**Interviewee: John Behlen**
**Interviewer: Thomas Saylor**
**Date of interview: 24 August 2002**
**Location: living room of the Behlen home, Appleton, MN**
**Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, October 2002**
**Edited by: Thomas Saylor, December 2002**

John Behlen was born 8 March 1915 on the family farm in Shible Township, Swift County, Minnesota. Except for several years living in Minneapolis (1927-33), where he graduated from high school, John's entire life has been spent on this farm, located near Appleton. He was married in 1942.

During the war years John farmed approximately 400 acres, and raised livestock. He was active in county government, and spent time in various local organizations. As a farmer, he received a deferment from military service.

In the years since 1945, John continued to farm, raised a family, and used his energies at his church and in his community. He continued to work long days well into his eighties.

John provides very good details of rural life in western Minnesota during the war years, talking about prices, availability of goods, and various crops and livestock.

**<u>Interview Key</u>:**
**T = Thomas Saylor**
**J = John Behlen**
**[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation**
**(***) = words or phrase unclear**
**NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity**

**Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.**

T: Today is the 24th of August 2002 and I want to thank you, John Behlen, for taking time this afternoon to talk with us about your experiences. Thank you very much.

J: You're very welcome.

T: We talked a little before and you talked about being born and farming many years out here in the Swift County area. You were on the farm in 1941 when the United States entered World War II. Do you remember what you were doing when you first heard the news about Pearl Harbor?

J: I do not remember what I was doing. In fact I can't remember the specific day. In 1941 we didn't have television. We would have had radio. Of course I've read the *Minneapolis Tribune* since I lived in Minneapolis and carried paper routes. Still reading the *Minneapolis Tribune*.

T: Now, you don't remember where you were, but eventually you did get the news that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. How did you react to that news?

J: Besides the newspaper we also would get *Life* Magazine. *National Geographic* sometimes. We always had a lot of magazines in my home. I cannot remember, although I was reading about the war news and watching. The mechanical aspects of it, the planes and all that. I know I read about it. I know I read about the planes coming into Pearl Harbor and we were probably taking *Time* Magazine plus another news magazine. We've always been voracious readers. I can remember the stories about the planes that they didn't get dispersed out there on the airfields and the Japanese came in and wiped the whole works out. So I remember a lot of those things but some things I can't really talk like this.

T: Let me ask you this. Pretty soon after Pearl Harbor the president declared war and the United States was at war for the first time in many years. How did being at war, the fact that our nation was now at war, how did that make you feel?

J: I'm going to say some things that you might think are kind of bad. I think most of us were, "What am I going to do about my business? What am I going to do?" Because all my help, not that I had a lot. I always had one steady man. In fact, a young fellow that was working for me. I just knew I was all set for several years


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because he was just out of high school. His name was Helmer Barrons. Another fellow up toward Morris and I went to St. Paul to plead with the State big wheels about this. Swift County only approves of this many pounds of this and this, and they counted it up. "Yes, Sir," I said, "I'm sure you're right, but you know, could they dispense with all the Swift Counties?" "Well," he said, "that's my rules. That's the ones I go by." What can you do? This Helmer Barrons went in to service. He started down real low and he was a dandy because he many years later left the service as a lieutenant colonel.

T: But the reason he went into the service first was because you couldn't get any kind of a deferment for him.

J: No. I was his best bet because he was working for me and he liked me. I'm still his friend. He lives up here in the Battle Lake area now. He and another fella, a carpenter, they got into some field of espionage where they would read maps and explain maps to people. Then he got into the paratroopers. Then he got into helicopters. He served two sessions in Vietnam. The first time he came home from Vietnam he came to see me and he said, "John, if they turn us loose we'd pile the bodies so high they couldn't crawl over them." The second time he came home there was none of that.

T: It sounds like, back to the farm, that your first concern was, how is being at war going to impact my business or my livelihood here?

J: I guess I really didn't worry too much about that. I had very late model equipment. I had a nice home. There was good food, Christian environment if that meant anything to anybody. Fine, pleasant wife, a good housekeeper. I was John. Everybody knew John. I can't remember that I worried very much about surviving, personally surviving the war. I was concerned of course about the war and the United States and all that it entails. We had a National Guard unit in Appleton and that was one of the first units pulled out. So there were friends that, people you knew, that went.

T: By the time, by late 1941, you were already married.

J: 1942 I was married.

T: So in '41 you were a bachelor farmer?

J: Yes. My mother was living with me. My mother was still keeping house for me.

T: Did it occur to you, once the US went to war, that you should volunteer?

J: This young man that was just here at our house this morning, one of his uncles was going. A neighbor of mine out there. So we went over there one evening. His name is Fred Imde. He lives right over here now. And we went over there to his


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place and his sister came up to me and said, "How come, John, you're left alone?" Well, that was just it—I was alone. There Fred was the first one they called from that group, and it was because they had, I think, three young men up there. [My] father was gone, in an auto accident. So that's why I was there.

T: You were the only male on the property?

J: I was the only male.

T: John, you got married in 1942.

J: Yes.

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T: And you stayed on the property there?

J: Yes.

T: What's one important way that you think your life changed with the United States at war?

J: It changed certain things, because you had to make do in some respects. But in other respects it was no hardship for me, because as a farmer you were entitled to things. For instance, I got a new automobile in 1942. The reason was, I had a car that had a hundred thousand miles on it. I had enough units there. Besides that I was on the township board, which doesn't mean that much, but still a little extra. I was president of the local elevator, which doesn't mean much but it's still a little bit. Things like that. I was active in my church. I was John.

T: The people of the township knew you.

J: Yes. I think one time I had to go and report for something, but it was just a formality. I really wasn't called on the carpet, so to speak. When my uncle who was short of help and I offered to help him and he and I went over to Benson. I met with the draft board. I just told them what the situation was and there was practically no question. I'd go work for Uncle George until the spring when I'd have to go back to the land. Which I did. No attempt to make umpteen dollars. I think I was promised sixty cents an hour.

T: On the farm yourself, you said during the war you were farming around four hundred acres.

J: Yes.


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T: You had some hired men on the farm in your employ. One guy. Maybe you could say a bit about your ability to hire people as a farmer.

J: People that are willing to work on the farm are not that many. Helmer Barrons, I have to quote him. It sounds like I'm blowing my own horn. Maybe I am a little bit. Helmer Barrons came back from the service. He came back to this area. Joined our church and he's teaching a Bible class. I'm sitting in his Bible class. One Sunday morning he says, "I'm going to tell you people a story today. A story about John sitting right over there. You know, I went to work for John. And I thought, boy, this is it because John is known as a successful farmer and so I'm going to learn all his secrets." I'm telling you the truth now. It may not be the exact words but… and he says, "John buys a hay baler and he puts me on the hay baler and I'm out baling hay and baling straw for all the neighbors in the area. You know what really surprised me?" he says, "These people are coming along to settle up with John. And I turned in the number of bales just like you're supposed to do. And John never collects the full amount. He always says, well, you got six hundred and fifty bales. Knock off the fifty or whatever. There's that Christian guy." Do you know why I was that way? Because I felt inadequate.

T: In what way?

J: That whatever I did wasn't really that good.

T: As part of the war effort you mean.

J: Whatever it could be. In life. I've never counted myself as being any better than anybody else. Most likely I'm not quite up to par. That's funny because it was something like that. I lived with that.

T: Now during the war, to keep on that track, did you feel inadequate in any way? That you weren't contributing enough towards our national war effort?

J: I was doing everything that I could do. I don't know. I'm kind of a strange guy. I always have a little different way of doing things. One time the Red Cross or somebody wanted somebody to canvas the township. I had done enough canvasses and I didn't want any more. But I sat down and I bought enough envelopes and enough stamps and everything and I sent a letter to every person who lived in my township. I wrote them a little note. They were all identical. Would you like to go collecting today? Now we're going to do this and do this and do this and it takes people to do this. Would you like to go collecting? I included a letter with a stamp. If you want to make your contribution you mail it to me then you won't have to go collecting.

T: So the Red Cross was canvassing or trying to get someone to canvas for them to collect money or what else?


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J: The next year the Red Cross invited me to please come up to Morris and give a talk to a bunch of people there. I didn't go. I had such phenomenal success. I don't feel superior or anything. I just have ideas.

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T: About your township there. Were you in Appleton then a lot during the war years?

J: I was living out there in the country all the time.

T: How did life in the township change as a result of the war? Did you notice that things were different?

J: I'm going to make a little guess here. I would guess probably the biggest change that took place was the result of people being drawn into the war. Sent off someplace and finally, if they were lucky, they came back. And it certainly made a difference to my neighbor across the road. He was my uncle, and he had twin boys and another son, and that son went off to the Pacific and died, not as a result of gunshot wounds but because of some fever. So you see, you could die. I had another cousin that was in the Air Force. He was a tail gunner. He was killed by an air crash in England. Plane came down. Something wrong with the plane. He was the tail man and he got it. When you talk about war, not everybody gets shot in the heart. There's many ways to die.

T: People in your township were affected by casualties, in other words.

J: Yes. I know this cousin that was killed in Britain, his funeral was one afternoon out in the country. Not the church I go to, but an affiliate church. His dad was probably one of my favorite uncles. I got a neighbor of mine to come and take over the combine for a few hours so that I could go to that funeral. That's not to heap any glory on myself. I just wanted to go. They were a family that helped us somewhat when we came out here to the farm.

T: Did farmers, yourself or others, have trouble keeping hired help or having enough manpower?

J: I don't know of anybody that really ran short, because they substituted. In most cases they could kind of double up or something. People were not farming on the scale they are today. It wasn't mechanized the way it was ten years later. You'd help each other out with this way or that way. There were enough older people around to sort of keep things going. At least I'm not aware of. I kind of knew what was going on. You made do one way or another. By the way, there were hardly any combines in the country at that time.

T: Why is that?


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J: The combines started in about 1945 or '46.

T: A post-war development.

J: Yes.

T: On the farm. Let's talk about a few things. How were you impacted by shortages? Was it easy or harder to get spare parts or tires or gasoline, things like this?

J: The remarkable thing was that as a farmer, you were number one priority. If I had a tire that went bad I could go to town and I could get the tire. At least to the point that I don't remember that I had to lay up any machines. In fact, when the war first started they had a few automobiles. I had a car that had a hundred thousand miles on it which doesn't sound too great today but at that time that was really miles. And I applied to the draft board and I got a permit to buy a car.

T: Whereas folks in the city may have simply… they wouldn't have gotten the permit.

J: Probably not.

T: You needed a permit to go to a car dealer otherwise they couldn't sell you a car.

J: The local Chevrolet dealer, I knew him. He went to the same church. He had kind of a homely Chevrolet two door. It was…

T: Nothing special, I take it.

J: Yes. So I went to him and said, "Harvey, I'd like to buy a car, but can you get anything different than that?" "I'll see," he says. I don't know what day that was. Maybe let's say it was Saturday. On Tuesday I got a card in the mail saying, your car will be ready Tuesday night.

T: You hadn't seen it yet.

J: I just knew it was going to have four wheels. I went in there. Oh my God. How can I be so lucky? He had a green Chevrolet, torpedo shaped. They had a special name for it. I couldn't have prayed for anything nicer. Especially since I was dating my future wife.

T: Did you even with your permit, did you get that car because of your connections? You knew him. Or was it just because you had the permit?

J: Because I had that many acres under control.

T: He didn't <u>have</u> to sell you a car though, did he?


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J: No.

T: But the permit meant that he could sell you a car.

J: Yes. That's right.

T: You still had to pay full price for the car?

J: Oh, of course.

T: The permit didn't give you any special price or anything.

J: No, no. It just gave me a permit to go out and find one. It just happened that this one dealer had this one. A two door plain Jane Chevrolet. Oh gosh. It looked plain, but then I told Harvey and I'd done some business with him. I'd bought some machinery from him. But I wasn't twisting any arms. He said, "I'll see what I can do." And I came back two days later and he's got this green torpedo shaped car.

T: He didn't have many cars on his lot to sell though, did he?

J: Didn't have any cars. He had that one car.

T: That was it.

J: I had a tire go on that truck or car somewhere. I went to my local gas dealer who sold me all the gasoline and everything that was delivered to the farm. He said he could get some new tires. He sold me some tires. I don't remember what kind of permit. I think you had to have a permit to buy tires.

T: It sounds like, I hear you saying, you weren't really impacted by shortages of…

J: I suppose a person was, but it was so easily resolved. I can't remember anybody saying, I cannot get a tire or, I cannot get this.

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T: And gasoline too then? You had a permit for that?

J: You got a permit, for so many gallons of gasoline. I did something for which I was ashamed for a long time. There were some people who were claiming that they were not getting what they needed in the way of gasoline. So they had a mass meeting down here, in Appleton. All the dealers there. We farmers were supposed to come in there and complain. So I went in and just my presence was enough. I don't remember if I had too much to say. These guys got plenty to say. "Have any of you been refused?"


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T: You shook your head "no" just now, in response to the question you asked.

J: The only problem was, we didn't realize how much we were burning in many cases. They'd ask for twenty-five gallons a month or something. They didn't realize they needed more than that. It all got straightened out so easily. Didn't need to be any casting reflections on peoples' ability. That was the only thing. But those things got resolved so easily. I applied to the local draft board or local ration board which met in Benson, and they published the name in the paper of who got permits for more gasoline, who got permits for this thing, and, most importantly, who got a new car.

T: And your name was in there for the new car.

J: Oh, you bet.

T: Now were other people envious or a bit suspicious that you had gotten a new car?

J: Nobody ever said anything to me face to face. I was, I say this realizing that it sounds like I'm bragging. I'm not bragging. I was one of the bigger operators. I was also active in town board. I was also active in my church. In fact I was secretary.

T: Did it make you feel at all funny or embarrassed that you had gotten a new car as opposed to someone else?

J: That car, I don't think I gave much thought to it. A lot of people couldn't afford a new car, the price of a new car.

T: Even if they had a permit, they couldn't afford it?

J: Yes, I think there was some of that. I was working. I've always worked very hard. I wasn't taking any time off. I was helping my neighbors as much. I've always been big hearted. I'm bragging, but now I recognize myself. I'm very generous to people.

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T: Let me shift a little bit. You came into Appleton for supplies sometimes or because you knew people or you met people in town. How did you see life in Appleton changing? The town itself? How did you see life in Appleton changing as a result of the war?

J: The biggest change would be when some merchants were doing business with and there's a notice in the Appleton *Press* that his son's been killed in Germany. So what do you say to the guy when you come into his store?

T: That's someone you know and have done business with.


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J: Yes.

T: What do you say?

J: I don't know. I don't know what you say. Except knowing that we were all in the same boat. You didn't. This fellow that was here earlier today, Fred Ende? He was called by the draft board. So my mother and I went over there to say goodbye and so forth. Fred Ende had a sister called Lorraine. I think Lorraine had a little… well, I got a note in my mailbox that day. "What's the matter with Lorraine Ende, three-quarters of a mile across the road? Across the field." Lorraine was there, and she says, "Well, how come Fred has to go and you don't have to?" I said, "That's because of the rules they've got. When the proper time comes I'll get the same kind of a notice. Now, Lorraine, let's look at another story. Nobody is rushing to go. If Fred or whoever comes back not wounded, there'll be all kinds of programs to send them to school, college courses, or whatever."

Of course, that did develop. That doesn't help the guy like my cousin across the road who died out in the Pacific of some illness that we are not familiar with. There were a lot of deaths from that and that's what Clifford Wilby died from, some disease that's not in existence here. I tried to reconcile, kind of console myself there. Well, John, if you have to go. In spite of all that, I was going with a girl pretty serious. We were talking some about getting married that fall. The fall of '42, I was a little tempted. Why don't you go in the service? Get married when you come back. There was the temptation there a little bit.

T: What held you back?

J: I don't know why or what. That's just the way. You kind of wonder if you're shirking your duty. Or if you ought to be doing something different.

T: So you didn't necessarily feel guilty, but the thought crossed your mind sometimes, maybe I should be?

J: Right.

T: Did you talk to other guys, other guys who must have had deferments too because they were farmers?

J: Remember now, I came out here when I was eighteen years old. I missed all the associations with grade school kids and even high school kids. I came out here when they were either going to work for their dad or whatever. Now, God forgive me, I'm going to tell you something. I think sometimes I've had this evil thought. How lucky you were, John, that you didn't have a dad. Why should anybody feel like that? Most of the young men that stayed at home just took off from where their dad left off. Since I was that high *(holds hand waist high)* I read books, read books, read


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books. In Minneapolis I read books, read books. I could give a book report. But don't ask me about my grades because I was a lousy student.

T: So if you'd had a dad in charge of the farm, what that might have meant for you?

J: I don't think my dad would have because I think he was more progressive from what I've heard my mother say. But so many times I saw farmers that wouldn't move out of any direction from what their dad was doing. The dad was doing the best that they knew how. But they didn't know any better. I had a cousin, he was married to my cousin. His name was John Arndt. I did custom work for him. I liked John. Why do you like one person more than another? I liked John. We got him on the town board for a while. But he only stayed one term. He resigned. He said, "John, I can't even sign my name." And when I was doing combining for him he started talking to me. "You know, John," he says, "I felt so dumb all my life because I was the oldest. My dad was farming. He needed help." So in the fall, school would start and John wouldn't go. His name was John also, John Arndt. So then about December the farm work was done and I'd go to school and the other kids are down the road a long ways and then I come in.

**End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 382.**

J: And you know the same thing would happen in the spring. I had to help dad until the crop was planted. School would close about June 1st and we had almost all the work done by that time. I wonder if he ever opened his heart. I liked John. He was a simple person but honest. He was talking to me man to man. Then right away from him I took that over to another guy. I never talked to him about him. He was in the same position. He was the oldest son. So it meant he had to help Pa in the spring and help Pa in the fall.

T: That's interesting.

J: Yes. This is the way life was lived in those days.

T: On to farming. What kind of crops did you raise during the war years?

J: When we first came farming here, again God blessed me because the first year I planted was 1934. And come fall I didn't have any crop but neither did anybody else because it didn't rain all summer. I make a joke of it but I think God was protecting me. Because nobody could see all my mistakes.

T: That's an optimistic way of looking at it.

J: It is strange the way life treats you, yes. It's very strange.

T: During the war did your crop, what you grew, did it change at all?


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J: No. We were kind of locked in. We would plant a little bit of corn. By a little bit I would say maybe ten percent. I'm just kidding. Just a small amount of corn. We'd raise some oats because we needed oats to feed the animals. We'd raise some corn and corn was limited somewhat by your harvest conditions. It was not mechanical. It was all hand done. And what land you had. We didn't have hybrids, we had open palm corn. Raised some barley in the years that it was popular. I raised quite a bit of barley and also quite a bit of flax. As time went on some crops fell from favor and other things changed, so that today all we raise is soybeans and corn.

T: During the war you raised…

J: Corn, oats, wheat.

T: How were the prices for your crops?

J: I can't remember that. They were very modest I would say.

T: Were prices fixed by the government that you recall?

J: I don't remember but I wouldn't be at all surprised. On the other hand, under the War Powers Act I would think so. On the other hand I just really can't remember much of that.

T: Did you have chickens, pigs or cows?

**(1, B, 440)**

J: Oh, yes. Every farmer had some cows and what horses he needed for his field work. And he raised some pigs if he had time. And some people had a few turkeys. But that was usually a side one. Some people had a few sheep.

T: How about you?

J: Yes.

T: Did you have sheep as well?

J: No, I never had sheep. The extent of my livestock was some horses, some cows. I went into milking more heavily than most people did. And some pigs. I'll tell you a little story. How I benefited from the War Act. You can raise spring pigs. Nowadays it doesn't make any difference—they got these systems and they are born any time of the year. At that time you probably didn't have warm buildings, so you'd raise some pigs in the spring and then if you wanted some fall pigs you would have them farrow before it got too cold. They had to be born before it got too cold. In 1941 in the fall I kind of liked to raise fall pigs. I had time in the winter to kind of look after them. So we were busy with planting and a fellow by the name of Galen Stevanis


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who was working for me. I had an old used truck and I built a rack on there to haul some pigs. One day we decided, and I never was any good at telling you what the pig weighed—some people could, I never could—we penned up the biggest ones and we backed up that old truck and loaded it. Oh my gosh, we couldn't get them in the truck.

T: Too heavy?

J: They were heavy. I was going to take them to Dawson because there was a buying plant there. I remember Galen Stevanis. He looked at the truck and he turned around and got a big axe. I said, "My god, what are you going to do?" I went down to Dawson and unloaded the pigs. They gave me five hundred dollars.

T: For how many pigs?

J: I don't know how many.

T: You thought this was a good sum of money.

J: Yes. It was five hundred dollars, and I think I had either four or five more truckloads at home. And it affected me so that I got engaged.

T: So it was amazing how the price of pigs can change your life, right?

J: I was single and all of a sudden you're walking by the car.

T: It sounds like you were surprised by how much you got for those pigs.

J: Yes. This is the point. How come they declare war in the fall or early winter I think it was, and I had a whole bunch of farrow pigs in the barn.

T: Lucky for you.

J: It wasn't warmongering. It just happened to be.

T: So the price for pork anyway was good.

J: I don't remember. I think it was around nine cents, but I'm not sure.

T: But in any case, more important than the actual number was that you felt that was a good price.

J: Oh, boy. I was really flying high.

T: Did you notice during the war, did the price for pigs or for cows or beef stay pretty high?


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J: I do not remember that. But it must have been pretty good. We must have been making some money, because it came to be that the war ended. In fact, I was working for my uncle part time that winter. Then I ordered a new tractor. That came, and I must have paid for it. The next thing I ordered was a new combine.

T: This was right when the war ended?

J: This was right after the end of the war. Maybe 1945 or 1946.

T: So you had money. You had cash it sounds like to buy this stuff.

J: Yes.

T: Just waiting for it to be available.

J: Yes. We worked. We really worked.

T: So it was hard working the farm, whether it's war or no war.

J: Yes.

T: Speaking of work, did your typical day, that is, when you got up and what you did, did that change at all?

J: I don't think so, no. That didn't change until we got rid of the milk cows.

T: That was after the war.

J: Yes. I'd get up and we'd do them, the cow chores, the milking and the feeding and separate. We didn't sell milk, we sold cream, butterfat. Then we'd go and have breakfast. Then we'd get ready to go out in the field.

**(1, A, 516)**

T: What did you do with your buttermilk? If you sold cream, what did you do with your buttermilk?

J: Fed that to the pigs. Did they ever love that!

T: There wasn't really a market for buttermilk?

J: No, we didn't have buttermilk. We had skim milk. We just separated it and sold the cream. The butterfat. The rest of the milk went to the hog barn and the pigs would come and they would squeal and holler. Try to beat each other off to get to that.


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T: Those were the pigs that were going to buy your car and…

J: Yes. *(both laugh)*

T: Speaking of Appleton, do you think the war helped to bring Appleton together as a community anymore?

J: I don't think so. I think the merchants were all working hard and long hours. Saturday night was when everybody went to town.

T: What for?

J: If nothing else the thresher men had to get a bath. They'd climb in the chair and the barber would have to clean them up. They probably wouldn't shave all week. They looked terrible.

T: Must have smelled pretty bad too.

J: Yes. *(both laugh)*

T: So Saturday night was go to town. When people would get together in groups would the war be a topic of conversation?

J: I can't remember ever getting into a conversation about the war. You'd hear about, so and so's boy has got to go now. Or, so and so got a notice. Or, so and so was killed in Germany. Things like that. But they wouldn't talk about it at great length.

T: What I'm hearing is that the more the personal, the individual impact, as opposed to the larger, how are we doing as a country.

J: Yes, I think so. I don't think many people… didn't have many radios around.

T: Did you have a radio yourself on the farm?

J: Yes, after a while.

T: Did you have electricity by this time?

J: No. We didn't get electricity until 1941, just before the war. So those of us who had signed up and were on the schedule, we got the electricity. I had a friend over here. He signed up, but his neighbors didn't sign up so he couldn't get it.

T: Because they had to run the line all the way?


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J: The lines had to follow. They couldn't afford it. They had a limitation of something. You had to build so many feet or parts of a mile to justify you getting electricity. My farm was here, my uncle's farm was over here, back in the field a ways.

T: But they were adjacent to each other.

J: Fairly close. The main feed line was here. For us both to get electricity we had to, especially he, he was too far, and he had to agree to hire minimum. I think the minimum was four and a half. Remember this was 1941. They came to me and said, "Would you be willing to sign for the minimum? If you and Cliff Wilkin will both sign we can afford to put this in." Sure, of course we did that. No doubt about it at all. The secret of it all is when they turned the current on neither one of us got by less than the minimum anyway. Even if the minimum hadn't been changed. We'd qualify because both of us…

T: You were using enough. So the hire minimum you had to promise to use a certain amount per month.

J: Right. Another guy over here, a friend of mine, he was about two miles from this main line. He couldn't unless he paid for the two miles. And that would be too much.

T: Let me ask about your church. Were you going to church at this time?

J: Absolutely.

T: What was the name of your church here?

J: Trinity Lutheran.

T: In town here?

J: Yes. The reason why we came to town because our synod, the closest church was out in the country there. That was closer than Appleton. That's where my dad is buried. They had predominantly German services.

T: In German.

J: Yes. Week in and week out. In German. I could understand a little bit but I couldn't speak it. And besides that we had been members of Trinity in Appleton when we lived in Appleton. That's where we started going to church.

T: So that was almost what brought you to town and into contact with other people once a week.


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J: Sure.

T: Did your church sponsor any volunteer programs or things that were linked to the war effort in any way?

J: I can't really remember anything like that. The boys that went, we'd have a service and we'd certainly welcome them home and things like that, but I can't remember anything special.

T: Did the sermons reflect the fact that we were at war? The message?

J: I don't remember that it did very much. Our pastor during that time was an elderly man. He was in his seventies. The way the situation was at our church in town was so many of the older Germans had retired here. We had German services every Sunday.

T: You had German services every Sunday too?

J: Yes. In fact, we had more German services than we had English.

T: And the other church you mentioned was only German.

J: The one out in the country. They might have been going to one English but it was predominantly German. This changed somewhat when the boys came home from the service. We had an influx of membership. That's all past.

T: So the services you recall as being pretty much the same. Not really impacted by the war.

J: I can't remember any emphasis on the war. Except as the Bible affects our daily life. I'm sure there was some of that.

T: Were there prayers offered for boys overseas or…

J: Oh, yes. Sure. I don't remember word for word. That's a long time ago.

T: Sixty plus years now. Let me skip ahead then. By 1945 you were thirty years old. That was the year you turned thirty.

J: Right.

T: You were married. Did you have any kids by this time?

J: The first child was born in 1944.

T: So by 1945 you had one child.


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J: Yes.

T: President Roosevelt died in April of 1945. Do you remember how you reacted when you heard the news that the president had died?

J: I can't even remember that. We were getting a daily paper. We were getting one news magazine. I think it was *Time* magazine at that time. Maybe even a second one. I was a voracious reader. My wife was too. In fact, some years later we didn't have a television. We were one of the last ones to get it. My wife said she didn't want to fight with the kids. I looked around the living room and here all of us, each of us had a book or a magazine. They were all reading.

T: Ultimately you did hear the news about the president. Were you concerned about the president dying?

J: It was kind of a matter of course. President Roosevelt, his health was not that great. He was already, it must have been a terrible strain that he was living under. So of course I was concerned about that, but I assumed that there were enough mechanisms and so forth in the country to keep things going.

T: So you weren't unduly concerned or upset that the president had died.

J: No, I don't think so.

T: Less than a month later the war against Germany ended. How did that news that the war in Europe was over, how did that first impact you?

J: This is a long time since that time. Applying the thinking that I have today I think I would have been grateful that the thing is done. Hope that things can be brought to a more even keel. I don't know. You read some of these atrocity stories. That was terrible. That was really bad. Sometimes you didn't know what to believe or who to believe or anything. I also read a number of books about that later on. It's kind of like, what is truth?

T: Was there any kind of celebration or ceremony in Appleton or at your church to mark the end of the war in Europe?

J: Yes, we had church thanks services. I know we had a community affair. I can't remember the details. There was quite a get together. They've got a very active American Legion and VFW in town. Especially the VFW people. Right now they've got a large flag area over in there.

T: I drove past it.


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J: They put those up any time there's an appropriate time to put them up. They watch that pretty diligently.

T: Was there any kind of a victory parade or anything like this in the town?

J: Not that I know of, no. I think the majority of people were just so glad to hear that the survivors were coming home. I think that was most important.

T: For you on the farm, were you now concerned about what the post-war would bring as far as crop prices or availability of machinery or things like this for you?

J: I don't recall being that concerned about it. I think that I was just too darned busy with the day to day problems keeping stuff running. You haven't asked me anything, but I didn't suffer personally as far as shortage of fuel, gasoline, oil. That was never a problem. If you needed tires, it really had to be a need, you got it.

T: So the shortages of consumer goods or things that people in cities were affected by…

J: I'm sure they got hurt a lot worse than we did. This farm economy. They had to keep that food coming somehow. They probably made it more important.

T: Did you ever receive a draft notice or a request to report to your draft board?

J: Yes, I received one to report to the draft board.

T: Was that in the county here or in the city?

J: In my township. I also, this Helmer Barrons that I mentioned. I was a somewhat larger operator. I knew this fellow up toward Morris. We went to St. Paul together to try to plead our case to hang on to the fellow we had working. This part I remember. The officer in charge said, "Swift Country produces this much food." And he read it all off. It wasn't a bigger reporting county. I said, in a courteous way, "Could they eliminate all the Swift Counties?" He said, "I have to go by this."

T: So Barrons didn't get a deferment.

J: No.

T: Were you concerned about holding on to him specifically, or was it the fact that it would have been hard to find a replacement?

J: It was hard to find a replacement. Very hard. I don't even remember what I did. I know I had a very young fellow working for me. He was just not mature enough. He got himself into shenanigans about buying beer for under age kids and this and that. The officer in town talked to me about it.


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T: You had trouble finding good help. Dependable help.

J: I think in a sense. I can't even tell you whether these all came during this period. It wasn't all just the war period. You'd end up with some young fellow that drinks a little too much. Something like that. This one young fellow came into Lila's bedroom and called her by name. He had gone off the road and hit an approach. He was bleeding and he had a nice older car and he had a girlfriend, but stayed out too late nights. Another fellow who had kind of a bad reputation. Too much drinking. One morning I would try to get him up to help with the chores, but he wouldn't come. I would just do the chores. Then I'd go and on this particular morning I'd gone to the field or something and he sat at the end of the walkway with his head in his hands. My wife laughed about it. Later on she went out there and said, "Aren't you well today?" Of course he had too much to drink.

T: So, in sum, it was hard to get good people on the farm.

J: Yes.

T: That's the last question I have today, Mr. Behlen, so let me thank you for the interview.

**END OF INTERVIEW**


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