

The following is an interview concerning the war years 1941 to 1946. It is conducted by myself, David Robinson with my father, Willard Robinson who was a teenager during WW II.

David: In what economic classification did you place yourself and your family in during WW II?

Willard: The high low of the low middle. Afterall, your grandfather was a factory worker, a typical factory worker, and we lived in a typical factory neighborhood. We didn't know what the term inner city meant, but that's where we lived. When we moved out of that particular house that we lived in, at that time, the entire neighborhood then was a black neighborhood. We were the last white people in the neighborhood. So you would have to had called it a working class neighborhood.

David: So, your father did have a job then?

Willard: I hope.

David: As for yourself, you had a job also?

Willard: Yes, by misrepresenting my age, again we're talking about war years. During the early war years I worked at a grocery store. But I misrepresented my age when I was a Junior in high school, which would have been about 1943 and worked in a restaurant and I had a title. It was a small restaurant which was across from a factory and most of our trade was factory workers. It was across from Servel. They were at that time referred to as war workers. It was a nice little restaurant and all trade was from the factory. As far as money was concerned, I was in charge at night. There was only four of us there and I made thirty dollars a week which was for 50 hours a week. On an hourly rate that would be about 70 cents an hour. But it was actually after WW II that even factories got that much and I'm referring to now what is Whirlpool. But at that time people starting there right even at the end of the war were making 80 cents an hour. I realize it's been thirty years, but even at the end of WW II most of the people starting at the factories were only making 80 cents and hour.

David: Well you had to contend with things like rationing, food stamps and things like that?

Willard: Yes, meats and most canned goods were rationed, however they didn't enforce this too well. The two things that were watched the closest were sugar in the grocery store and your gasoline stamps. And there was a lot of trading going on with these stamps. The sugar stamps were not so awfully hard to get but gasoline stamps were a little bit harder, however, people would trade gasoline stamps for sugar stamps. Now, in most cases, meat was also rationed. But, again I don't really

remember entirely how the rationing went on that even though I did work at a grocery store, didn't pay too much attention to the stamps on anything other than sugar which was the only one we were interested in.

David: Well gasoline stamps, you weren't too concerned about those, why, because you didn't have an automobile?

Willard: We didn't have a car.

David: Well how did most people get around at that time?

Willard: Well to give you an example, in our neighborhood, I think there was only one or two cars that I know of in the entire neighborhood, that everyone walked. It wasn't anything uncommon for people to walk two, three, four miles. I remember as a kid, we walked to Enlow Field or to Bosse Field to see a ball game. In most cases we would walk to school, just like in high school in walking say from the 1000 block of Cherry St. to Memorial, which was a good two miles, that we never rode the bus other than if it happened to be a really bad day, then we might take a bus. But normally speaking you just walked anywhere that you wanted to go. You didn't feel that you were underprivileged or that this was any great hardship, you just did it.

David: You did say though that after you moved out of that neighborhood it was totally black, did any of the blacks in that neighborhood have a car?

Willard: Not that I remember.

David: Well what were your feelings towards the black people at that time?

Willard: I thought that this was an interview on WW II. Are we going to change it now?

David: Well, these are the war years.

Willard: In this neighborhood then we can talk about a few demonstrations of one type or other. I do remember one time that they almost put that particular area under ^{martial law} Marshall Law. The soldiers from Camp Breckenridge came over and patrolled that area with their patrol cars, with their guns mounted on the cars because there was a racial friction in that neighborhood. But I think all in all it was more than likely, even at that time more outside agitation than there was within that area, because we had blacks and, really at that time we didn't call them blacks, that lived on both sides of us and I don't think that they necessarily always called us whites, they had some pet name also for us and we played together and more or less

lived together because how else do you it? We were the last family in this block and naturally we all lived together.

David: Well did any members of your family get inducted into the service or did they join?

Willard: My brother enlisted.

David: He enlisted?

Willard: Yes.

David: How about blacks of the same age that he was? Did they also enlist or get inducted?

Willard: You know it seems to me that you're hung up on this black thing.

David: I'm not so much hung up on it but

Willard: I mean are you wanting to find out how the blacks responded to WW II? Is this what you're wanting?

David: No, I want to know how you responded as a teen growing up in those war years.

Willard: Well, number one, I think there was a lot more patriotism I think at time that we felt that this was a justifiable war and that even if for the war that I was going to be drafted and I really felt bad about it or I felt that this was an unjust war I believe that at that time that even your friends and neighbors would have shot you. There was a great deal of patriotism, a lot more than there is today. Right or wrong our country was involved in something that we should back.

David: Well, why, for what reason?

Willard: Well because I believe that we were a lot more trusting then than what we would be today or you guys would be today. That our President or leader said this was thing that we should be doing and we believed it.

David: So therefore that was due to Roosevelt, his charisma?

Willard: He more likely by the working class people was loved. They didn't question Roosevelt's statement at all. There wasn't as much anti-German feeling as there was anti Japanese feeling and the reason, I think, for this is that there were a lot of ties in this whole area with the Germans. This is basically a German decent community and most everyone in

this area has some German ancestor. You've got especially in some of the little communities around here they were and, in some instances still speak German as well as they speak English. Japanese, there are no Japanese here in this area even yet today to even amount to anything. There was one family of spaghetti benders that ran a, I think you call it a spaghetti bowl downtown, but really they were the only Italian people in this area I knew of at that time. So, in most cases there wasn't too much feeling of real hatred for the German people themselves. I think at that time there was a lot of hate for the Japanese. Seems to me we were more involved with Japan during the war in the early stages especially than we were with Germany, plus the fact that it really built up hatred with Pearl Harbor.

David: So it didn't bother anyone for the Japanese to be put in concentration camps in California?

Willard: Well, again you know more about that today than we knew about it back then. Because I can truthfully say that I don't even remember that being done. I doubt that this made headlines at that time; that they rounded up all the Japanese and put them into camps. It might have been, but I certainly don't remember it.

David: Well how about the involvement with Russia as our ally what were your feelings towards that?

Willard: Well, again, I don't truthfully remember. The only thing, as far as pro or cons concerned the Russians were acceptable to us. I don't remember having any bad feelings towards the Russians at all, none whatsoever. I wasn't even aware that Patton didn't like them until I saw the show. But apparently he didn't. You were asking feelings about Roosevelt. To give you an example, I can remember that in high school in fact it was in the locker room, the word came that Roosevelt had died and all the boys in the locker room balled like babies, so, this man was loved, he really was, because if you can get a bunch of high school kids to be emotionally tore up over the death of a President you can imagine that the man must have been loved.

David: Did you have any opinion towards Truman becoming President or didn't that even become involved in it?

Willard: Well, especially then, a Vice-President was practically a nothing. This is one reason I personally would think that Truman was a good man for President simply for the fact that he had no great knowledge of what was going on. He was not briefed on a lot of the things that he should have been. I think that the Vice-President's job was more ceremonial than anything else.

David: With the death of Roosevelt did your attitudes change towards the war itself went?

Willard: Well I think that you would have to remember that Roosevelt was very much reverend as a leader and most everyone was concerned about what his death, what effect it would have, because the war was not going well at all in the South Pacific. Now it's true that Truman did take over and he did restore confidence in a very short while, He did make the decision to drop the Atom Bomb. In dropping the bomb, at that time, it's true that it did kill hundreds of thousands of people. But we had no really great feelings of remorse at that time because even if it had eliminated the entire Japanese island and killed all the Japanese people we would have still had no great feeling of remorse. Whether that was right or wrong today in looking back at it we would say it was wrong but then they were our enemies and anything that we could do to end the war without sacrificing any more American lives we would have done, no matter what it happened to be right or wrong.

David: As far as war production in Evansville went with the abled bodied men in the service at that time, who did carry on the works in the factories themselves?

Willard: Well, you had even high school boys working and then the over drafted age men and the work force was made up of a lot of women also. As far as I can remember there were no great labor shortages. There were enough production workers to fill production jobs. In this area, by the way, there was manufactured everything from airplanes to ships. What is now the Whirlpool plant at that time was Republic Aircraft and they made the P47 which was a fighter plane. Also Chrysler Corp. which was here at that time made tanks. The old Serval plant also was engaged in making small arms and things. The Evansville Shipyards made the LST. How many they made exactly I don't know but it was several hundred. I think they played a fairly important part in the South Pacific as far as cargo carriers and this type of thing went.

David: Weren't you afraid with all war production going on, with so many people involved in it, about a job shortage after you had no more government contracts?

Willard: Well I don't think that at that time that people were as concerned about what was going to happen after the war as they were of getting the war over with. Everyone was affected personally in having someone, either a member of the family or someone in service and their safety was the major concern.