well, yeah. It did help out though one time when Nancy and I were on a Rhine River cruise and we were in a little town in Germany over there one night and got lost. I went into a place looking for help and nobody could speak English. Finally made them understand I wanted a taxi, I was lost. Got back down to our boat, which was on the Rhine River and I was scared. That was just about 3-4 years ago, 5, about that long. So it helped out.

Weaver: Did your family have relatives still in Germany or were during the War, I mean

Bob: Yes, there was. Still do.

Weaver: Still do. Do you remember any discussion in your home in regards to the War?

Bob: No, but dad never did know any but I have a cousin that gets into genealogy, lives down around Dallas right now. They had been over to visit Weidenheimers over there, near Frankfort, he was a music teacher. And they spent some time with him and they came over to visit here with us one time and Nancy and I were in Wichita with Beth when she was in intensive care when she died. When we went to Germany at that time and tried to get a hold of them and they were over in another country for some doings they had gone to. So I didn't get to see them. But yeah, there are relatives over there.

Graff: When the soldiers came back from the war, did they need houses, did they need jobs or did they have someplace when they came back?

Bob: I don't think they had too awful much trouble finding jobs and stuff like that. They might have had some psychological problems. They did especially from Korea and Viet Nam conflicts more than the Second World War. I think that they were pretty much satisfied to nurse their wounds and go to work and do whatever they could. They got along pretty well. The other two were police actions.



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Weaver: Well, okay, let's, I think maybe we can move on to the Korean War a little bit you think? How did you get involved in being in the Coast Guard and stuff? What was your...

Bob: Well, I had a number of friends who were about my age, past the age of wanting to go to the service and married. I had an old friend that lived in Lewis on a farm out there by the name of Emil Fisher.

Weaver: That's fine.

Bob: Anyway his dad was a great Mason. I don't know if it was great or not, but he was in the Masonic Lodge and they had a recruiting officer in Kansas City who recruits out here wanting some boys from out here in the middle west. Emil would get them on a train and take them down there and he just recruited them in there and you were on your way to California. That's where Jake Roenbaugh and me and Wayne Weyrich that used to be here and Carl Wingfield from Greensburg and of course Emil Fisher's two sons from out there, Donnie and Norman. There was a bunch of us.

Weaver: Yes.

Bob: Yep, and there is several more.

Weaver: And you guys were mainly already married you said?

Bob: Yeah, most of us were. No Wayne wasn't. I was best man at his wedding in California after that. After that, he wasn't married, but Jake and I were. No, Jake wasn't either. Nancy came home for his wedding when I was in Santa Barbara.

Weaver: So, I'm trying to remember, when did you say you got married?

Bob: '51. Married in October and went to the service in December.

Weaver: A-hah. Okay, what did Nancy think about that?

Bob: Not much.

Weaver: Did she know that you were going to do this? When she got married?

Bob: Not right at the time, it just got worse then that though and draft board got after me and I knew I was gonna have to do it. So I saw the good chance and went to Santa Barbara and traveled over the United States kind of. There and back in Connecticut and I was in Santa Barbara on a Coast Guard cutter for about 2 ½ years.

Weaver: So you were enlisting in the Coast Guard before you would have been drafted probably for the Army.

Bob: That's right; that was the best deal out for me. And of course it was at the tail end of the damn thing. There wasn't any fighting going on I think when I went in. I just had to go put my time in and I thought I might as well. I'm a cooking; I'm a bottle washer and a baker. I might just as well go do something I know how. And that's what I ended up doing. Went back, took baker's school in Connecticut for four months, Nancy was with me. Jake was back there too. I spent a month in a butcher shop and they had me teaching while I was in there. Just about, yeah. There's a big base back there in Groton, Connecticut.



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Weaver: And then what, is this a boat in the Coast Guard? What did you serve on? Which, or were you on dry land?

Bob: I was on a Coast Guard cutter out of Santa Barbara.

Weaver: Coast Guard cutter. What was the name of it?

Bob: Yeah, didn't have a name, just had a number.

Weaver: Oh.

Bob: 83366. Had thirteen men and an officer. And we were on air-sea rescue all the time. I was also a cook and the radioman 'cause I was the only one who could read Morris code.

Weaver: When did you learn that?

Bob: I took up amateur radio when I was in the Coast Guard. I had a friend out there who had a shore shop for all the boat radios and taxi cab radios and stuff like that. We got to be great friends and he had been an instructor with MIT during the War, the Second World War. He was a good man. He got me started in amateur radio and by the time I came home I could send a Morris code and copy it at 25-30 words a minute. Been doing it every since. Still do.

Weaver: You're still an amateur ham radio operator.

Bob: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But, I liked Santa Barbara and I liked the people out there, I knew some pretty influential folks in the Coast Guard. And if they had an influence, I don't know what good it would have done me.

Weaver: So on the Coast Guard cutter you would just go up and down the coast of California and

Bob: Yeah, we had jurisdiction over I think it was Port Hueneme to Port Mugu, along the shorelines. And then we had all the Channel Islands south, Anacapa, Santa Cruz, San Miguel. They were about thirty miles off shore on the islands. We had the lighthouse out there that we took supplies to and attended to. We were on constant call. They would call the main radio station for the Coast Guard out of Long Beach and they would call us on the radio, if anybody was in trouble in that whole vicinity. We would go to sea about, oh maybe 150-200 miles on rescue work and stuff like that, fires, boat fires. I always got pretty amused at the salmon fisherman and fisherman would go up north for the season and there would be big fishing boats and they had a bad season and we always had fires, they came down around the coast from up north, and they set their boats on fire and sink them. They would get the insurance cause they had a bad year of fishing so we had to go out there and get them out of the water and help sink the floating things, like the gas and the fuel, drums floating in the water and anything that was a menace to navigation of a boat. We hauled a whole lot of dead people around. People who were not a nice clean thing you know. But I did acquire a real good friend while I was in Santa Barbara. He use to go out to sea with us all the time. He was a movie star, Barry Fitzgerald. He was a good friend. He sat in my galley many days. He was in *The Quiet Man* with John Wayne. Barry was in that show.

Weaver: Why did he go up sea with you? Was it because

BOB: He lived in Santa Barbara; he was retired.



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Weaver: And the Coast Guard just let him tag along?

Bob: I could take anybody I wanted to. They all knew him. He come down every day. We'd sit down together and drink coffee and we'd get a call to go to sea a day or so, he'd just go with us. He was a character. You see a lot of them out there.

Weaver: What would you think was the most exciting or the thing that you did during your patrolling? Was there any story that sticks out?

Bob: From the Coast Guard?

Weaver: Uh huh.

Bob: No,

Weaver: Any rough seas?

Bob: Yes, but I think the most exciting day I had, we lived in little government housing projects, Nancy and I did, and had Amy most of that time, our oldest daughter, born here in Kinsley. I think the most exciting thing was we had, just lived from hand to mouth, it was pretty tough going. And had a little old refrigerator I bought somewhere up in town that had the unit on top and it was nosier then hell, and my neighbor next door was a Marine Sergeant of some kind, and he'd get mad 'cause the refrigerator made so much noise it was keeping his kids awake next door. When we got ready to leave that dog gone thing, I got my orders to evacuate and go back to, got transferred to St. Louis to get discharged, and Nancy and I ate our last meal there, threw all our silverware and plates and everything in a waste basket and just left the old refrigerator sitting there, running. I told my neighbor next door that if he wanted to, he could take it out back and shoot it if he wanted to. Anyways, that was the most exciting day I had in the Coast Guard, coming home. Yup.

Weaver: So then you came back here and when did the Lustron house?

Bob: Oh Merlyn had that about the time I went into the service.

Weaver: And he was a salesman or something?

Bob: He had a dealership for the darn things. I don't know how many of them he sold. He had two or three of them. One here, one in Greensburg in one time and maybe one some places else. Then things got tough because they talked that the Lumbermen's Association lobbied them out 'cause they were too tough. They would last forever. As you can well see. That is old, that house of Nadine's. I lived there. Merlyn only lived there a short time and then he moved to Palo Alto, California. When I came home Merlyn still owned it. I lived there about the time I started this house here, we moved in here about 61.

Weaver: What year was it that you came back? When you moved in there?

Bob: About '54 or early '55.

Weaver: And it was built what year?

Bob: It was built back in, Merlyn left here the same time I did in 51. About that time he went to California.

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Weaver: So it was built a year or two before that?

Bob: Nancy, do you know when Merlyn built that Lustron house?

Weaver: When did the house get built?

Nancy: I know that Becky and Merlyn lived in it a while and they had already moved to California when we were married in October of '51. So it had to be in '50 or '51.

Bob: That is right. That is what I was thinking. Yeah.

Weaver: Thank you.

Bob: Gleasons lived there when we came home. And Merlyn, was living in Palo Alto at that time. Then Merlyn sold the thing after we got out of it to Dewey Gilley. But Dewey owned that house clear up until the time Nadine moved in there and bought it from him. That's all I know about it.

Weaver: You remember it being built? And what people were saying?

Bob: Yeah, I remember when all these damn Hart Addition homes were being built down here too. Rosetta probably remembers. You remember old preacher Larson? He use to be at the Christian Church.

Graff: I remember the name.

Bob: He had a son in there that I think did most of the wiring on these Hart Addition houses here on this street and maybe on the next street over, Third Street.

Graff: Were these built in the 40's or 50's?

Bob: Oh. No, it would have been in the early 50's. Most of them, I am not sure. We bought this place for our house here out of this wheat field from Carl Wilson. Even where Nancy's Mother lived over there, there was an old fellow, what was his name, Kelley. He lived back of that, that whole area there was old Kelley, some relation to Dale Smith. His house burned down back there. This was all some kind of a wilderness down here when I was a kid.

Graff: Now does the Coon Creek when it floods come up around here?

Bob: Yeah, I had about a foot of water in my house. Sure did.

Weaver: What year was that?

Bob: '65. I remember the date Nancy, believe it or not.

Weaver: You are doing good.

Bob: It was '65. I will never will forget that. I had a real good friend in town he was Christian preacher, Dale Rider was his name. Dale hung around down at the store all the time and we were both ham radio operators. Dale came down there with me that morning; it was dark, early in the morning. It was when the water was coming up and he almost fell in the man hole in the alley down there. We came down there and we jerked all the rugs that we could off the floors. By the time we got out of here, we almost



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had to swim out. The water was up pretty high. It was up and coming in the house. It was a bad experience. We moved almost all the furniture over to my dad's garage over there on 7<sup>th</sup> street. And if the darn water didn't get up high enough it was getting in his garage. Then we had to move it from there into the house, that yellow house.

Graff: Next to Virginia's Gleason's?

Bob: No, no. Nancy's mother lived over there. My folks lived down there next to Hutchison's big red house on the corner, the yellow house next door. That is where my folks built that house. Yeah. About the time I got ready to go to college. They got rid of me so they could build a new house. I never lived in it, come to think of it. We stayed there a little bit during the summer and worked. Anyways, I better quit talking so much.

Weaver: No, no that is good. You are doing good.

Bob: Yup. Those Lustron Houses, I've had more people ask me about them in the last month or two. "Did you build them or sell them?" "No I didn't, but my Uncle Merlyn did." He has been dead for a lot of years. They've all been dead quite a while.

Graff: The homes were built in Great Bend, is that where the factory was?

Bob: I don't know. I don't know where they built them. That I can not tell you. I don't know where he got them from, I know he had the dealership for them. Where he got them I do not remember.

Weaver: And they are basically screwed or bolted together?

Bob: Yes, oh yes. It's stout material. A tornado would have a hard time blowing that thing down. I remember getting up in the attic and trying to do a few things and oh that construction was tough stuff.

Weaver: There was the lumber men that ...

Bob: I think they lobbied the places out. For some reason, like I said I only heard.

Weaver: Nobody has done it since then which is amazing.

Bob: No, steel homes like the Lustron Home.

Graff: They were like prefab homes.

Bob: They were cut up in little sections, the panels anyways. They were unique if you were looking for rental property. Very tough stuff. Might have to wash it down, take the hose inside and scrub it up, but that is tough stuff. Real tough. Inside the living room one whole panel or wall was mirror, if I remember. She (*Nadine Stallard*) had made a lot of improvements since she lived there. She put forced air in there, how I don't know. It use to have a little furnace that sat off the kitchen there and it heated inside the walls. Didn't have any duct work or anything else, just heated inside those metal walls. But it did the job. Then it got kind of old and shabby and broke down all the time. It got a little tough and I think she decided she had to do something else. She had duct work put in there sometime.

Weaver: Is there anything else you need to know about local history that you had on your list for him?

Graff: He's cleared up a few things.



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Weaver: We got a couple sort of wrap up questions. Looking back overall, how would you describe the effects of World War II on your life as a child growing up in World War II did that mold you in anyway or affect you or not?

Bob: I don't think especially. No it didn't. Being pretty darn young as a kid I had a lot of fun. I got to know people pretty quick. We use to be like most kids. We would climb trees and play rope swings, ate green pears and got belly aches, and this that and a little beer probably, that and mulberries.

Weaver: Do you think it affected your decision to go in the Coast Guard knowing what World War II had been like? 'Cause you said rather than being drafted in the Army you went in the Coast Guard.

Bob: Well being married had a lot to do with it, yeah. And the Korean War was about over anyway. I knew I had to go spend three years, I figured I just might do something I want to do. I could have been a butcher in the Army. If it hadn't been for some people enticing me into the Coast Guard I had some help there. I feel like Carl and Marcile Wingfield were good friends. We got to be better friends when we were in the service. Have been friends ever since. Anyway, it looked like a good project. Jake liked the idea of it. That is what we did.

Weaver: Do you think that World War II made changes in Edwards County? How did the war affect the county? If it did, I mean were people coming and going? Did they come back after the war or did the men tend to go off and work other places?

Bob: Well I guess a lot of them probably did, but it increased the amount of people in the county; we had to. We had a lot of people in Edwards County. Especially after the Veterans did come home. I wish we had that many.

Weaver: Did they stay when they did come back?

Bob: Lots of them did stay. A lot of them had businesses here. I am sure a lot of them did move on.

Weaver: When did the population start to go down and what do you think caused that?

Bob: I wish I knew. I don't know, I think it has been declining the last 10 to 12 years. Maybe longer. Mother died 12 years ago. It's slipped quite a bit since then. We lost a dealership or two. And a good restaurant. We lost the Cedars, which was here a while. It didn't help when that closed. A lot of businesses that couldn't make it. Competition. Mammel's used to have that big store on the corner. Safeway was down on the other corner where Ryan's is. There was that other place where Duckwalls was. Steve Siebel, Denny Friesen came and he was doing really good but he couldn't do good enough to make it either. There is just that many grocery stores in town. He went to Johnson and ended up in Denver. Unfortunately I never did exist until I was the only store in town. I sold to Siebel. He wanted it bad 'cause he'd be the only store in Edwards County. He could have done really well but he didn't want to. He wasn't very ambitious along that particular line. But he went to Dodge, doing something else and died. Got esophagus cancer. But Jay Schroetlin is doing well. He's doing really good. He is the only one here and he is doing great. He is a good boy, that boy is.

Weaver: Do you have pictures?

Bob: Lord I wouldn't know where they were if I did.

Weaver: People just didn't take pictures.



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Bob: Oh, we took a lot of them on 35mm slides. I got a whole gob of slides of my kids when they were little. We never watch them 'cause I think the bulb is burned out on my slide projector. And now we're taking pictures of our great grandkids. That is what we are doing. Had a great granddaughter born last August. She's our main interest these days, I guess.

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Robert Weidenheimer 3/19/09



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Robert Weidenheimer U.S. Coast Guard  
c. 1952