

An Interview with

# **Gordon Thompson**

at the State Historical Society of Missouri in  
Columbia, Missouri

**28 November 2012**

interviewed by Jeff Corrigan & Patrick Sellers



## **Oral History Program**

The State Historical Society of Missouri

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One-room Schoolhouse

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## PREFACE

Gordon Thompson was born on a farm in rural Pettis County in September 1939. Beginning in 1945, Thompson attended Allen School, a one-room schoolhouse near present-day Whiteman Air Force Base. After completing fifth grade at Allen School, Thompson attended school in nearby La Monte. Upon graduating from La Monte High School, Thompson enrolled at the University of Missouri. In the interview, Thompson highlights his experiences at Allen School, including notable teachers, family life, school activities, holiday programs, and interactions with classmates. Thompson also discusses his later business career, personal philosophies, and travel to Europe.

The interview was taped on a CompactFlash card, using a Marantz PMD-660 digital recorder and an audio-technica AT825 microphone placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [ ] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets [ / ]. Any use of parentheses ( ) indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [“”] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [    ] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [           (??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Sean Rost.



Narrator: Gordon Thompson  
Interviewers: Jeff Corrigan, Patrick Sellers  
Date: November 28, 2012  
Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

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**[Begin Track 1. Begin Interview.]**

10 Jeff Corrigan: This is Jeff Corrigan, oral historian for the State Historical Society of Missouri. I'm here today in the Historical Society's conference room in Columbia, Missouri, on Wednesday, November 28, 2012. I'm accompanied by my oral history intern, Patrick Sellers, and we are here today to interview Mr. Gordon Thompson about his experience attending a one room schoolhouse. Mr. Thompson.

15

Patrick Sellers: Could you start off by telling me when and where you were born?

Gordon Thompson: I was born on a farm in 1939, September. And I was approximately three miles from the school that I attend. So that's it.

20

Sellers: And what city?

Thompson: It was in Pettis County. Back in those days, you didn't go to a hospital. Things were done by a midwife at home.

25

Sellers: And could you tell me a little bit about your family?

30 Thompson: My family is all farmers. They have farmed all their lives. I'm the black sheep of the bunch. I can't get into the sun too much, so I decided to come to the university. I did my undergraduate and graduate work here. Undergraduate work, graduated in '63. Graduate work, graduated in '68. And so my great-grandfather is from the Scottish area, Scotland in the far north part. My grandmother, she's from Switzerland. And I have one sister. My mom is still living. She's ninety-seven, lives on the family farm. The family farm is approximately two miles from the Whiteman air base.

35

Sellers: And what were your degrees in?

40 Thompson: My degree is an unusual thing. I wanted to study architecture. I was accepted at the University of Illinois, but it was all commercial. I did not like commercial. So I come to the university. Entered the School of Forestry in the area of wood products and residential construction. Doctor, oh, I can't remember his name. Started the program. Dr. Ellis was the president of the university at that time. They were going to start a school of architecture and Kansas objected because of their relationship with the veterinarian and cross-reference with the school of architecture. And so they started this school of residential construction. So I got  
45 a BS/MS in that. Doesn't exist anymore. I think it's environmental design now.

Sellers: Then when, where did you start school in the one-room schoolhouse?

Thompson: Approximately 1946, I would say. I did not look up the date. But '45, '46.

5 Sellers: And did the school have a name?

Thompson: Name was Allen School. A-l-l-e-n.

Sellers: Okay. And if you were to describe the school's physical appearance.

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Thompson: School building was wood-frame. It was approximately twenty-four feet wide and forty-four feet long. And we had a combination wood and coal-burning furnace that sat in the back of the school room. We had a stage that was approximately twelve feet in depth and about eighteen feet wide. You stepped up one step to the stage. On either side of the  
15 stage you had a girls' dressing room and a boys' dressing room. And the ceilings were approximately ten foot tall. The school was orientated east to west. On the south side of the school we had four big windows. The north side, we had four big windows. The school was elevated about three and a half feet above the grade level, ground as we might know it. It had an entry porch. Porch was about seven by sixteen. And the outside was all covered with what  
20 we call car siding today. It had to be painted. The neighbors that had children in school would usually come late each summer before harvest, paint the school, trim all the trees, mow the grass. There was a perimeter—

**[End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]**

25

Thompson: —fence around the school. The school sat on one acre of ground. And in this one acre, we had outbuildings. One for the boys, which is in the far corner. And the other girls' outhouse was in the other opposite corner. We had a coal shed. We had a pony barn. Most of us rode ponies to school. And they had a fence around the school, as I said, with a  
30 gate. The teacher would lock the gate at nights. And she would come early and unlock the gate at mornings, and start up the wood coal furnace.

Sellers: Does the building still exist today?

35

Thompson: No. The building was tore down in approximately 1970. I can't tell you exactly how the land was deeded, but it was deeded back, I think. Allen gave the land to the school, as I understand. As long as it was the school, that deed would be vested in the school. When the school ceased to exist, I don't know how many years before it could be acquired by either bid or how it was, I don't know.

40

Corrigan: Well that's good. On the inside of the building, could you describe it more? Did you have the individual desks? Or did you have those side by side desks?

45

Thompson: We had individual desks. You had five desks to a row. Three rows. Made a total of fifteen. All five desks were anchored to boards that would slide. So when we had pie suppers or whatever, you could lift up one desk at one end and one at the other, and you



could move all five desks to a new location. Normally we had about eleven to twelve students in our school. So we had fifteen seats. We always had an extra seat or two. The ceiling was metal. You see it in the old antique stores where they have the pressed metal designs. The ceiling was metal. The walls were plastered. You had wood lathe and plaster.

5 And a lot of times, the plaster would come loose and you would have to repair it. That was done in the late summer, when the farmers come to do repairs. The floor was pine boards, one by four, one by six, it varied. And we would use linseed oil on it. And then we would use sawdust on it to soak up the excess linseed oil. And that was done yearly.

10 Corrigan: Did you have those individual chalkboards, like the slates? Or did you have one big chalkboard at the front?

Thompson: In the photo I give you, you have one big board at the front. It's vertical. So when you did math or whatever you were required to do, write, you had to go to the front. So  
15 sometimes in, we had, in my class, it was three students. And so when we would do math, or we would do anything, we'd all three go to the board at the same time.

Corrigan: And what about the, what was the water situation? Did you have a pump outside, or—

20

Thompson: We had a cistern type. Everything was caught by gutter. In the process of the day, you would quit, our school day started around 8:30. Because where we rode ponies, it would take us a while to get to school. Mine was the farthest. I rode about, approximately four miles. And we would quit at four. But when we quit at four, some children would go to  
25 the coal shed and bring coal in for the next day. Some of us would sweep the floors. You would then mix some linseed oil in the sawdust, and that would pick up all the dust. Some children would just, the small children, would be required to put all the books back that we had out. We had a very small library. And myself and my neighbor, David, we would go to the pony barn. A lot of times we'd clean the pony barn. So we'd all leave at 4:30.

30

Sellers: And then, how about, playground?

Thompson: Playground, you know, when you only have eleven in a school, and it varied from eleven to maybe thirteen, there wasn't many sports you could play, because we didn't  
35 have enough. So a lot of things were set up by the teacher—

**[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]**

40 Thompson: —where she would time us in running. We would play pitch and catch, which we would, I know we would pitch the ball to the little kids to teach them how to bat. Sports was not a big thing in our school because I think all the farmers looked at children as a source of work, not play. I know my family did. Being Swiss, it was all work, no play. In the springtime, usually once or twice in the spring, our teacher would take us on a hike and we'd  
45 look at spring flowers and all the spring that was popping out at that time. In the fall, we would take off, usually two times, and we would look at fall colors and try to identify trees.

You have to remember, it's a rural school. And back in those days, we had different values. So you needed to know a walnut tree from an oak tree. You needed to know what mushroom was edible, what mushroom was not edible. You looked at spring flowers. It sounds kind of ridiculous to identify spring flowers, but we would identify those. So that was really a treat to  
5 get away from the school building and go walking and looking at things like that. So sometimes you would move from sports more into that philosophy. It's hard to accept today because sports is a big thing in schools. And recess, we would usually have about 30 minutes. It varied, twenty to thirty minutes, according to the weather. When the weather was bad, raining, snowing, we'd naturally be inside the school. You could do anything you  
10 wanted to. You could read. You could draw on the blackboard. I liked to draw, so I diddle. I'd spend my time at the blackboard. Lunch, I don't know, I might cover some things you'll ask me later, so let me stop and let you ask more questions.

15 Sellers: Okay. Back to how many students were in the school. You said eleven to thirteen, about.

Thompson: Yes.

20 Sellers: Could you tell me a little bit more about the age makeup? Like how many students were in your class?

25 Thompson: Had three in my class. I have a picture that I gave Jeff. We had oh, let's see, I've forgot. You're going to have to—we had two girls that were, oh, they were ready to go to high school at the time the picture was taken. There was, I guess we had eighth graders, two in the eighth grade. We had, at the time this photo was taken, we had three in the fifth grade. We had two, three in the fourth grade, a couple in the first or second grade.

Corrigan: This picture's about what, 1951?

30 Thompson: Something like that. Yeah. Mm hmm.

Corrigan: You said about fifth grade, so right around '51?

35 Thompson: Mm hmm.

Corrigan: And this was, you mentioned earlier, this is before we turned on the recorder, but this is the only picture that was taken.

40 Thompson: Only picture. Because when you were in the one-room schoolhouses, I don't think it was profitable for a photographer to come and only sell eleven pictures. And sometimes the families wouldn't buy the pictures. The whole set of values at that time in a one-room school was teaching the basics. Reading, writing, arithmetic and some history. That was the purpose of the school. The purpose was not to learn algebra or advanced science or any of that thing. Because the farmers and moms and dads of—some didn't have  
45 schooling. We had several families that, I know in one family, that the father did not read. So his attitude toward schooling was he was proud that his son and daughter could read. But

they didn't anymore. They could read the paper and that type of thing. So values have changed a lot. Today you go to school and you're graded, you're based on, when my two sons went to school at Midway here near Columbia, we looked at grades, we looked at the expansion of their—

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**[End Track 3. Begin Track 4.]**

Thompson: —academic life. They were able to come to Hickman and study German and advance themselves. But in those days, reading, writing, arithmetic. That was it.

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Sellers: Can you describe your teachers?

Thompson: I had two teachers. The first teacher I had was an older lady. She lived approximately two miles from the school. She would come early always. I had her name written down, I'll come back to it after a while. She talked with a foreign accent. It was British. I don't think she was from Britain, but her family was. She taught—I only had two teachers. One for three grades, and then Mrs. Kelly(??), the one in the photo here, taught until we were consolidated and the school was closed down. I apologize for not remembering the teacher's name. I'll think about it.

15

20

Corrigan: It will come back up at some point.

Sellers: And do you remember anything specific about their teaching style?

25

Thompson: Not really. I've been to university, as I mentioned. I watched my children go to Hickman School here in Columbia. Graduated with approximately 600. I graduated from La Monte High School with nineteen. So I've seen a lot of different—my evaluation, no. My evaluation of the teachers of that time was to teach what they were required to teach. When my sons went to Hickman, they went to math classes, history classes and so forth. And the teachers were required to teach that. So I think the teaching was the same, except we could overhear the teacher teaching the first graders or the seventh graders or whatever. We got that exposure, which you don't have when you're in a consolidated district. If that was any value, I think it made you reflect back on things that you missed. Because if you weren't good in fractions, and the teacher was teaching the fourth or fifth grade fractions, you had an ear to that. Hmm. Now I understand. So I think that was a teaching, a product of the teaching style, that probably helped you. Or if they were reading a book that you were interested in, you would recall. So that exposure was helpful. Sometimes it was annoying because you didn't like that book or you didn't like those fractions or whatever. But you accepted it. You know, I tell my boys, you have to play the cards you're dealt. So back in those days, we didn't look at it we played the cards we're dealt. We just looked at it we were here, and we didn't ask questions. Today, with a more educated society, you ask why am I here, or why am I this or that, because you have this expanded vocabulary of knowledge. I know I'm expounding on some philosophy, but that's the way it was.

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Sellers: So was it mostly individual work that you got? How did the teacher teach everyone in the classes?

Thompson: Well, I wrote this down. You know usually, I'm going to expand on this, at 8:30, when we started school, the first thing you'd have the pledge of allegiance to the flag. And first thing, because the younger students would get sleepy in the afternoon, the younger students had their work at morning. So the younger students had reading first. For us older students, to keep us quiet, the teacher would give us assignments. It might be math assignments. It might be reading two chapters, three chapters in history or English or whatever. While we were reading, the younger students were getting their reading and usually their math, history. That was all done in the morning. History, math and reading. Younger students, the teacher would always have them go to the blackboard. Because everybody done things, and if you had three in your class, or four in your class, you all four would go to the blackboard. Because that way, she could stand behind you and watch you look at fractions, look at additions or look at—

15 **[End Track 4. Begin Track 5.]**

Thompson: —whatever you were doing, she could watch all three at one time. And if one student was having a problem, she would go up behind him and say, “Here, you might do this.” At eleven o'clock, us older students would turn in our assignments. And we would get into civics, American, world history. We would have reading assignments given. We did a lot of reading. Today, it's a lot of lectures. You learned by books. Lunch was from twelve to one. You had recess. It's kind of interesting, at lunch, I wrote it down. Lunch was—we all brought our lunch. Didn't have a cafeteria. Typical lunch for me was apple, sometimes when you were lucky, you'd have a banana. You'd have peanut butter, bread. You would either have ham and bread, because we butchered at our house. So we would have ham. You would have sausage and bread. My mom would put up a lot of tomato juice, so I would drink tomato juice. Bring popcorn for lunch. In the wintertime, sometimes the women would get together and they would say, “On Monday, Mrs. Thompson, you bring ham and beans and we'll have a warm lunch for the children.” Maybe Mrs. Lane would bring a soup or stew on Wednesday, we would maybe have sandwiches on that day, Tuesday. Maybe on Friday another lady would bring some pot roast or something like that. So in the wintertime, it was a big treat to have a warm meal, and we looked forward to that. A lot of times, I brought soup. I'm a soup eater, and I would bring soup in a thermos. And I would eat that many, many days. And so we would take and put the thermos on top of the—we had a rack on top of the coal furnace. And we would set our thermos up there, and help warm it up. And in the spring and the fall, we would get to eat outside. And that was a treat. We always looked forward to eating outside. And so going back to the school day, afternoon you would have recess around 2:30. It varied from twenty to thirty minutes, usually around twenty. And sometimes fifteen. It would depend on, the teacher would feel like sometimes, she was the boss. She would decide if we were going to have fifteen minute recess. If it was raining, we would only have fifteen minutes. If it was a real good day, and she could tell that the students had a lot of energy and they were restless, we might have thirty minutes. And she might time us on running or whatever. So she was boss. At three o'clock, it was always spelling. Spelling for everybody. And we would spell our words on paper because we were given the spelling assignment the night before. I memorized everything. And the little children would spell on the blackboard. And only the, probably from the fifth grade up, you did it on paper. And the,

oh, as I said, around four o'clock, she would quit. And we prepared the school, sweep the floor, do the coal and everything. And 4:30, we'd leave. That was a typical day.

5 Corrigan: I have a question. You mentioned you started the day with the pledge of allegiance.

Thompson: Mm hmm.

10 Corrigan: There was obviously a flag hanging up.

Thompson: A flag, mm hmm.

15 Corrigan: Do you remember any other pictures? Were there portraits of Lincoln, Washington?

Thompson: Lincoln and Washington.

Corrigan: Okay.

20 Thompson: Washington on the left, Lincoln on the right. Blackboard.

Corrigan: Was there any maps hanging from the walls?

25 Thompson: Yeah. In the center, we had a roll map you pulled down. It was a world map. That's where we did our geography. And a lot of times in the morning, when the teacher would assign us work to do, she would say, "I want you to find" some country, you know to us, Russia was a foreign country. Didn't know where it was at. Nothing. Japan was the same. Japan, because Japan was in the war, we were familiar with it. But it might be Colombia, it might be Brazil. And to us kids, that was a job to find it. We just didn't know. So she would  
30 pull down the map. Normally the map was rolled up. When she pulled it down, we knew—

**[End Track 5. Begin Track 6.]**

35 Thompson: —geography was on the list. And that was done on an individual basis. She would say to me or to my other two students in my class, "You go to the map and you find Brazil, Argentina, and maybe five countries in South America." And she would tell the next students, "I want Norway, Sweden, Finland. Find those." And that's the way I learned the world.

40 Sellers: You mentioned the women bringing food to the school. Now when you said women, are those students' mothers?

Thompson: Students' mothers.

45 Sellers: Okay.

Thompson: At the time, you have to realize that the only people interested in the school was the parents that had children there. Only those parents would come in the late summer and mow the grass and paint the school or whatever had to be done. I talked to my mother about how a district was organized and really she didn't have any clear understanding. Usually land  
5 was given by a farmer. The community would get together and build the building, according to my mother. But there was some income, and we did pay property taxes. My father would go to Sedalia, that's a county seat. And we would always go down for Christmas shopping and we would always pay our taxes, our property taxes. Those taxes, a portion of it came back to the school. But I don't know how they were distributed. They were distributed by  
10 students or by districts or what. I've done some checking, and nobody that I've talked to know how that was done. That's something that you all might research because, it's interesting, because when the school was consolidated, the state decided that they would consolidate these one-room schoolhouses. And ours—evidently our area was financially stable enough to support the school. We had, according to my mother, we had a surplus of  
15 money. And the state was going to take this money as they closed down the schools, because it was tax money that had been appropriated to pay the teacher, buy the coal, and fix up the roof or whatever had to be done. And they—I know my father when I was a kid, he really complained, and all of them complained. So how that money was distributed from the county, or from the state to the school, I don't know.

20 Corrigan: Do you ever remember, speaking, you mentioned the county. Do you ever remember the county superintendent coming by? Was that a big deal? They usually came by once a year.

25 Thompson: They would come back once a year. And actually, in our particular case, I only remembered one time. I don't know if they came by when we were in session. One time we were in session, I remember he came by. And he came in unannounced. And anybody that knocked on the door, we were all scared because nobody ever knocked on the door. And he came in and introduced himself to the teacher. And he looked at the books, as I recall, that  
30 we were studying. And he mainly was interested in our materials that we were using. He didn't stay to listen to the teacher or us talk about world history or math or anything. As I recall, he looked at, we had a small library and he sat back there and looked at the books. He came by and looked at our math books. We had a world history book that we had. We had a book of English pronouns and different basics of English. We had a book of math, a book of  
35 geography. And I think that's all that I had was those three books. And the rest I had to get from the library if we had something to look up or whatever. I think in science we had a science book. I think we had two of them. They were always in the library. We'd have to share them. But we did have the superintendent come by, I remember, one time. And he only looked at our materials.

40 Sellers: Okay. Do you know what sort of education your teachers had? Were they just high school, or—

45 Thompson: My mother, she taught in approximately probably 1933—

**[End Track 6. Begin Track 7.]**

Thompson: —somewhere along in there like that. My mom had spent one year at Central Missouri State College, it's CMSU, Central Missouri State University.<sup>1</sup> At that time, it was not even Central Missouri State University, it was a teachers' college. And you would go one  
5 year to qualify you. But you did not have a teacher's certificate. That qualified you in the minds of the farmers and the school board. This school that I was at, and the ones that I'm familiar with, usually had three farmers. You had three on the board. And one was the president, secretary, treasurer. That was the three. And they interviewed the school teacher. And they always thought the schoolteacher needed to go to—they called it some sort of  
10 teachers' college at CMSU. And if she went to that teachers' college, she was qualified to teach the children. The teacher here in the picture, this Mrs. Kelly(??), she had spent I think two years at a teachers' college. And back prior to that, according to my mother, it was finding somebody that had the time, the discipline, and the want-to to teach. You didn't—it was zero. And I don't know how that goes for other schools, but that's what I'm aware of.

15 Corrigan: Yeah, that's pretty common, one to two years. Some, depending on how rural of an area it was, it was just high school education.

Thompson: That's true. That's why I say, once they accomplished high school. Because you  
20 have to remember, in the '30s, you're dealing with farmers that could barely read. Good, bad or indifferent, that's the way the times were. And probably the work ethics and the honesty and some of the other values they hold, probably hold a higher standard than some of the values we have today. When you look at politics and the corruption we have in government and the corruption we have in different parts, in crime and corruption, then probably not  
25 having the ability to read was not frowned upon. But the acknowledgement of honesty, hard work and responsibility was a tribute that you would say, "That farmer, he's a good guy." It's amazing how things have changed. Because you look today, if a farmer couldn't read, they'd say, "He's a so and so." (laughs)

30 Sellers: Right, right. Okay. Back to a little bit about the classroom makeup. When you were younger, do you think that you learned a lot from listening in on what the older kids were learning?

Thompson: That's why I mentioned a while ago, you would overhear both from the older  
35 and younger children. Sometimes you would—when she was teaching maybe math or English to the older two girls who were in the seventh and eighth grade, you would not pay too much attention, because you knew that was going to come. And you didn't have the desire to advance yourself. In our school, as well as a lot of other schools, when corn harvest come, and you lived on a farm with 160 acres, it was a big deal to harvest all the corn. A lot  
40 of corn was harvested by hand. We had a mechanical machine. And so it was common for school to be, if the weather was good, the farmers would call the teacher and say, "You know so and so and so and so is going to have to help in the harvest. He's going to be out for a week. Give him his homework" or whatever. And it was not frowned upon. It was not even frowned upon by the state or whoever was in control of the number of days you attended  
45 school. The harvest would come before the schooling. So I think sometimes you didn't have

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<sup>1</sup> CMSU is now called the University of Central Missouri (UCM).

the desire to learn from the older people because you had this philosophy entrenched in you that survival was more important than knowledge. And with that attitude, that carries on into high school. Because when I went to high school in La Monte, I told you, I graduated with nineteen in my class. Again, you looked at survival of the family farm, or getting a good job.  
5 And so—

**[End Track 7. Begin Track 8.]**

10 Thompson: I don't consider myself an exception, because I was an average student. I was probably the only one in the 19 that went to college. And that doesn't make me any smarter, it just makes me different. And came to the university. In the first class I walked into with Dr. Pinkney Walker. Pinkney Walker was an economist. He taught economics at the university. It was a five-hour course. Three hours of lecture, two hours of lab. And there was approximately 350 in the class. I'll be honest with you. I was ready to go home. Quite a  
15 shock.

Corrigan: Yeah.

20 Thompson: And I struggled. I'll be honest with you. I struggled for the first two and a half years of college. It was not having the exposure, not having the depth of a lot of subjects. Economics? Hell, I didn't know what economics was about. Never heard of it till I went to this Econ 51. So it was, when you look at the one-room schoolhouses, they had advantage, but they had a lot of disadvantages. Because if you were going to go beyond the one-room schoolhouse or high school, you were at a complete disadvantage. It's sort of like, in a race,  
25 and you're in a marathon, and you twist your ankle. And you were running third, and now you're running 123<sup>rd</sup>. and you've got to get back up front. You've got to take time out. Tape that ankle. Nurse it and whatever and if you have the want-to, you'll get back up to third. But it is one hell of a struggle. I never want to go through it again. My father told me because of my complexion, I can't get in the sun a lot. And as well as I told my boys, when they  
30 graduated from Hickman. I says, "You have two choices. You have to grow up beyond high school. Either you have to go to college and graduate, or you have to go to the army and grow up." They both took the college course, the college route. I did, too. My family is, on my grandmother's side, are Dunkards, the Dunkards and the Mennonites and the Amish are pretty much the same. The Dunkards are the most liberal of the three sects. They have  
35 electricity, they have tractors, they have cars. And so I was raised with the belief that wars are sinful. You don't go to war. You don't kill people. And so I started my college. And to be honest with you, I dropped out one semester. I hated it. And this is beyond the one-room school, but it makes a point. And so Vietnam came along and I was going to be drafted. And I had the choice of going to the army or going to war or going to college, and so I went back  
40 to college. And I think that gave me the initiative. And by that time, I had a little background of college that advanced me to the graduate program. The one-room schoolhouse does not prepare you for college, back in those days. Absolutely doesn't do it. It doesn't have the foundation of math, it doesn't have the foundation of phonics. I can't spell "cat." When I did my thesis, my thesis typist said, "How in the h-e-l-l did you get through college?" (laughs)  
45 She says, "You can't spell nothing!" I says, "If it's math, I can take it." So we did not have phonics in the one-room school. And today, you ask me to spell, if you look at some of my



notes here, you'd say, "What's he got here? He must be a first grader." So that was a very, very weakness for me was English and the phonics and some of that. I was not prepared for the University of Missouri. That would be like me taking you out and saying tonight you're going to go down and play with the boys' basketball team. You'll say, "I can't do it!" So it's  
5 going to take you a couple of years to even get up speed.

Corrigan: Right.

Thompson: So that was a big drawback to the one-room schoolhouse. And I don't regret it.  
10 It's just the fact that it was a brick wall that was hard to get over.

Sellers: Now did you always know that you were going to go to college?

Thompson: No. When I went to one-room schoolhouse, the philosophy, as I told you then,  
15 was survival.

**[End Track 8. Begin Track 9.]**

Thompson: The family farm, all farms were mortgaged. People didn't have money. When  
20 you got maybe a dollar a bushel for corn, or you got 50 cents a bushel for wheat, or you got maybe fifty cents a pound for beef, you didn't have much money. So the farm that we bought, that I was raised on, it was 120 acres. I remember from Dad always talking about paid nine thousand dollars for 120 acres. And we milked cows, and then we raised beef cattle and farmed. And our milk cows was our—might say paid for the food, the clothes, and all the  
25 basics. And hope you made it enough on the other to make the farm payment. With that attitude, was a student in a one-room schoolhouse, and we all being rural and farmers, they all had the same attitude. You had to help Dad and Mom pay for the farm, or you wouldn't have any place to live. So when you went through the one-room schoolhouse, you didn't even know college existed. You knew that the banker would come out and take your farm  
30 because my mother went through the Depression and she would talk about how farms were taken from the farmers because they couldn't make the payments. So we were all orientated in our mind to survive and not worry about tomorrow, try to get through today. And hopefully today would pay for tomorrow. And so when you graduated from high school, you even graduated with some of the same attitude. You graduated with the attitude of I don't  
35 know the world. All I know is my family, my farm, my church, my friends. So my father and mother, mainly my mother, because she had spent a year at college, at the teachers' college, thought I should have an inside job. Because my dad actually died of cancer, skin cancer. Later in life. He was sixty-nine. So I think that was the only reason, if it wasn't for that, I'd probably be farming today. Because we're still a rural community. If you go back, I showed  
40 Jeff where we lived. It's a rural community. It's all farming. And so the one-room schoolhouse was a development of attitude. It was not directed toward college. Not in our area. Some, yes. I'm a friend of Ray Beck. Ray Beck used to be city manager here in Columbia for years. Ray Beck came from Saint Elizabeth. Saint Elizabeth was south of Jeff City. That is all German. The German culture is bred in education. So I'm sure some of these  
45 one-room schoolhouses in that Jeff City, Saint Elizabeth, Saint Martin's, Saint Thomas,

Waynesville, Wardsville is all directed to get beyond this one-room school. But ours was not. Ours was too rural. When you ride a pony to school, you know it's pretty rural.

5 Sellers: Okay. So do you remember any specific special activities at school? Maybe like, you mentioned you had a stage. Were there performances?

10 Thompson: Well, usually you had one or two a year. The big one was always Christmas. Christmas was a religious holiday. And it blended in to the schools. Because the only institutions you had in a rural area was schools and churches. Nothing else. You didn't have all of these other outside activities, institutional activities. So school activities in the Christmas at a one-room school was evolved around the Christian faith. And so whatever we kids put on, we put on small plays or skits, it was always religious-orientated. And it would always have to be. Because if it didn't—

15 **[End Track 9. Begin Track 10.]**

20 Thompson: —the parents and everybody would frown upon having something beyond that. Because usually it was school first, then we were let out, then you would have the church ceremonies in the next few days or weeks or whatever. The thing about school Christmas parties, it brought all the families together. You got to see John's mom and dad. Maybe you hadn't seen his dad because they lived in the opposite part of the district. And it was interesting to see the families. And the old farmers, we didn't communicate. We had telephone lines. But at that time, you wouldn't dial, you'd ring a telephone, a crank telephone. And each, you might have five people on a line. And one person would have one  
25 ring, and you'd want to ring your neighbor, maybe they would answer if you'd ring three times. So a lot of times, you only talked on the phone in case of emergency. But when you had a school party, you got to gossip. And that was a treat. The other one was sometimes, not so much in our school, because we were small. In the county line school in the other districts, we would have pie suppers. Because they might have 20 students in a school. And we would  
30 go to those, even though we were not part of that district. But we knew the families. And in our school, sometimes we'd have a little fall festival, which the parents would bring dishes each, and we would have a supper. And sometimes the kids would get to—you were given something like a, not like a coin—I use them in Germany all the time when I go. It's like a wooden nickel.

35 Corrigan: Token, or—

40 Thompson: Yeah, token. And you would get tokens. And a lot of times you could buy something that maybe some student had made. We always had to make something. And some of the girls would make a pie. We didn't have pie suppers as a lot of schools had, because we weren't big enough. And you were given tokens and you could buy things. And it would usually start about five o'clock in the afternoon. And in the fall, it would be dark by six, 6:30. Didn't have the time change as we have today.

45 Corrigan: Daylight savings time?

5 Thompson: Daylight time. So you'd have about three hours at school. And springtime, not really. You had, oh, in May you had a day we called May Fair. And it was a day that we really didn't have to study. That's usually the day we got to go on hikes, we got to play, we got to enjoy the school without studying. But that was an internal thing, with only us students.

Corrigan: You called that May what?

10 Thompson: May Fair.

Corrigan: May Fair?

Thompson: Yeah. I don't know where the name come from.

15 Corrigan: Was it always on what we call today May Day?

Thompson: I would say it probably is. Because it's a fair day. And we didn't have to study. We called it May Fair, for whatever. It was a local thing. It's like a dialect. You have local dialects. Well, that was May Fair. That was a free day.

20 Corrigan: I had a question about any of the programs and that. You didn't mention. Was there a piano in the school?

Thompson: Yeah.

25 Corrigan: Did the teacher play the piano?

Thompson: Mrs. Kelly(??) did. She would play. We did very little singing. I would say the piano was there for Christmas, period. What both teachers did, sometimes we would cut lunch short. We would only have a thirty minute lunch or whatever. And she would spend thirty minutes reading. And we got so we liked that. So we always cut our lunch short and she read complete *Tom Sawyer*. She read complete *Huckleberry Finn*. And the *Bobbsey Twins*. And we students loved to hear her read. That was one universal thing with all the students in the class. The small ones sometimes would go to sleep. But us older students, we loved it. That was a treat. And, you know, it's interesting. You go back and you look at the foundation of one-room school and I give you the limitations of it. But it prepared—

**[End Track 10. Begin Track 11.]**

40 Thompson: —you the values. Now I'm going to give you the plusses on it. I didn't have the math. I didn't have the English. I didn't have the basics to go to college. And it was a struggle. But at the same time, that society that established the one-room school, the farmers, the teachers, the neighbors, they'd give you values. And the values was honesty, as I mentioned. Hard work was another thing. But I think they give you the value that—I tell my boys this, “Always try. You might fail. But always try.” That was a value that we got probably out of the one-room school. Even though you didn't know the fraction, even though

you didn't know where Argentina was, our teachers would always say, "Try it. Figure it out. You'll make it." And I don't know if that's the right terminology, but that was the only thing that got me through university. If you failed—I'll be honest with you. I graduated, it's no big deal, you can look it up on the records. I think I got a 3.45 or 3.5 or something, graduated in  
5 both areas. Hell, I got D's. I failed! But that one-room school said, if you did fail, take it over. You'll do a better job next time. And I think that was a big thing that we miss in school today. Because if you get a failure today, they seem to think that you need to go to special education, special teacher, something that will—sometimes failure you have to take on your own shoulders. And you say, "You know, that's my problem. If I'm going to get out of this,  
10 I've got to do it on my own. I can't lean on everybody else to bring me up from my bootstraps." And I think that was the biggest asset that I got out of a one-room school. I don't think I could have made it through college if I didn't have the honesty, the hard work ethic, and the "if you fail, try again. Move on." And it's like, you know, I went to Germany. First year, back in the early '80s. Never been to Germany in my life. And walked in the Frankfurt  
15 airport. Couldn't speak the language. I knew a lot of German, but I couldn't speak it. And was there for three weeks, my son and I. And each boy I took, when they turned 16, I took them back to Switzerland and Germany. Because my wife is German, American-born, but both of her grandparents are from Germany. So that one-room school said, you know, you don't know where you're going, you don't know, I've studied up on Germany. But it got me  
20 through Europe. Because it says, you can do it. If you fail, try again. So I don't think you should ever forget that. Go ahead.

Sellers: Did you guys stay up with current events at all when you were in school?

25 Thompson: Yeah, we had a, it was about a week late. We had what was called a *Weekly Reader*. I don't know how, I guess our teachers got it by mail. And the *Weekly Reader* was something that I think we got about five or six copies. And we all read the *Weekly Reader*. It was on political, different events. I don't remember, but I remember reading the *Weekly Reader*.

30 Corrigan: Those went on for decades.

Thompson: Did they?

35 Corrigan: I had them.

Sellers: Yeah, I think I had them, too.

40 Corrigan: I think they stopped in grade school at some point. And it was still called the *Weekly Reader*.

45 Thompson: Mm hmm. I enjoyed it, because you know, I have clients, I do architectural work, and we do work in about 100-mile radius of Columbia. And as we talk to the clients, as I sit and sketch in front of them. Everybody has a talent. I don't care, I have a nephew. And this nephew, (unintelligible) that doesn't control him, he likes anything that's fattening. Pizza, mashed potatoes, chicken wings, all of that stuff. And you think Caleb, just cut it out.

He's big for his size, you know. But can sing! He's got the most beautiful voice. Everybody's got a talent. Well, coming back to this one-room schoolhouse. Even though they didn't go to college, I know, I can look back and think—

5

**[End Track 11. Begin Track 12.]**

Thompson: —of the different kids that had different talents. I can't sing. I can't sing nothing! (laughs) But I know three or four of the kids are just beautiful singers. And some of the girls can do, their moms had taught them to do lace. Have you ever tried to do lace? That is one complicated thing. If you're ever in Belgium, they do a lot of lace. Very complicated. And so in Hungary, too. And so I think you begin to recognize in a one-room schoolhouse, the talents that other people have. When my boys went to Hickman, there was five hundred and some in his class, five, six hundred, both of them. And they began to associate with only two or three. You had your little group. And that group maybe associates with another group. But you don't know the talents of all the other people. Some are in theater, some are math, gifted, or whatever. So the one-room schoolhouse, you're more—I don't think I really had a talent of any type. I just had a want to have knowledge. And I think that was another thing that got me through the university. I wanted to see the world. I've often said today if I graduated from Hickman or some school, I would go out and get a job and work for two years. Stay at home, save every dime that I could. Then for the next three or four years, I'd travel the world. You wouldn't know if I was alive or dead. But I'd travel the world. Because I find that we learn from other people. Then come back and do my college work. I would take off two or three years and do my thing and come back. Because it took me, with the one-room schoolhouse, you grow up slower. You don't advance yourself as fast, because you've got these predetermined attitudes based on father and mother, of the farm comes first. Well, family, farm, and everything comes third.

30 Corrigan: It made me think of it when you mentioned the lace, did you have a regular art activity or a craft project, or did they teach sewing or how to sew on a button?

Thompson: No. Never. Not in a one-room schoolhouse. Not in ours.

35 Corrigan: Not in yours.

Thompson: No.

40 Corrigan: So did you decorate, for example, for Christmas? Or did you decorate for Halloween? Or did you do anything like that, for the programs, maybe, if you didn't have like a weekly, because you said you only used the—

45 Thompson: Christmas was the only, really, you have to realize that we're very, very rural. And Christmas and religion was the whole thing. Halloween was something that if you dressed up, your neighbor was three miles away. (laughs) You didn't walk three miles to scare him. And at the same time, if one of the girls could do lace, the other girls might—their parents might say, "that's wasted time. You need to learn how to cook, because someday

you've got to cook for your family." And that's why I began to see, looking back, each girls had the talents. One could do lace. And I know one girl, Joyce, whenever we had, the parents would bring the meals, she would always help the parents prepare the food. She was a cook. And probably today she is an excellent cook. And so you began to identify as you get older and you look back, each talent this person had. But I don't think my boys going to Hickman can identify too many talents of any other kids. Too many. So that was an advantage. Another advantage, it was an aspect that has popped out in my mind as I look back.

10 Corrigan: You mentioned that churches and schools dotted the landscape out there.

Thompson: Yeah.

15 Corrigan: Was the school, did it serve for any other purpose besides the school? Do you remember, was it used as, was that where people voted? Was it used as a community center? Do you remember the school ever being used outside of the school day?

20 Thompson: The only thing it was used for was voting. You're right. I failed to acknowledge that in my notes because we would go, whenever they were voting a lot of times we would have school and they would come and vote. But other than voting, no. Never. Christmas, schooling, and voting. That was it.

Sellers: Do you still keep in contact with any of the students from your school?

25 Thompson: Well, I—

**[End Track 12. Begin Track 13.]**

30 Thompson: —know two boys. John is here in front in the picture, and David is a neighbor of my sister. And his sister, let me see, one, two, three, four of them, I'm well aware of what they do, where they live, that's right. But I don't have any—you know, when you move away from your roots, it's like moving from one state to another. If you left California and came here to Missouri, you come into a new environment, new lifestyles, habits, attitudes and so forth. When I left, I left a farming community and came to an urbanized, educational community. And I had to adapt. And I think I adapted to it because I liked it. And my wife and I talked about it that if we was to retire, we couldn't go back home because we have retained new lifestyles, habits, attitudes and values. Different than what we were raised with. And so, we probably don't keep in contact like we should, because we left something and we didn't retain those values. So I know where they live, and that's about it. To call them up or to talk to them when we return home, no. I don't have any contact.

40 Corrigan: Did a lot of them stay in that area?

Thompson: Yeah. Definitely.

45 Corrigan: And there also is a difference today of back then is the way you could communicate, it's a lot easier now. Telephone's not expensive. People don't have to write a

letter and paper would be expensive, or have a stamp. So that has changed, how people communicate has changed, and it's a lot easier now, or even in a city as it would have been back in the rural time.

5 Thompson: Well, to go back and say why don't, I communicate with some of these students, with all respect, I respect them all as individuals. I think every individual, as I say, has a talent and has a reason for being on this earth. But of the three or four that I mentioned, I doubt if even four of them have a computer. They have this basic farming institution. This boy is taking over his mother's farm. This boy farms and part time postmaster at Blackwater.  
10 This boy here inherited the family farm. Neither of these have computers. Cell phones, none of that. They still have land phone. That's why I say, I divorced myself, in a sense, from that society. I have, I communicate with my friends in Germany more than I communicate with my ex-students. Because I have, not advanced myself, but I have become part of a different society. And that society says, if you're going to live in Columbia, you must email, you must  
15 have a smartphone. Maybe not must, but if you're going to communicate, these are the tools that we use. These are the tools they don't use. Nothing wrong with it. I don't make fun of them. Great people. Go ahead.

20 Sellers: I was just going to ask if there are any other stories from the one-room school experience that you'd like to—

Thompson: Well, you know, I've been fortunate to have a business where I meet a lot of people. And I've been fortunate to be able to travel where I want to travel. I only travel where I can learn. I will not travel to—this is an arrogant attitude, probably. But I won't  
25 travel to Mexico or anyplace where I can't learn and I can't speak the language or understand the language. So I travel to Germany, Switzerland, France and Austria. That's my core. The one-room school, I probably never mentioned it to anybody when I was in the university. Because probably I was timid about saying I went to a one-room school. Because that was putting me down at some base level where everybody graduated and had smarter teachers  
30 than I did. But—

**[End Track 13. Begin Track 14.]**

Thompson: —I learned that bigger is not better. I look at Switzerland, I looked at  
35 Liechtenstein, I looked at Austria. I look at these small countries and how they control their debt, their economics, their unemployment. It tells me that you have more control, you have more adhesion. The Austrian people, the Liechtensteiners, you probably don't know Liechtenstein. It's a country that's three miles wide, eleven miles long. Well, you know where it's at. In Switzerland. They have a cohesion that we don't have in America. We have,  
40 as we grow into a society, we are a society of immigrants. And I accept that. But we don't have that cohesion. Seems like one group or one society or one dialect or one state or one area or one region is fighting the other. Nobody is cohesion. The smaller countries, you have this cohesion. It seems like they identify a problem, if it be a debt problem, if it be an infrastructure problem, if it be a society problem. Switzerland, and I won't get into it, had a  
45 drug problem years ago. And it's interesting how they solved it. And they haven't solved it completely. And so I look back to the one-room school being smaller than these schools my

son graduated from. I think if we had the technology today, if I had computers in this one-room school I was going to today, and had the opportunity to look at calculus and look at all of this, I would probably select a one-room schoolhouse before I'd go to Hickman High School that's got eleven, twelve hundred students. I would select going to—I'm not anti-  
5 America, but I'm a realist. I would probably select to live in Austria or Switzerland versus living in America. I look at how the infrastructure, the attitudes, the cohesiveness, and I see that based on the one-room school. So technology, somewhat, probably in Nebraska or some of these far off places that have the one-room schoolhouse, might have an advantage over the bigger schools. You know, when you're dealing with different societies, you're dealing with  
10 some societies that, I went to school, in high school, I went to school with black children. My mom, whenever a black family had a death in the family, my mom would bake pies and take it over to that black family. We had that cohesion. We were a small community. We didn't have any racial, never even thought about a racial attitude. They were black, we were white. They were poor, we were poor. They were trying to get ahead, we were trying to get ahead.  
15 They'd get sick, we'd get sick. It was all an even board. Today, it seems like society has somewhat lost that equal-ness. Some people think they're better than this society. This society feels inferior because the attitude of the other society. I won't say black and white, but it's out there. And I was raised that in the one-room school in a small community in a small group of children, we were all equal. It didn't make no difference if he was black,  
20 yellow, green, white, dumb, fat, thin, tall, skinny, short. We were all equal. And I think that's what I was telling you early, that the one-room schoolhouse give us that foundation. And with technology today, I'd love to go back to a one-room schoolhouse and have the computers and have my small group, because I think I could learn more quicker than I can. Because when you go into a lecture and you've got six, seven hundred students, you know  
25 that you're not going to be number one. The odds are there's some smart dude out there that's going to study 24 hours a day. And so you've already rated yourself based on the volume. But when you're in a one-room schoolhouse with 20, and you've got the attitude that we're all equal, I'm going to do the best I can. And I'm not going to worry about being number one, because there's only 20 of us in here. Maybe that's a bad attitude. But that's the  
30 way I summarize it up.

**[End Track 14. Begin Track 15.]**

35 Thompson: The values, in summary, I would say this much: honesty, hard work, and don't be scared of failure. The three things that I learned in a one-room schoolhouse. The three detriments is that we didn't have the education that other schools provided. We had probably not the enjoyment that other schools provided. We didn't have sports or anything. We didn't  
40 get to have fun. I think my boys have lots more fun in Hickman and Rock Bridge than I did in the small school. And I think, too, that the one-room schoolhouse didn't give me the opportunity. I was so structured to the social values of the community, I never thought about what, can I be president? You didn't even think about things like that. So those three things were a detriment. And with that, so you can ask any final questions.  
45



Corrigan: Well, I had a question about, kind of skipping back a little bit, about your mother. So she had taught at a one-room schoolhouse. By any chance, did your parents attend them, too, or no?

5 Thompson: Yeah.

Corrigan: Where were they? Because you showed me where they were from. Did they both attend them?

10 Thompson: This county line school where my mom taught, my dad went to school. And it was common practice back in those days, you finished the eighth grade, that was it. And my dad had three brothers. And all three brothers finished the eighth grade, and that was it. My mom went to a different school, but I'm not sure what it was.

15 Corrigan: But they were all from that area, though.

Thompson: Right.

20 Corrigan: And then your sister, you said, was quite a bit younger than you were. Did she ever attend the one-room schoolhouse?

Thompson: No.

25 Corrigan: It was already gone and consolidated?

Thompson: It was gone.

Corrigan: So that would have been in the 1950s?

30 Thompson: Yeah, '50s.

Corrigan: Because where did she end up going to school? Where did that school actually consolidate to?

35 Thompson: La Monte. Yeah, La Monte and Knob Noster are approximately twelve miles apart.

Corrigan: Okay.

40 Thompson: You have Sweet Springs is about fifteen miles. You have Warrensburg from Knob Noster. These towns are all about fifteen to nineteen to twenty miles apart. And they consolidated the schools in these various towns. So a bus route sometimes would be ten miles out, or fifteen miles out from the school, in a circle, or in a semicircle, or whatever.

45 Corrigan: Because you went until fifth grade, you said roughly, right?

Thompson: Mm hmm. Roughly.

Corrigan: Then you moved up to, was it a junior high? Middle school?

5 Thompson: No. Back in those days, you went, the high school, one through twelve was in one school.

Corrigan: Okay.

10 Thompson: And the only thing different was the floor level was one through six. And upstairs was six through twelve.

Corrigan: And approximately how big at the time was La Monte? How big was that school that you ended up at? You said nineteen in your class.

15 Thompson: Nineteen in my class. Each class would probably average about twenty, twenty-five.

Corrigan: Okay. And that was first through senior, twelfth grade.

20 Thompson: And this was from one all the way down from one to twelve. It was a small school. You've got to realize, in the area of the Whiteman Air Force Base, the park came in and bought about 2,000 acres of land. Whiteman Air Force Base bought 3300 acres of land. There was about over 5,000 acres just wiped out. And that was in about the same period of  
25 time. And so that didn't destroy the community, but that totally changed it. There was a lot of population around where the base was. Very good land. Deep soil. So that whole area at the time of World War Two was restructured. Road systems were restructured because the base wouldn't allow any roads to go through them and all that. So I would say there was probably  
30 two schools lost very quickly.

Corrigan: Just from the Air Force base.

Thompson: Air Force base. Uh huh.

35 Corrigan: Now you would have been, let's see, we're talking the '50s. So you would have been in school then during World War Two.

Thompson: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

40 Corrigan: Do you remember a lot of activity around there? I'm just thinking proximity-wise. I'm just curious.

Thompson: Not really. I can remember, I can tell you this. I got on the computer the other  
45 night and on YouTube they have the B-29 taking off from—FIFI is a B-29 that's been restored. They fly it around the air shows and that—

**[End Track 15. Begin Track 16.]**

Thompson: —and that type of thing. And so they had a video on it taking off a runway. And it has a certain noise. A B-29 with four engines, all motors have to be synchronized, and you can hear it. And so about two o'clock in the morning, usually about ten, sometimes, five to ten of these 29s would come over our house taking off. And that was probably the only memorable part of the Air Force base. Otherwise, we farmers looked at the Air Force base as you don't dare touch. You know, they told us kids, "they had a fence all the way around, don't you get on the Air Force base." And today, they have the stealth bomber. And it's so interesting, my mom was telling me the other day, she calls the stealth the blackbird. She says, "Those old blackbirds take off about two o'clock in the morning, and they wake me up every morning." So it's interesting how history repeats itself. But the Air Force base, today you have a lot of Air Force people live off base. They participate in schools. They have Knob Noster School District has a school on the base. The base funds the district for teachers and that type of thing. So there's a lot of interaction between rural society and Air Force society. But back in the days of myself, I don't know where the GIs went. They had to stay on base or whatever, but you never saw a man in uniform. You would see buses taking people somewhere. And planes flying a lot. You had the 29s, the 17s and different airplanes. But no interaction between the school district and—

20 Corrigan: Do you at least remember when, for example, Pearl Harbor? Was that a discussion in class, or was that something your parents talked about?

25 Thompson: Nope. Never talked about that. The only thing I remember was when we were kids, we were on the farm and we got a newspaper, about a week old. The war was over. We didn't even know it. May 8, 1945. The Germans had given the final surrender.

Corrigan: So you remember that, but not prior to that.

30 Thompson: Never really talked about the war in school. Because war at that time, you've got to remember, our community, in particular my family, war was a bad thing. You didn't talk about it, you didn't participate in it, you didn't want it. And so it's kind of like having a bad dream. You pushed it off to the side, never talked about it. So war was not a part of our society. And after the war, my father got a contract to bale hay on the Air Force base, because it was closed down. And so we would go up and bale hay and combine lespedeza and he got it through my uncle. My uncle had a political contact, and it was still politics. And I would go to the rifle range and dig out lead, and then take it down to Sedalia to McAllen's(??) junkyard and sell lead. And I'd take a whole great big bunch as much as I could carry and I think I'd get two dollars for it, which was a lot of money. And by the way, when I went to school, I rode a pony. Back in those days, I trapped rabbits, live rabbits. And we'd take them to Sedalia and get 25 cents a rabbit. And they'd ship them to Pennsylvania, because Pennsylvania had some sort of rabbit disease and all the rabbits died. And so that was my extra income. And so I'd put a gunnysack on the old horse and take the rabbits out of the trap and put them in the gunnysack and go home. And every Saturday, we'd go to Sedalia and sell rabbits. Twenty-five cents apiece. These are side elements, but they're part of a one-room schoolhouse.

Corrigan: Yeah. Definitely.

5 Thompson: And the electricity came to our farm, rural electrification come in about 1949. Before we did, we milked cows and we went to Montgomery Wards and Dad bought a generator. And we used a generator, we had lights out in the barn. Didn't have lights in the house. And we'd run an electric, we had surge milking machines. And we'd run the electric compressor so it would run the milking machines. And lights were a great thing out in the barn. Kerosene lamps in the house. And wood-burning stove.

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Corrigan: Was that the only surplus income from the farm? Because it sounded like earlier you mentioned you would sell milk. Is that correct?

Thompson: Yeah. Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

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Corrigan: But everything else, I mean, when you were growing corn, was that just to feed the livestock?

20 Thompson: Feed the livestock. And at the same time, you wouldn't sell the corn. You'd feed the livestock. We had beef cattle—

**[End Track 16. Begin Track 17.]**

25 Thompson: —and you hoped that the beef cattle would make the farm payment. The milk cows would pay for gasoline for the tractors and the cars and the repairs, and Mom buying whatever food we would buy. And we'd go to Sedalia every Saturday. That was a ritual with Dad. Because the farmers would congregate in front of Pennys on Ohio Street. And they'd all talk about whatever. Drought and whatever. Weather. And we would buy sugar, salt, usually some kind of cereal, like Corn Flakes. We'd buy the basics. And then the big treat for a kid  
30 back in those days, you would go to Richardson's Market and you would buy—sounds crazy, but you'd buy bologna. They'd slice it for you and you'd buy white bread, because at home we'd always bake bread. So when you drove home, you got a bologna sandwich. Two pieces of white bread with a big thick piece of bologna between them, and that was a treat. Later, a few years later, we'd get to buy a six-pack of Coca-Cola, 12 ounces per bottle. And you had  
35 one a day as a kid. I got a six-pack of Coke. That was like an alcoholic having alcohol. (laughter) You loved it! You'd just make that Coke go for all day.

40 Corrigan: Did they come out to the farm, or did you have to deliver the milk? You said you guys went to Sedalia every week.

Thompson: They'd come to the farm. Emma was about twenty-five miles away. And Emma made cheese. And they would send a milk truck around every other day.

45 Corrigan: So your milk, it was used for cheese? So were these Jersey cows? Or Brown Swiss?

Thompson: We had Jersey and we had Brown Swiss. And mainly high-fat content.

Corrigan: The high fat content, yeah.

5 Thompson: And Emma was a product of, who started the Emma Creamery was a Swiss. And he come from the Emmental Valley. And Emmental Valley, “tal” means valley. So it was a Swiss organization back in those days. Oh, I don't know—

Corrigan: Is this twice a day milking?

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Thompson: Twice a day. Five-thirty at mornings, and five-thirty at nights.

Corrigan: And how many dairy cows did you have, approximately?

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Thompson: Usually have about ten to twelve. That was a lot. Because when the darn generator wouldn't start, you'd have to milk them by hand. Oh, man. Your hands would ache.

Corrigan: And then did you have the big steel drum to put the milk in, to chill it?

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Thompson: No. You put it in five-gallon—no, you put it in milk cans. The old style milk cans. You put it in a great big tank with a lid on it and it had water. You'd take this generator and it would run a compressor to cool the water. And you'd cool it for about four hours. And it took so much gas to run the generator. Then that water would keep that milk for overnight.

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Then the next morning, you'd run it for a while. And he came every other day.

Corrigan: Okay.

Thompson: We used to garden. Everybody gardened in those days. You raised all your, you canned everything. You canned, we had a full garden. My wife today is German. She was raised near Concordia. And today she raises everything but corn. And the coons get the corn, so we don't raise, but we have asparagus and we have strawberries. We have raspberries and we have radishes and we have two different types of lettuce. We have potatoes, we have tomatoes. We have cucumbers, watermelon, and muskmelon. That's our garden for the year.

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This year it's kind of a tough year. But we still raise it. And I guess that's a product of one-room schoolhouse. She went to one-room schoolhouse. And she being German, you'll never get her here. She says, you know. The Germans are different. You have to look at a German.

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Once you understand them, you understand why they, some of the true Germans. But that one-room schoolhouse entrenched those values so tightly in my wife and I that even though we divorced ourselves away from that society, we carried those values with us, the basic values. Gardening, thriftiness. We recycle everything. The Germans recycle everything. I think, basically, some of that—

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**[End Track 17. Begin Track 18.]**

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Thompson: —is inherited. I was taught as a kid you never leave your plate with food on it. You never throw it. And I won't today, when I go out to eat or whatever, I'll order something small, because I see so much food wasted. And so, one-room schoolhouse and that society, that's all got lost because my boys and their wives and their families, I'm just amazed at the food that they waste. And I'm not picking on them, it's throughout society. And I look at how we look at things. We buy things in a one-room schoolhouse that would last, hopefully, for a long time. Today we live in a throwaway society. You buy it. If it goes bad, or if something new comes out, pitch it, go on and buy new. We buy Volkswagens, and we always have. We usually drive them for about twelve years before we'll trade them off, and get the full value out of them. And so everything that we purchase, my wife and I, I think it's a product of that basic society of one-room schools. We lived in our house forty-three years. We had some hail damage to it here this year because of the hailstorm, and State Farm didn't believe that it was forty-three years old, because we keep it up. We keep it painted. We keep everything perfection. We live on fifty-one acres. I have some, a duplex and a triplex there. It's on a Frank Lloyd Wright type thing. They're different. But we mow about fifteen acres, I mow about fifteen acres of grass. I keep it like a golf course. We trim all the trees. We pick up all the sticks. We've got about three acres of forest that is perfection. It's like a city park. And we have parts of the forest we leave natural for the animals and that type of thing. I'm not bragging what I do. I'm telling you it's a product of this older society that developed the one-room school. Those values—mine is the last generation. The next generation will never have the opportunity to have those values. And you won't understand that until you go to Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Austria. And you see these small countries and you look at them and you see this perfection. Perfection of maintenance of buildings, perfection of infrastructure. You see women still sweep the streets in the small villages of German and Switzerland mornings like you've seen maybe in movies or whatever. And that generation, I can see it dying in those countries, somewhat. And I see it dying here. So when I'm gone, as I tell my clients, I says my boys will look at our property and say, "We'll turn it into cash." And they've already told me, you know, I keep everything. I keep a library of all my magazines. I've probably got inventory of I'd say somewhere around three, four thousand sets of architectural plans I've done. And the younger boy says, "Yup, Dad, we're going to put a dumpster at the front door, at the office door and the back door. And there it goes." And it's somewhat joking, but somewhat true. So I expound on this to the fact that you have to go beyond just the one-room schoolhouse. It is a product, the one-room schoolhouse has extended itself up to my generation and I think you're going to see a definite change. I see this in politics. I used to be, in Washington we had compromise and we had politicians who'd sit down and you'd have a glass of brandy and I have a glass of wine. You smoke a cigar, I smoke cigarettes. And we get in a smoky room and we can, hell, we've got to figure this problem out. We'll solve it. Today, we don't have that. We have this confrontational thing, as I mentioned earlier, between races and all of that. And so the one-room schoolhouse has a lot more value in it than a lot of people give it credit. Because it was a product of a society that honesty, hard work and don't be scared of failure, however you want to put it, is the thing that we have to recognize that give me the values that I have. And my boys today, I have one son in Boulder, Colorado. Boulder's a very liberal community. He is in a high-tech, very high-

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**[End Track 18. Begin Track 19.]**

Thompson: —tech, I tell him, I says, “you keep moving up in your occupation, one of these days you’re going to be like your neighbor. You’re going to be so skilled, you’re not going to have a job”. His neighbor has to fly to Silicon Valley every Sunday night because there’s  
5 only two or three people in the world that does his job. Boulder doesn’t offer him any jobs because he, I said to my son, I says, “you’re going to be either carrying garbage one of these days or flying to Silicon Valley.” I said, “You’ve got to figure out where to stop.” And it comes up like that, and there’s only two or three jobs left. I did a job here in Columbia, at Rocheport for a gentleman, he writes nuclear software. There’s only seven in the world that  
10 does this. He’s about the same way. He says, “You know, I have to travel to France and Germany and different places, because” he says, “My jobs are very limited.” So that doesn’t have anything to do with a one-room schoolhouse. But you’ll see as if you were to go back and be able to look at society, a sociologist could look at society, you’re going to see this line of demarcation of us old people around seventy-plus years old dying off. And we’re the last  
15 product of a one-room schoolhouse. And it’s going to change. It already has changed. But you’ll see that if you can really detail and get a microscope and study all the factors, you’re going to see a lot of politicians and a lot of innovationists was a product of the one-room schoolhouse. Now it’s a product of we live in an electronic age. And we live in an age of speed. We live in an age of impatience. We live in an age where I will step on you to get  
20 ahead. And this was not true with—and we see that in politics today. So were you’re seeing this change. And I don’t know if it’s good or bad. It’s something that I can’t recognize and accept, because I maintain the old values of the one-room schoolhouse, where the new society of my boys’ generation and your generation, you all have to work it out. I can’t do it. I can’t project beyond that.

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Corrigan: Good. All right. Well, I think we’ll go ahead had stop there. Thank you very much. Let me go ahead and shut off the recorder.

**[End Track 19. End Interview.]**

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