

Today is March 29, 1975. My name is Connie Dorris. As a project for Indiana History, I'm conducting an interview today with Timmons Todd. We're going to discuss what life was like in Evansville and the surrounding area during the times of the Depression and World War II. Allright, first, what was life like for you during the Depression? Could you tell us some general things about it?

Mrs. Todd: Well, I was real small, but I remember we was living in the country; we weren't living in Evansville at that time. We lived out in the country. Of course, I lived with my parents, and I was the youngest of the children. As far as things to eat, we had plenty to eat; we never did go hungry because we raised our hogs for our meat. We didn't have no beef back then because there wasn't any freezers, and we didn't even have any refrigerators. So we had no beef, other than we had our cows for our milk and butter. We raised our hogs, and killed them, and cured our hams and the side meat and things like that. Then we raised our vegetables. We raised all our vegetables just about it. We didn't have to buy anything other than sugar and of course we raised our wheat. We raised wheat to take to town, to take to the mill for our flour. We took corn to the mill to have it ground for our meal. So sugar and a few things like that are what we had to buy. We had our chickens. Our fryers, lot of times we'd have to take them and sell them to buy sugar and things like that. Very seldom did we have eggs to eat. Mother and Daddy would take them to town to sell them to buy the things that we didn't raise. So really we didn't have - now our clothes, we had enough, but usually mine were hand-me-downs from my older sisters. About once a year, Daddy would have enough money that he could get us all a pair of shoes, but when we went to school, most of the time we went barefooted. Of course we weren't the only ones, the others did too.

Dorris: What was your school like? Let me ask you that.

Todd: Well, it was a one-room schoolhouse, with all eight grades, from first to the eighth grade.

Dorris: And you just had one teacher?

Todd: One teacher is all that we had. Then there was just seven months of school.

Dorris: What kind of books did you have?

Todd: What kind of books? Well, we had - they called it the primer, that was the reader, you see, and we had a spelling book and arithmetic. On up in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, we had government, geography, and history. I guess it was just about the same amount of subjects that they have now. How one teacher ever did all that I'll never know. There used to be around 25 or sometimes 30 children. Oh maybe even more than that but a very small schoolhouse.

Dorris: I don't guess, since you lived out in the country - the depression probably didn't affect you as much as it did those living in the town. You were used to doing without some of the things which they had.

Todd: That's true; I imagine that's right. Like I said we lived out in the country. We didn't have any money, but as a little kid, I didn't really think about it. As I got a little bit older, then I could see -

Dorris: Was life like it is on "The Waltons"?

Todd: Are you kidding? The Waltons have got electricity, and we used a kerosene lamp. Even for our matches - we had a few matches, but we were very saving with them. We'd make what they called lamp-lighters. That would be some kids' jobs of a night, sitting by the fire. Mother or Daddy one would cut out these strips of paper about an inch and a half wide, eight or ten inches long. You start rolling them up at the end and roll them real tight and double them down at one end so that they would hold together, and that's what you'd light your lamp with. So, we had kerosene lamps and the Waltons have a radio, and we didn't have any radio. They to me - of course, they've got a car.

Dorris: You didn't have a car?

Todd: Not very many people did. It would almost scare us to death if we heard a car coming down the road. I know when we, we had to walk to school on this little country road. Oh, I guess it was about a mile or two miles to school. My sister and I would be going to school all alone, and we'd hear a car coming every once in a while, very seldom, but when we did it would scare us so cause we knew it wouldn't be anyone we knew, it would be someone from town or we thought from way off, we'd run down to the woods and hide behind a tree 'til the car come, and then we'd come out and start on to school.

Dorris: Do you remember anything about President Roosevelt's policies? I guess things began to change, to pick up during his administration.

Todd: Of course, the first presidential election that I remember was Hoover. He was on the Republican ticket and Smith was on the Democrat ticket. I remember that election when he was elected. Then, of course I don't remember a lot about the banks and the depression business, other than to hear Mother and them talk about it. But things really got bad then. Then I remember when Roosevelt was elected, wasn't that in about '32 or '33, when he was elected? Well of course he began - wasn't it the "New Deal" he called it - the New Deal, different things he began thinking about to try to do to get the banks back in operation, to get more employment. One thing that I do remember was about the WPA that he got started.

Dorris: What was it, Workers Progress -

Todd: Workers Progress Association, Workers Progress Acts, anyway. - Whatever it was, to tell you the truth, you'd ride along and see them and they wasn't doing a whole lot of work. I know it was kind of a joke. A lot of people, - I guess it was the ones - cause everybody couldn't get on this, - I don't know whether you had to have a pull - or what it was, if it was like everything else with a government job, - but the ones that couldn't - I guess it's kind of like the sour grapes business - they said the WPA stood for "We Piddle Around". Every time they'd see them, they'd just be standing around, leaning on their shovels. Then Roosevelt started that CC - the Three-C camp. There was one I remember between here and, I believe it was the other side of Henderson and Dixon, Kentucky. It was a camp.

They dressed like, kind of looked like soldiers in the army, because they went in army trucks, and they would go around to the farms and on ditch banks and gullies and things like that, they would set out pine trees. Even today, you can go along lot of places and see all of these pines, and you can know that that's where they set out the pine trees. So people really, they thought Roosevelt was something else; he brought the economy up. It wasn't too long then 'til the war business began, not here with us, but they began talking about it over in France and different places. Of course as I got older - it was when I was seventeen and in the fall of '37 that I came to Evansville, and I got my first public job. It was at, it was the Box factory then, now it's Inland Container, not at the same location. It was here in town, over where the old Brigg's-Chrysler Plant was. I worked ten hours a day and started at 21¢ an hour. So I'd work ten hours and get two dollars and a dime.

Dorris: What kind of work did you do?

Todd: Well, what it was, of course this was more of a seasonal job, in the fall before time to harvest the apples, I made baskets and the tops. They had wooden tops to go on them. What I helped make, I helped feed the machine.

Dorris: Did you do the same work as the men did?

Todd: Well, not exactly the same, 'cause they run the machines. The women did most of the work.

Dorris: Well, what about your pay?

Todd: They got a few cents more on the hour. Of course, none of it was very big. It seems to me like they made ten cents more on the hour than the women did.

Dorris: You didn't have any unions or anything to protect your rights, did you?

Todd: No. We didn't have any unions or anything. You just worked your ten hours a day, and you knew when the ten hours was over, that you had worked your ten hours. I'd been working there, oh I guess a month or two, when they give us a two-cent raise. So I did make 23¢ an hour. I guess it was about three months of that and then see, they laid people off cause they had enough containers for their apples.

Dorris: When you first came to Evansville, what was your first impression? Here you had grown up in the country, so what was your first impression of Evansville?

Todd: It really was something else. Evansville to me was, of course, the biggest city that I'd ever been in. Then it was to me like I imagine if you went to New York City or Chicago or some place like that, or if a child went to some place like that today. It was factories everywhere. Servel was here, Briggs and Chrysler, Swift's, and then a lot of other little small ones, but that was the - and then Sunbeam, where Whirlpool now is, and of course the zoo. That was something big. That was the big

attraction, the zoo and the merry-go-round and a few little rides like that. People would go, and you'd spend hours and hours at the zoo, walking around, seeing the animals. That was just about the only - other than a few theatres - that was about what Evansville was.

Dorris: What was the main center of the town?

Todd: Main Street was, from one end of Main St. on down to the north end. Down on the north end was where Woodlawn Theatre was. That was where most of the people would let their little kids, out in the north end of town, go. At that time, it seems to me like, it cost five or ten cents to go see the movie, and they could just go. There wasn't any such thing as being afraid that anything would happen to them. You'd let them go in the afternoon or even at night. They didn't think a thing about letting them go alone like that. So, it was - it was an awful dirty town, because everybody used coal for their heat and fuel, and also the factories did too. In the morning, when the factories would go to starting their boilers and what ever they did, you could just see the big, old smoke and soot just falling everywhere, and you'd stand outside waiting for the bus - if you was just talking to anybody, you could see the soot just a-falling. You'd have it all over your clothes, even on your face. By the time night would come, you'd be as sooty as everything, if you were out at all that day.

Dorris: What kind of transportation did they have?

Todd: Well, streetcars, when we first came to Evansville, not a whole lot, but they had some and then buses.

Dorris: In the downtown area?

Todd: Yes. Then our milk was delivered by the milkman in a horsedrawn milk wagon every morning. Then it was all glass bottles and before anyone else usually was up, you could hear the milkman coming down the streets. The streets then, so many of them was brick, and it made a lot of racket, the horse of course and the milk wagon. Then there was no garbage pickup like now, and there would be some people that would pick up your trash with push-carts. They'd come down your street or else down your alley, picking up all the trash and bottles and stuff like that for you.

Dorris: Do you remember - approximately how big was the population at that time?

Todd: Well, I'm not for sure just exactly when we first came, but not too long after, I remember it was about 62,000.- So it was far from, you know, what is now. Then when World War II started, it began to pick up.

Dorris: Do you remember what you thought when you heard the announcement that we were in the war and the reaction of the people around you?

Todd: I know what I thought. I know my reaction was - You want me to tell that about the Sunday I heard about it? Okay, well it was - then of course, they didn't have no t.v. or no fast way of getting the news. We was out of town on that day, and we was coming in town that afternoon, with my sister and

her husband. As we come in the corner of Riverside and Kentucky Avenue, late that afternoon, there was a paperboy standing there, hollering and selling papers, and that's what the headlines was, about Pearl Harbor. Well, of course it just shocked everybody, schocked and worried too, because they knowed that a lot of their loved ones and different ones they knew would have to go to the army. So that's what at first it was, but immediately, here the factories began to change over to defense work and begin to hiring more people. So more people got jobs cause at the time before that, you just absolutely couldn't hardly get a job in Evansville unless - now the only way that you could was if you knew someone, see, that had had a pull.

Dorris: That's the way it is now.

Todd: Then you could get a job. 'Cause my brother-in-law was working at Swift's. He got a job because a friend of his, in fact I think it was a son of his kinfolks, was a foreman at Swift's. Well, he gave him a job, see, and then that's the way my husband got on at Swift's, because through my brother-in-law and by knowing the foreman. That was about the only way you could even get a job like that.

Dorris: I imagine some people were even glad the war was going on because you got more jobs and more money.

Todd: I hate to admit it, but true, that's true; they did. Especially the ones that knew they wouldn't have to go to the service or knew that any of their immediate family wouldn't have to, and even some of them that brothers that had to go, they still was glad in a way that they got the work because, well you know the saying: "The more money you got, the more money you want". So they started hiring and in fact they hired everybody that come in off of the street. If they was able to walk in, they hired them whether they needed them or not which lot of times they didn't need them.

Dorris: Why did they do that?

Todd: Well, because some way or another the government, I think, would pay them so much, a certain percentage for every employee that they had on defense work. Naturally, the more they hired, the more money the factories, the companies would make. So they had them sitting around of a night and day, anywhere they could have them, asleep maybe. What I mean, you know, they didn't really need them to work; just as long as they had them hired, they could work a little, but they loafed a lot too.

Dorris: Where did you work at during the war?

Todd: Well, I worked at, they called it Sunbeam then, but it is where Plant One is of Whirlpool over at the corner of Reed and Morgan, and they made forty-five cartridges. I worked in the year of '43.

Dorris: Were your wages better than they were earlier when you worked?

Todd: Well yes. It's been so long, but I believe I made, it's either

fifty something or sixty something cents an hour while I worked there, and I was inspector while I worked at Sunbeam. Then - let's see, I worked in '43 - I quit then in the fall of, I think it was in December of '43; I'd started in January of '43, and I quit in December of '43. My husband had been drafted and had left in November and was stationed in Texas. So I quit but they was already - see the war had began, it wasn't over by no means, but they had done got enough defense work piled up that they began slowing down some and part of the plant had changed back over to what they was doing before, and they had done said they was going to lay off some after the first of the year. So I was going to quit, and they fixed it where I could draw my unemployment, see. So I went to Texas and stayed, and really here when it all completely changed back over, you know, from the defense work, - we had a big boat yard, I mean ship yard down on the river; they made these big - I forget what kind of boats they made. Then out here where Plant Two is of Whirlpool, was the Republic Aviation place where they made airplanes. They built that new then just especially for that.

Dorris: Did they have any other new industries at that time?

Todd: Well, I can't think of anything new, 'cause, you see, the old ones that was here - Chrysler and Briggs and Servelle and Sunbeam - they just changed over to defense work because they didn't make what they was making. Things was scarce, see, like refrigerators and different things that these plants was making when they changed over; they began to get scarce. It was a while before you could even get things like that.

Dorris: What type of things did they ration?

Todd: Well one thing was tires; you couldn't hardly get tires, and of course gas was rationed. Then things at groceries, sugar was rationed and different things. I remember - this was when we were in Texas; I don't guess you want to hear how it was rationed in Texas - it was during World War II, and it was the same as it was here, I imagine. I know that at the little grocery where we traded at, there was just certain days a week that they, we knew they got bananas in, and we got acquainted real well with the lady that run the grocery, and she would always save us bananas because there was very few, and things like that was kind of scarce. I don't really know why things like that was scarce. I don't know why sugar was scarce, but I remember even here if you knew your groceryman that you traded with all the time, he'd stick a few things like that back under the counter for you when they came in, and you could get them.

Dorris: So, as far as waged were concerned, the people prospered and were better off during the war time, but as far as getting goods and stuff, it was harder.

Todd: Yes, but a person, you know, you had plenty really, and material, I know that was scarce. If you wanted to make a dress or anything like that material was scarce, but it was cheap too.

Dorris: Overall it was a big boom for Evansville; the town grew quite a bit.

Todd: Yes, it really did, and then even after the war was over, and they went back, changed from their defense work, it was still prosperous. Oh it might have been kind of a slow-up for just a little bit but not too much because people had made money all during this time, so they had money to buy. Therefore they put back in the economy. Just like at the Republic where they made airplanes, that was International Harvester after that, see. Then at Plant Two, where Whirlpool is now, that has only been Whirlpool since Harvester left. Harvester made refrigerators too, and it left town in, well you were only about a year and a half old back then because it was in about '55 or '56 when it left town. Whirlpool bought that plant out, see. Then Servell left too, and that was really hard on Evansville when Servelle left. Then when Chrysler left, people just thought that was terrible, but then Whirlpool just kept getting bigger and kept bringing the economy back up then.

Dorris: Okay. I think it's about time for us to quit. Can you think of anything else that you forgot that you want to add about what the city was like?

Todd: Well, not unless you ask me a question; I can't think of anything.

Dorris: Thank you very much.