

Short Stories and Tall Grass

(Oral tradition; transcribed at various times by Douglas Fugate from conversations with Neil L. Fugate, Carthage, MO. Current version, January 2011)

Morgan and Retta Fugate took their family to Washington State in the early 1920s. Retta's parents, Luther and Mary Smith had moved to Sunnyside in 1920. They lived at Rattlesnake Canyon, six miles out of Yakima towards Ellensburg. The road down to the Yakima River was groundhog heaven. There was a two-story house and a nearby dilapidated barn with a two pitch roof that the kids played in. One time some people came out to fish in the Yakima River. They had a car with a canvas roof. While they were at the river, two goats climbed up on top of the car. They both fell through the roof, with their feet sticking straight down, both goats side by side. The goats were family pets, used to running loose around the house. One time they even climbed the stairs to a bedroom. The goats wouldn't go back down the stairs so they chased them out the window onto a porch roof and then they went down a plank to the ground. I don't know how the goats got out of the car. The Yakima River ran through pretty much open range in those days. Buffalo still ran wild in the native pastures along its banks. Neil remembers seeing them from time to time.

Morgan Fugate had various jobs during this stay in Washington. At one time, he was partners in a meat packing house. They processed beef. At another time, he bought a new Model T Ford truck and hauled produce from the lower Yakima valley to the upper valley. There was enough difference in the weather to affect the growing seasons. Neil remembers that they lived in a nice, two story house so Morgan must have been fairly successful in these ventures.

The Yakima River provided irrigation water for the Yakima Valley. Water was diverted from the River into a holding pond near the Fugate home. Impounded water was then released into an irrigation canal for use by farmers downstream. Neil, Margaret and Ellen would "swim" in that irrigation canal. At that time they had two dogs, one a collie and one an Airedale. While the kids were swimming in the canal they would pretend to get into trouble in the water and holler for their dogs to help. The dogs would jump in and come out to them. The kids would then hang onto their tails and let them pull them out. It was a mean trick on the dog but they didn't seem to mind.

Neil lived in Washington with this family for about six years, going out when he was one years old and beginning school there. Soon after he started school, someone back in Southwest City, Missouri sent them a letter stating that they were needed so they went back. It was probably a family matter as Morgan's parents lived in Missouri. They moved back to the Midwest after Neil completed first grade. Neil remembers starting the second grade in Southwest City. Morgan had purchased a new Model T Ford for the trip and made the entire trip back on one set of tires; somewhat of an accomplishment for the day. At one point during the trip, they came to a flooded river in Kansas. The Fugate family spent the night in a farm yard with other stranded travelers until the river crested and the travelers could use a ford or perhaps a ferry to get across.

The time at Southwest City involved spending a lot of time at the home of his grandparents; who are now buried in city cemetery there. Neil remembers that his grandmother (actually step grandmother by this time) served Grandfather Samuel Fugate clabbered milk and cornbread for supper. There were only two chairs at the table, one on each side. She also chewed snuff which was a source of amusement to

the kids. Grandmother Fugate liked to bake ginger snaps and would give them to the grandchildren. One of Neil's memories is sitting on the front porch of that frame house with his sister Ellen. (Step) Grandmother Fugate brought out some of ginger snap cookies which were hard as rocks. The kids couldn't chew them up so they poked them into a knot hole in one of the siding boards on the porch. Neil suspects they are still there to this day. The house pretty much straddled the Missouri border . After resurveying in modern times, the state line went between the house and the pump house.

The Fugates stayed about a year in Southwest City and lived near a feed mill at that time. The feed mill provided Neil with his first opportunity at being an entrepreneur. He did some chores for a lady who lived nearby. In exchange, she gave him feed sacks which had contained feed for her livestock. Young Neil would takes the sacks to the mill and sell them for a nickel, pretty good money for a young kid in those days. Later on in Ramona, he answered a magazine ad and received a kit for selling flower seeds. He sold enough seeds to earn one of the prizes, a child sized violin. He didn't know how to play it but did make noise in the back yard. A neighbor girl had taken lessons. She was able to tune it up and play tunes. Making money wasn't easy during the Depression.

From SW Missouri they moved to Double Creek just north of Ramona, then east of town on the Caney River. A cyclone got the house on the river, so they moved into Ramona near the railroad tracks near the center of town. There were four houses on their side of the street facing the tracks. They lived in the back corner, the ice hauler lived next door, and the Sherricks (sic) lived two doors down. George Sherrick was a barber and part time preacher. He had a son who nick name was Two-Gun for some reason.

Neil attended grade school in Ramona, finishing his elementary education there. The school was big, two-and-a-half story building with a clay tile roof. It later burned and there is now a modern replacement on the same site. Several teachers made an impression on Neil. Around the seventh grade, Mr. Bowman, the manual training teacher, gave Neil a block of walnut wood and told him to make a pencil holder. It was his first piece of work and still remains in the Fugate house in Carthage, MO. Later on, Neil made a replica of a covered wagon, his mother Retta sewed the canvas cover. It drew quite a bit of attention for detail and convinced Neil's teacher that he had some skills in industrial arts. Over time the wagon disappeared and no one knows its whereabouts. Other teachers he remembers was his fourth grade teacher, Miss Daugherty, and two sisters, Jule Boone (music) and Ola Boone.

There are several stories related to the elementary school at Ramona. Neil and the school principal's son built a crystal radio from a kit. It was built on top of a block of wood and tuned with a "whisker" to get the radio frequencies from nearby Tulsa. The first song he remembers hearing was "Home on the Range" through an earphone. Another time, the principal's wife came running up to the school, face red and clothes a flapping to tell her husband that Oklahoma's favorite son, Will Rogers, had died in a plane crash in Alaska. She had heard the news on the radio.

Neil still remembers learning a poem for one of his classes in Ramona. The poem went "Barefoot boy, with a heart full of joy, Swinging in a grapevine swing."

Young Neil spent many hours on Double Creek fishing, trapping and hunting. Selling animal skins was one way to earn a little spending money. As for the hunting, Neil got his first firearm, a 20 gauge shotgun, when he was about 10 years old. His father, Morgan, bought it for him for \$10. The seller was the janitor at the local school The gun has stayed around all these years . Speaking of guns, Neil also had a little .22 Crackshot rifle at one time. It eventually was sold and forgotten until many years later when

Neil was at an auction in Southwest Missouri. A Crackshot rifle was up for bid and it turned out to be the same one he had when he was a young boy in Oklahoma. Neil was able to identify it from a scratch on a rifle barrel.

The farm east of Ramona was 80 acres running east and west with a small piece across the river that went with the place. It was only a couple of acres and Neil seldom went that direction.

While on the Caney River, they raised sorghum cane. A hired hand came during harvest season to help Morgan crush the cane. He arrived at work with his shoes on but took them off as soon as he started working. All day long he walked around in those crushed cane stalks called "pummies." His feet would get sticky and gather layers of stripped cane leaves. His feet would just get bigger and bigger. When the day was over, he would carry his shoes over his shoulder and walk home in his cane "shoes." The next morning, he would be back with shoes on for another day. They used a horse to run the sorghum press. Morgan made or had a sorghum pan made. There were four partitions, creating five divisions. They holes in the partitions were staggered right to left so when you started cooking the juice, gravity carried the juice through each of the partitions. He caught the boiled down sorghum at the end of the pan and canned it up for sale in town. He bought new gallon tins and had labels printed up with his name and other useful information. The sorghum was sold locally.

Besides being a farmer, Morgan worked as a fireman on the boiler at Gaugler's sawmill. At times, he drove around the countryside in northeast Oklahoma buying hides from the local boys. Neil remembers riding with him while Morgan bargained for the best price. The hides were later sold to a buyer in Ramona. Living was tough, the Depression hit everyone hard. Retta was a homemaker out on Caney Creek, spending most of her time cooking for her family. Ellen was the oldest child, she stayed in town during the week with the Burdoffs as there was no school bus. Neil didn't go to school after they moved out there from town, he finished the sixth grade while living in town but his formal education ended then.

There were a couple of fellows from Ramona who thought they were pretty tough guys. Their names were Gullett and Sizemore. They decided to become outlaws and had a hideout west of Ramona in a draw out in the Indian country. One of their first robberies was northwest of Rogers, AR. A man from Ramona had a strawberry farm over there. These guys decided to go over there and rob him. But they didn't get away with it. The sheriff in Ramona, Sheriff Robley, went out to get them the next day. Somehow they were recognized and word got back that they had committed the crime.

The Gullett boy was one of three children from a family in Ramona. John, the eldest was a pretty good guy. The youngest was a girl, Ruby, who also seemed to be well behaved. However, the middle boy, Sonny, was the one who was always in trouble. They had a first cousin, Ina(?) Gullett who married and lived around Ramona all her life.

Sizemore was pretty much in trouble all the time too. The story goes that his father was arrested by Federal agents for bootlegging during Prohibition. The local sheriff was to testify in the matter. There was already tension between the Sheriff of Ramona and the Sizemore fellow and this just made things worse. Sheriff Bill Clark was known to walk the mile south of Ramona to Searsville to have a beer at a tavern there. For some reason, he didn't drink in Ramona. There was also an outdoor wood roller skating rink there and a place to eat. The Sheriff and Sizemore had a confrontation at that tavern. They had some words. The Sheriff started backing him toward the door and when they got to the door,

Sizemore pulled out a pistol and shot the Sheriff dead. Sizemore went to court over that one and did some time at a Federal prison.

Ramona saw its share of violence during the Depression and Prohibition. One time there were two brothers, they shared the sheriff's position in town. One was found hung under a bridge by the Ramona school. Fortunately, he was cut down before he died. He recovered and the brothers became dog catchers in Tulsa or Bartlesville later on. It was suspected that one brother tried to hang the other over some argument.

Neil's best friend was a half-breed Indian by the name of Tom Ray. Tom had a white father and an Indian mother. Tom was the only boy out of the four children. Neil and Tom trapped fur-bearing animals for the money they could make selling the skins. One of the places they trapped was at an oil tank just on the northwest edge of Ramona. The oil tanks were inside a dirt-banked enclosure. There was also a cannon inside the enclosure where they could shoot a hole in the side of an oil tank and drain off the oil in case it caught on fire from a lightning strike. Anyway, the dirt enclosure had a drainage pipe that ran from inside the enclosure to the outside; it was to let rainwater escape. It was about 6 inches in diameter and about 15 feet long. During the cold months, skunks and possums liked to crawl inside that pipe because it was warm in the center where the natural warmth of the earth kept it near 55 degrees. Each morning before school, Neil and Tom would check out the drainage pipes for skunks and possums. When they spotted one, Neil and Tom would position themselves on each end of that pipe. One held a long coil of stiff wire, about like clothesline wire, and the other would have a large coffee or shortening can about the same diameter as the pipe. One would pass the wire through the bottom of a cloth sack and then through the pipe to the other end, where the can would be attached and then pulled back. The can being pulled toward the sack would bring along the critter inside the pipe and deposit them inside the sack when the can reached the end. There was no escape although a skunk could leave things smelling pretty bad. Since the boys went to school after running their traps, they often went to class smelling like their catch. They weren't always the most popular boys to sit by.

There wasn't a regular fur buyer in Ramona, it was just too small a place. However, the railway agent at the depot, Mr. Horseman, would buy skins from the boys. When he had enough, he would bundle them up and ship them to S. Louis, MO. A fur company there would tan the hides and sell them to garment manufacturers. On one occasion, Tom and Neil caught a big house cat in their trap. The cat had the markings and color of a raccoon so they skinned the cat and put the cat skin in with their other raw furs. When they took their hides to the railway agent, they didn't say anything about one of them being from a domestic cat. The agent sorted out the furs by type of animal; muskrat, raccoon, possum, skunk, and the like, and paid the boys the going price for each skin. The cat hide fetched the price of a raccoon. They were pleased with their good luck as a prime raccoon fur was worth relatively more than the other. The agent wrote out a receipt for the hides and the amount he paid and gave it to Neil and Tom. About a week later, the agent hollered out to the boys to come over to the station. He was pretty agitated about something. They figured they knew but went over anyway. The agent had received his payment from the fur company in St. Louis. On the itemized statement was a reckoning of the number of animal furs and the price he was to receive for each. At the end of the statement containing the raccoon, muskrats, and such was an entry that read: one cat 10 Cents.

One time Neil and another Fugate boy (no relation) went out of town toward the Osage Hills along the banks of a draw that didn't run most of the year but did have pools of water. They were looking for

muskrat burrows where they could dig the animal out of the side of the bank. Neil was at one pool, the other boy was further up the draw. Neil was digging out a hole, not sure what kind of animal it was but thinking it would have a fur hide anyway, when he heard the other boy yell. Looking up, Neil could see the other boy running away at full speed some distance away. When he looked to see he was running from, Neil saw a herd of Longhorn steers galloping his direction. With no where to go, Neil climbed up a willow tree growing in the draw. It wasn't very big but it was the only protection around. The steers came right up to the banks of the draw and stopped. Neil was about eye level with them in that tree with only a little open space between him and the edge of the draw. Neil's little dog ran out and barked at the steers and eventually they turned and went back the way they had come.

Another adventure involving these two happened when Retta, Neil's mother, needed to go to Skiatook (now a suburb of Tulsa) but at a time just a small town about 15 miles away. The two boys decided that they wanted to ride along to Skiatook and then walk back across the prairie using "dead reckoning" to find their way. They knew their directions, had a rifle and a dog so they figured they were set. The prairie at that time was pretty much open range with longhorn cattle--who were known to be a bit aggressive. Fortunately, the boys didn't encounter any of them on this hike. On the way back to Ramona, they killed a jack rabbit. They found a tin box of some sort that had probably blown out there during one of those violent Oklahoma storms. It made a substitute cooking pan for that rabbit which the boys (and the dog) ate. They made it back late in the day, coming into the southwest side of Ramona. Pretty accurate land navigation for two boys with no compass.

Another time Neil remembers digging out a burrow with Tom Ray. As was the practice, the boys would carry a length of barbed wire, shape it into a loop and push it in the burrow. They would then twist it around, snaring the animal in the den so they could drag it out. This time the animal was a possum and when they pulled it out, it swung up against Neil's leg. The possum clamped down on the leg. His reaction was to jerk the possum away and when he did, it broke off two teeth in his leg. The scars were there for a long time.

Neil had a pretty spirited horse when the family lived east of Ramona. He even had the horse in town for a while. There was a barn near the house although it was across the road. Neil would ride with some of the country kids. They liked to race their horses and Neil's horse liked to run; which meant that some of the older and stronger kids would ride his horse during the races. Once it started to run, he couldn't handle it.

An older man from Ramona by the name of Ben Swan asked Neil's parents if their son could accompany him to Arkansas where he had a strawberry farm. Ben was a widower and probably wanted some company as well as some help on this trip. The parents gave their approval so off Ben and Neil went to Rogers, Arkansas in a Ford car. The trip to Rogers was fine. They stopped in town to buy supplies. Ben had a cabin at the strawberry farm and he needed to stock up on things he would need out there. They left Rogers for the farm, which was about 3 or 4 miles out of town. They turned off the main road, forded a small creek and started up a dirt and gravel road that went up a long hill toward the farm. Shortly after they began their ascent, the car made some inappropriate noises and stopped moving. After inspection, Ben determined that the Ford's drive shaft was broken. He left Neil with the car and supplies and started by to town to get some help. Neil knew it was going to be a while so he built a fire and generally amused himself waiting for Mr. Swan to return. While waiting, another vehicle turned off, forded the creek and started up the same long hill they had failed to climb. Part way up, Neil noticed the driver, who was in

the car by himself, slump over in the front seat as the car began rolling backward down the hill. The car veered off the road and into the fence. The car continued moving backwards taking down the fence posts and the wire all the way back down to the bottom of the hill when it finally was stopped by a combination of wire, posts, and flatter ground. Expecting the worst, Neil thought the driver might have had a heart attack or something of the sort since he never straightened up downhill run, Neil ran over to see what he could do. When he got there, the driver rose up, quite healthy but a little shaken. Seems he was caught his foot under one of the Ford's three operating pedals (brake, forward, and reverse) which caused him to press down on the reverse pedal. The harder he tried to move his foot, the faster the car went backwards until the fence made him stop. About that time, Mr. Swan arrived and they all had a good laugh about the accident.

Neil used to, like the other kids in Ramona, go out along the river bottoms and pick up pecans. They brought 3 or 4 cents a pound, maybe 5 cents in a good year at the store where he sold them. He would fold up two or three flour sacks and put them in his back pocket. The flour sacks held 25 pounds of flour so filling one would earn him about a dollar which was quite a bit of spending money at that time. The river bottom pecans were more or less open for public picking; unlike the pecan groves that were commercially harvested.

Neil had a little white dog when he lived on Caney Creek; a little terrier type dog. He just about lost him one time. He came up missing. The dog went out hunting and didn't come back in that day and was still gone the next morning so I went out hunting him. Neil went out looking for the dog. He followed an old wagon road that wound up and down a slough that carried water into Caney Creek when there was a heavy runoff. It was dry the rest of the time except for holes that might hold a little water. Anyway he went up that draw, maybe a half a quarter from the house, looking for the dog. As he walked up the wagon road, he passed where a dead tree was down. He heard a small whimper. Neil knew there was a hole in that log hollow, he had gotten rabbits out of it on several occasions. He went over there and there the dog was. The little dog had probably chased a rabbit in the log and had gotten stuck; couldn't back out or go forward. He had tried so hard to get that rabbit that he had wedged himself in that log. Neil pulled the dog out, and had a hard time at that. The little dog was all right, just kind of shaky and hungry.

The Eden's had a dairy operation just on the north side of Ramona. The younger children of the family delivered milk around town. Neil sometimes went with one of the boys, Ferris Eden, who was about his age, making the rounds. There was a large strawberry farm across the road from the Eden's as well.

Speaking of neighbors, there was quite a collection near the Fugate home in Ramona. Vervyn Stephenson, who worked for the railroad, lived next door. Vervyn liked to play cards.

On that ground over there southeast of the house, there was a pretty good slope down and then back up and then back down to the river. One day Neil was out rabbit hunting with that little white terrier dog. The dog jumped a jack rabbit and started him down that slope. The little dog caught up with the rabbit as they went up the slope. They were about a quarter of a mile away but Neil could tell that there had been some kind of tangle between the two. They turned around and here they came back, probably following the same path. The jack rabbit in front by quite a bit but the little dog in hot pursuit. They came right back to where the jack rabbit had been jumped in the first place. By this time, both of them were pretty well worn out. The dog grabbed the rabbit right as they got back to Neil. He said it was the

longest dog and rabbit race he had ever seen. Neil didn't know how that little dog kept up with him, he never was close enough to catch up with him but those two times.

Speaking of rabbit hunting, one day Ed Turner and his friend decided to go east of Ramona and cut firewood. Neil wanted to go along so he could hunt rabbits in the grass along the river. While Ed and his friend sawed wood, Neil carefully scouted out the grass clumps for cottontails. He spotted one up ahead, crouched behind some grass. Neil could just make out the brownish gray color and shape of the rabbit but couldn't quite see the head. It was important to shoot the rabbit where it wouldn't tear up the meat. He slowly moved forward, looking at each side, still trying to find the rabbit's ears or eyes or something that would provide a place to shoot. As he moved closer yet, the rabbit began to look more and more like a whiskey jug. As it turns out, Mr. Gabbier who owned the field had stashed his whiskey in the field so his wife wouldn't find it. Fortunately, Neil didn't shoot a hole in the jug or it might have made for some hard explaining.

One more rabbit story involved a jack rabbit. Apparently, they grow pretty big down in the Oklahoma. In this particular incident, Neil was hunting with his little dog when they got up a jackrabbit in a corn field. The rabbit figured he could make more time running in a straight line than dodging corn stalks so he picked out a row and tried to outrun the dog by running down the furrow between two rows of corn. Neil cut across the field until he was in the same row as the rabbit. Unfortunately, the dog and the rabbit were running directly at Neil and he couldn't shoot for fear of hitting the trailing dog. The rabbit was in such a state that he didn't turn right or left but kept running full tilt at Neil. The collision knocked Neil to his knees and the last he saw of that rabbit was his white tail heading toward the swamp.

Caney Creek was deep enough to float logs in the spring of the year when heavy rains would fill it bank full. When there was water, the men would tie logs together and float them downstream to Gaugler's saw mill where the logs were cut into ties to be sold to the railroads. Until then, the logs were simply downed and hauled to the bank of the Caney. It was dangerous work getting them into the water. Neil often worked in the woods, he said the most tired he had ever been was one day working with a crosscut saw cutting logs. At times, he worked for Gaugler getting the boiler fired up and wood carried to it during cutting operations.

Neil recalls playing cards with the Alec Harvey, sitting in a tent cross-legged on the ground Indian style. They played high five for hours until Neil said his legs hurt so bad he had to stand up and stretch. Alec found this humorous and would laugh. Rich Harvey, his brother and his two sisters were the children of Alec Harvey. Alec married an Indian woman so the kids were "half-breeds." Pearl and her sister were very attractive girls but unlucky. One day Neil and his dad were down at the creek repairing fence. They were putting in short lateral pieces that ran from the main fence on the high ground down to the water's edge. When the river got up, the water would tear it out so it was something that had to be done on a regular basis. It took about three posts to put in those pieces. This particular day, the Harvey boys were down at the creek milling around when there was some yelling back and forth and the boys ran to the house and came with cane poles and worms. They had determined that this was the day to catch fish according to the moon signs. Sure enough, they caught a large mess of fish. Neil said they believed in those moon signs and it almost made a believer out of him. He also observed that the Harvey's had their own way of doing things. Sometimes you might notice something every week or two, or a month but sometimes, it might be two or three things in one day that would "tickle you to death."

There were many Indians in and around Ramona; often Cherokee who were driven up the Trail of Tears from Georgia. The area had been Indian Territory until the Government decided to open up the last of the tribal lands in the 1890s. One character Neil remembered was a minor chief by the name of John Stink. John contracted chicken pox from the white people; a minor disease for us but often fatal for Indians. John went into a coma and was presumed dead. He was taken out and buried under a cover of stones. However, John wasn't dead and recovered enough to push him way out of the stones. He returned to his Indian brethren but they refused to take him back. In their minds, he was dead and they didn't want his spirit around the camp.

One of the darker moments around Ramona involved a suicide by a man named Sam Hedger. Sam hung himself from a tree in the edge of a pasture just east of Cemetery Hill. He picked a spot across the branch at the edge of a pasture. Neil was probably out hunting with his little dog or maybe just out scouting around but he found Sam. The man had been dead for several days based on the condition of the body. He lived alone and I guess no one missed him or thought to go look for him. Neil went to town and notified some adults who took care of the situation. No one ever thought it was anything other than a case of Sam taking his own life.

Morgan milked a few cows while they lived out on Caney Creek. The milk truck came each day and one day Dad just decided to catch a ride with him to Nowata to the creamery. Then he hitchhiked on up to Carthage to stay with this sister, Nell Frost out on the farm northwest of Carthage. He worked as a farm hand, back then the farming was done mostly with mules. He didn't stay very long before he went back to Ramona. He went back to Carthage later on and this time he stayed longer. Work was plentiful by then and he enjoyed the spending money. Nell's husband, Walter Frost hired several men to work for him, including Vernon Parrill.

Neil met Neva Frost for the first time when his parents, Morgan and Retta Fugate, went to Carthage Missouri for the funeral of Orville Frost around 1930. Orville was the father in law of Nell Frost, one of Retta's daughters. Neil was only about 10 at the time and probably doesn't remember much about the trip but he did go back to Missouri when he was about 16 to stay with his sister Nell and her husband, Walter Frost. Neva said when he came back the second time, he was wearing a cowboy hat which Neil said was part of his regular "outfit" at that time. As part of the family connections, Ed Turner, brother to Nell Frost and half-brother to Neil, worked as a farm hand for Neva's parents, Frank and Anna Frost. Neva remembers that she and her sisters were fascinated by Ed's tobacco smoking. He would roll his own cigarettes and smoke them around the farm; something no one else did. Ed was always patient with the young Frost children and entertained them by playing his French harp or harmonica.

After Neil went up to Jasper County to live with his sister Nell, things changed considerably. He hired out as a farm hand and helped different farmers around the Preston and Mt Moriah neighborhoods. Work at that time was driving a team of horses or perhaps a tractor, helping with threshing, milking and the like. In particular, he worked for Frank Frost. One Halloween, he and some of the other boys in the neighborhood went out to commit some pranks. One of them involved two neighbors, one a staunch Republican, the other a staunch Democrat. The Republican, Vernie Byers, lived down a long lane that had a gate to fence in his livestock, at that time mostly sheep. The boys painted something like "Welcome to Roosevelt's Sheep Ranch" on the gate. The next morning, Garfield Barry, who worked for the county road crew and drove a road grader for many years, happened to be going down the lane up to Byer's house. Garfield mentioned the sign to Vernie, who immediately suspected Mr. Powers, his

Democratic neighbor, was responsible. About the same time, Mr. Powers had discovered that someone had painted something like "Welcome to Mr. Dewey's Farm" on his barn. He immediately suspected his Republican neighbor, Mr. Byers was responsible. They met in the road between the two places and had some angry words before they determined that they had been tricked by the local boys.

Neil joined the Civilian Conservation Corps when he was about 17. He, like many other young men of the day, was employed for public works projects. The local CCC manager interviewed him to determine his skills. Neil said he could do carpenter work. The manager took him to the shop, threw a rough timber up on the saw and told Neil to square it up and cut it off as a dimension 4 X 4. Since he had worked at the sawmill, this was no problem. The manager put Neil in charge of the woodworking shop and giving training lessons to the other boys. The lessons were all written out and since Neil knew tools, he said things "went sailing after that." At first, he worked out of a camp about 5- or 6 miles west of Bartlesville, OK. He and his crew built a three level house on the side of a hillside. Later on, he went to a CCC camp near Fruita, Colorado, to work on what is now the Colorado National Monument. He was put on a train to Grand Junction and sent to a camp up on the side of a mountain, There was quite a project going out there that involved building trails and public access features. Neil was a bit adventuresome, taking advantage of the mountains and the plateau. One time he climbed a butte within the monument. The canyon below the butte held buffalo back then. Apparently, he had enough of the CCC as he left the camp and went to Fruita where he caught a freight train heading west. He followed the tracks up to Oregon where he left the trains and caught a ride with a truck driver into Sunnyside, WA where he had family. He stayed with his uncle, one of the Smiths, for a few days and started hitchhiking back to Oklahoma. He was picked up by two women who eventually let him drive their car. He scared them and himself nearly to death when he drifted off to sleep behind the wheel. He remembers hearing the tires hit the gravel on the side of the road, just in front of a bridge. This taught him a lesson he never forgot about driving. Somewhere out in Kansas when he was north of Blackwell, OK, he left the two ladies and south to visit his sister, who at the time was newly married to Paul White.

After the CCC experience, Neil came back to Jasper County. His construction experience helped him get a job with a contractor who was working on Camp Leonard Wood near Rolla, MO. Neil drove a truck mostly carrying construction materials. He later worked with the same company at Camp Crowder near Neosho, MO.

The first draft took people born up to January but since Neil was born in February, he wasn't drafted until the second round in August, 1941. He was given a few weeks to get ready for active duty. He went directly to Fort Leavenworth, KS by train and then by train to a military camp north of San Diego, CA. This was a coastal artillery training site called Camp Callum. He wasn't there but a few weeks before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. His unit, the 206th Coast Artillery, had shipped out to the South Pacific. However, two barracks of soldiers stayed behind because they were confined to their quarters due to an outbreak of spinal meningitis. One soldier died and one recovered from a serious illness. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Army figured that the Aleutian Islands were next so whatever troops that were available were sent north by boat as replacements for a small coastal artillery unit already up there. The quarantine didn't last long after Pearl Harbor. Neil and about a half a dozen from his original unit were sent to Dutch Harbor, Unalaska. They joined up with the 2xxth Coastal Artillery unit from El Dorado, AR. They had about six months to get ready for the expected invasion which came June 3 and 4, 1942. During that time, they were busy preparing for the expected Japanese attack. This involved the building of an airstrip, permanent barracks, and officers quarters. The Japanese landed on the island of

Attu, amidst rough weather and seas in 1942. They launched their attack on Dutch Harbor on June 3 and again on June 4.

In Neil's words, " I could see what the war was doing, they hit us pretty hard with those dive bombers and those high flying bombers too. They did a lot of destruction, they didn't know how much they did. They got the worst end of the deal. I think we lost around 40 guys in just one bomb, practically, somebody was at fault there, when they got notice that the Japs were coming in that morning, some officer in that camp got everybody out in the street and got them in formation. I guess the rest of us would have been there too but we were quartered in a Quonset hut. One bomb rolled the hut over but no one got hurt. We got out of that pretty good. That was a pretty small area, there was a row of two story barracks there; they weren't even occupied yet. There were roads around, just dirt and rock. They had them boys out there in the middle of the street, we scampered out of Quonset huts and got into our gun positions. They hit dead center in the guys down below us. Seems like we lost in the 40s or something like that. " The PBY flyboys from Dutch Harbor bombed them pretty good. Got them routed them out of there, further out in the islands, but they couldn't stay there.

"I watched one bomb come down, it fell, I watched that thing from the time they kicked it out until it hit the ground. It hit down there toward a foxhole. I tore down there, a couple of other guys came down too. We estimated it hit about four feet from the foxhole, there were three guys in that foxhole, that bomb just lifted the dirt and dropped it right in that hole. Except for shell shock and one guy with a piece of shrapnel in the back of his helmet, they were OK. It was a three cornered tear where that shrapnel went in. I was trying to get the helmet off of this guy and didn't know, when I figured it out, we left it on.

After the bombing there was lots to repair at Dutch Harbor. One building that was heavily damaged was the hospital. It had formerly been a hotel but had been refitted for military purposes. After the Japanese attack, the building had to be rebuilt and a new roof installed. Neil got them started on the roof and left to attend to other repair jobs. When he came back to check, the roofing crew was putting the shingles on backwards. He got a good laugh out of that but the crew got to turn them all around before then could finish the job.

Another repair job was to replace the door to the command center. It was heavily fortified and the entrance was protected by a series of zig-zags turns in earthworks in front of the building. The force of the bomb was still enough to blow in the door.

Life at Dutch was both exciting and tedious. Foggy weather prevented work quite a few days; it was also quite windy at times. The warm southern currents kept snow from accumulating although it didn't keep it from snowing frequently during the winter months. During the early days in Dutch Harbor, the soldiers slept in a canvas tent pitched over a wooden floor. The tent was big enough for four soldiers and a stove which burned Presto logs. The logs in the stove would send up sparks up the chimney which fell back down and burned holes in the canvas tent roof. During the night, as the soldiers slept, the falling snow would sift through the burn holes and build up on the inhabitants of the beds below. Dad said that sometimes it might be several inches deep on their beds by morning. The soldiers learned to sleep with a canvas tarp on their beds at night, either to catch the drips if the canvas wasn't frozen or to catch the snow. Later they bunked in metal Quonset type huts on a wooden platform which were both warmer and dryer.

Early in 1942, an ocean freighter with a load of coal bound for Japan docked at Dutch Harbor. The crew brought it in to give to the Americans rather than take it to Japan. The multi-national crew apparently didn't know much about snow. Dad said that there was a big snowball fight between the soldiers and the crew of the freighter. The crew, many of them Chinese or Asian, "pushed" the snowballs rather than throwing them like the soldiers.

Anticipating a Japanese attack, the garrison worked six days a week. However, Sunday was their day off. Many of the soldiers would hike and explore the nearby country on Sunday. One time, two soldiers decided to find an eagle's nest. They had watched the birds flying around and thought they knew about where the nest should be. One stayed down below to provide directions and the other climbed up toward the nest. This attempt was unsuccessful so the next time, they came back with a long rope and climbed the cliff again. This little guy from Arkansas that weighed about 100 pounds was dangled off the rocks above the nest and lowered down. The eagle pair attacked him; driving him back to the rocks and off the mountain. They came back to camp. When Dad opened the tent flap and saw the soldier that he was "beat up" by the eagles, he asked "What happened to him?"

The garrison at Dutch Harbor got a general early in the war. When news of his arrival came, the camp commander tried to get together a welcoming party and troops to inspect. Unfortunately, there were very few people with complete uniforms so it was only two rows with about a half dozen soldiers in each row that stood in formation for the general's inspection. He asked the usual questions and when he got to Neil, he asked him how he liked duty in Alaska. Neil answered that he "didn't like it one damn bit." Some months later, Neil was working on the roof of a building used for officer's quarters when a staff jeep came up the road from camp. The quarters were up on a hillside above Dutch Harbor. Out of the car came a driver and the general as before. As he approached the house, the general looked up, recognized him, and asked Neil if he liked the army any better now than before.

One evening, one of the colonels ordered the young soldier Fugate to drive him to another part of Dutch Harbor where he could buy tobacco, drink and play poker with other officers. They had to detour around a dredging and rock crushing operation along the bay. The rock crusher itself sat in the road as it was the only flat spot around. The conveyer belt carrying the material from the bay went from the water to the crusher. The road detoured off the road, down to the gravel beach and back up to the road again. Road traffic passed underneath the conveyer belt. When they got to the location, the colonel told Fugate to wait for him, to go to sleep in a nearby (and as yet mostly unoccupied) building. That he would wake him up when he wanted to go back to camp. Fugate went to bed and later on that night was shaken awake by a somewhat drunk colonel who was anxious to get him up and going. It seems Neil was sleeping in another colonel's (Col Robinson) bed (who was also on his way back from the poker game). The first colonel helped Fugate get his clothes and boots and so they could hurry out of there. Off they went. When they got back to the rock crusher, over the bank they went on the detour but this time the tide was in and they drove into three feet of seawater that had covered the beach. The colonel got pretty wet. He told Fugate, "when we get back, get those#### lights fixed!" In fact, Neil didn't know where the light switch was. They were driving under "blackout" conditions and had the lights been on, just a slit of light would have been allowed .

Bulldozers were needed for roads and construction sites so two were sent up from the States. They arrived on a barge. Some of the locals were hired to unload the barge. They took off the cables and drove the first one onto the dock. They didn't tie down the front of the barge so when the first bulldozer

came off, the weight of the one in back tilted the barge up on its end. Without any cables, it slid off into the bay. I guess it's still there.

One of the interesting characters up there was a woman we called "Kiska Annie." No one seemed to know much about her except that she was pretty tough. She paddled into Dutch Harbor in a canoe with a dog and her load of furs. She traded them at the store and bought supplies. After she got what she wanted, she left in that canoe. I never did know what happened to her.

After sleeping in tents for a while, we got in some metal Quonset huts. The huts sat on a wooden platform and were a lot more comfortable than the tents. Sometimes we moved them around. The officers tried to figure out how to move them with equipment. I just got a bunch of guys on each side and we lifted it up and walked it to the new location. During the Japanese bombing, some of them got blown over.

I did a lot of fishing while I was up there. Somehow we got a hold of a fly rod and caught trout out of the streams. We caught enough to eat for our guys. When the officers saw the trout, they made us go back to the river and catch enough for everybody else. The boys from Arkansas knew how to fish.

Other stories for transcription:

Carrying pictures on clipboard

Little dog in a duffel bag

Escorting soldiers on the train