Interview Description

Dona Peck was born and raised in Postville, Iowa. She experienced life in a small town and has observed all the changes that have come to Postville through the years. Dona grew up attending the Presbyterian Church in Postville and has spent a lot of her retirement participating in church events and volunteering through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Dona also volunteers at the local Food Pantry. Like many in the community, after the May 12\textsuperscript{th}, 2008 ICE raid on Agriprocessors, Dona spent time helping out at the Presbyterian Church. In the interview, Dona recounts her experience of witnessing the trauma of the event and the fear that remained in the community during the following days. In the interview, Dona also comments on the changes that occurred in Postville after the raid and the media’s portrayal of Postville.

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Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project

Interview with Dona Peck

October 27th, 2014

RaeAnn Swanson: Could you tell me a little about yourself?

Dona Peck: I grew up in a family of six with a mother and a father and three siblings, two older sisters and a younger brother. We lived in town, in the town of Postville all my growing up years. We had grandparents that lived near us in Elgin, a town fairly close, so I knew my grandparents. I would get to spend time with my one grandparents who lived on a farm helping my grandma in the summertime usually for two or three weeks. Growing up, I did the things that a lot of kids do at that time. I had a paper route in town and did a lot of babysitting. When I got old enough I worked at the local bakery, we had a lot of local businesses. I worked at the bakery selling donuts and things like that. Then I went to work at the theater making popcorn and selling candy. Also, we had a place called Water’s Dairy where they made ice cream and had a milk route. They had a little counter where you served ice cream cones, malts, sodas, and made-rites. All through my school years I pretty much held a job. Back then girls really didn’t have any athletics in Postville.

[Break in the recording] [1:47]

Okay

Harold and I met when we were in high school. We dated about two or three years throughout high school. We became engaged our senior year and then we married the October after we had graduated. At that time Harold worked on a milk route and I still worked at Water’s Dairy.
After that first year, our first son was born. At that time, I didn’t work anymore except for a couple months after Christmas at the feed store that we had here in town where they put out a seed catalog. I helped just at that time. The next year our second son was born and I did the same thing, worked at the local feed store for several months. Two and a half years after our second son, our daughter was born. At that time, we still lived in town for about another year or so and I didn’t work. Then we moved out in the country. For about a year at that time I worked as an aid at the local hospital. At that time, we had a hospital here in Postville and I worked as an aid. I really liked that kind of work but it was a lot of weekends and night work, which with a family didn’t really work out so well. After a year I gave that job up. I mostly stayed home until the kids were a little bit older and all of them were in school. I worked at our dime store and I would be able to be home about an hour after the kids came home on the bus. I always had activities for them to do before I got home, so that worked out okay for a while. Then the principal at the Postville school asked if I would be interested in doing some reading with kids that maybe had some reading problems, so I helped out, volunteered, just reading with the kids. It was through that that he came to me one day and said that Keystone Area Education was looking for someone to be an assistant for the speech clinicians to help with children with speech problems. I was interested in that, so I got that job. I worked at that job for quite a few years. That led to a job opening in Decorah where I could work in a preschool special needs classroom and I got that job. That was the last job I had and I worked at that job for like 23 or 24 years until I retired. Throughout the years we were quite involved with the activities that our kids were in. We always went to their games. The boys were in sports and Tami was in sports, music, and speech and we attended all of those things. The kids all went to
Sunday school and confirmation. We were rather sporadic churchgoers at that time. Myself
maybe more than Harold was at that time, since then things have changed. Growing up, our
main activities as a family were to go to ball games. Harold played ball until he was over 40
years old, so weekends we’d be going to games. Sometimes our vacations would include going
to see ballgames, which the boys liked I’m not sure Tami liked that so well, but she went along
with it. We did go to Clear Lake a few times and St. Louis to see the arch different times. The
vacations they really liked the best were the Canadian fishing trips, they all seemed to like
those trips. So that was kind of how our life went.

*What was Postville as a town like when you were growing up?*

It was a typical little hometown [5:00] where you’d walk down the streets and you’d say hi to
everybody. You knew everybody, you knew where everybody lived. Of course I was a papergirl
so naturally I knew where a lot of people lived. If somebody would come into town and ask you
directions for someone’s house, you would never know the street names because you never
thought about it. You never needed to know the street names. You’d say *well you go up to*

Falb’s house and turn left and down to Brown’s house which wouldn’t help the
stranger but that’s how it is in a small town. You know the people rather than the signs. It was a
friendly town but it was definitely not a diverse town at all. We had no diversity here at all. Not
even black people or Hispanic or anything as I was growing up so we were kind of sheltered in
that way. It was just kind of a German population way back. It had quite a few businesses, a
hospital, and a school and some industries, a packing plant and a chicken plant also. The REC
was located here in town. We weren’t a county seat so we didn’t have a lot of big name stores,
but you could almost purchase anything you wanted here in Postville. Basically, I think Postville

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was a friendly town. People were pretty much interested in the kids and sports of course were a big thing. We had probably four or five churches, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic and we had a United Brethren Church at the time. Growing up, a lot of family life was centered around the church, things going on in the church. That is what Postville was like.

*How have you seen Postville change over the last 25 years or so?*

Oh, Postville definitely has changed, maybe more than some towns, but I think a lot of the towns are changing probably in the same way. With the packing plant, it closed and then a Jewish family bought the packing plant. That brought in a lot of different people in to town, not only the Jewish people, but they would hire Hispanic people. At that time our town changed in that way, we became a lot more diverse. With the different problems that towns were having with businesses closing up, Postville was hit that way. Eventually our hospital couldn’t keep going so we lost our hospital and we lost different business places downtown because of the economy. Probably the biggest change though was the diversity in our town.

*How have you seen Postville handle that diversity in town?*

At first, like a lot people, they don’t like change, they don’t like to see change. You’d hear this isn’t like it used to be. At first it was hard for some people. On the other hand there were other people who liked it. They thought it was good and it was a good opportunity for the children growing up to see this diversity which they knew that they would have to encounter if they went to college or places out in the business world. It was different, on the one hand you had the people that grumbled because the people that came in weren’t just like we were and they didn’t do things [10:00] just like we did. Maybe the Jewish people who grew up in New York City didn’t quite know how to keep up their lawns so that was a sore spot for some people.
and different things like that. As time went by, people realized that this is going to be the way it was and either we needed to learn to get along and to try to understand the different people better or it just wouldn’t have been very good. So there were different meetings held. I can remember a meeting with the Jewish community where they told about their customs and why they did things. We all wondered why they would do a lot of walking and why they left their lights on all night and different things like that. Through some of those meetings, at least to the people who were willing to come out and listen, it really helped to understand them a little bit better. If I remember right I think they got to ask questions too so I am sure there were a lot of things that they didn’t understand about us. Then as the years went by and we had a bigger Hispanic population there would be different get-togethers where we would invite people to come and be able to talk to them and ask questions. We had a town celebration called the Taste of Postville where all the different ethnic groups could have a booth and have some of their foods or whatever where people could walk around and they got to taste different things and just see different things. A lot of them wore their native costumes which was really interesting. There was a parade and they had the flags from all the different countries that were in Postville that people represented. I think there were twenty-some different flags where people came from here in Postville. That was a nice way for us to mingle with the people and taste some of their things and they could taste ours. We’ve had different get-togethers. We have what we call a diversity team [Diversity Council] here in Postville and they plan these things where they have invited the different ones. Now that we have the Somalis in town we have had several get-togethers with them where they have a chance to talk. There is usually an interpreter there in case some of them don’t know our language yet. For the most part, a lot of
the people here are really trying to get along better and understand the different cultures because that’s just the way it is going to be. There have been some people who just didn’t like it and have moved out of town. Many of us that are here, we like it, we like the diversity. To me it is just kind of fun to go downtown and see the different people. We have different stores now that are really interesting to go into with all the different things. We have a Mexican restaurant here in town that has excellent food, so to some of us it’s a good thing.

*Can you tell me more about the Taste of Postville?*

A whole street is blocked off. They have the little booths where you can walk up and down. I remember getting, I think this was from the Philippines, something that was wrapped in a corn husk maybe. I remember that and I remember different meatballs [15:00] and different things that the Jewish people have, I can’t remember the names. Then for the American things, somebody made homemade lemonade where they would shake it up right there, which turned out to be a real treat for everybody. They had what they call the Grill Boys. They would do grilling and have stuff on a skewer. Different meats and things that people can buy. There was usually a shirt every year that would say something like the ‘Taste of Postville’ it might say. It would have the name Postville and something about the diversity. ‘Hometown to America’ is something I remember or ‘Where All Countries Meet.’ You saw a lot of those shirts around. We kind of gave in to the Jewish people and held it on a Sunday rather than a Saturday because that was their Sabbath. Of course, Sunday is our Sabbath but things really didn’t get started too much until after church services anyway on a Sunday. At that time they also had activities for children. I remember ring toss and shooting a basketball. I don’t remember particularly any
rides, maybe a year or two. Sometimes at night they would have a band where everybody could come and have a street dance. It was a good celebration and a fun time to mingle with people. *Can you tell me a little bit more about the diversity events, you could talk about the most recent one with the Somali people?*

If I remember right, there are some people from Luther College, I believe, that know a lot about or maybe work with the Somalis. Some of them came over and would give a talk. There was a man who was the interpreter at the school and he would be there to interpret and also talk a little bit. Somali families would come with the children and different times we’d have, after the talks and everything, games for the children. The one time I remember they had food too. They would bring their food and we would bring our food and that was really fun that we could taste the different foods too. This was always open to the public. There weren’t a real lot of people that would come to it. It was kind of disappointing to me because to me it was really interesting and a good way to get to know these people. Kind of like at the Food Pantry, I think it’s just a really good way and you get to know that people are pretty much the same no matter what they are. They like to be treated with respect and know that people really do care about them. That’s about all I remember about those meetings. They were informative meetings, good meetings to be at where you learned a lot about the different cultures. *Can you talk to me about your involvement with the Presbyterian Church?*

I have been a Presbyterian all my life. Growing up I had confirmation and everything. My parents weren’t necessarily churchgoers but for some reason all of us kids were. Harold was also Presbyterian, although he grew up in a different town. When they moved to Postville he became a member of the Postville Presbyterian Church too so that’s where we were married.
As the kids were growing up I was involved with teaching Bible school and Sunday school and the usual things that a lot of parents would do. At that time Harold wasn’t involved in church but he would go at different times with the kids. We had the kids baptized there. In later years, the kids all went to confirmation and got confirmed here. Then Harold later became very strong in the church. He had cancer and our pastor came down to see him. His operation was in Iowa City and when the pastor walked in he said I hadn’t seen Harold much in church so I wasn’t quite sure so the pastor had to ask him are you Harold? Harold said yeah and he knew who he was. Harold said to him you didn’t come all the way down here just to see me did you? And the pastor said yes. For some reason that struck him and then he got different cards from people in the church. Anyway through cancer I can say that he had a change of heart. Ever since then, he has been a really strong churchgoer. He now teaches an adult Sunday School class. We are on a lot of committees, membership and fellowship committee. He and I have both been on the session. He’s been on the session many times. I was on the session once and I have been a deacon many times. That’s the one I like. He likes the business part of the church and making the decisions. I rather would like the things where you work with people and do the Thanksgiving boxes and things like that. So we are both quite involved with that. Harold is on another committee. Every church is kind of going through a rough time now with losing people attending churches so there is a committee that is trying to look into ways to get people more involved. Through our church we became volunteers with the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Our Pastor is on the team that goes out to all these disasters and evaluates them to see if they need to send people there or set up a camp. Through him we’ve gone to different disasters that have happened locally and way down south

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like Katrina and the different hurricanes. Our church sent about six or seven people down to Katrina two different times and the Pastor was big in getting those trips together. So we’ve been involved with that. We went out to North Dakota to work on flood damage. We went to Cedar Rapids when they had their flood and worked on that flood damage. Another, Lake Delhi that is kind of close here with flood damage and then Parkersburg when the big tornado went through there, we worked there too. It’s been really fun being able to do things like that. Otherwise I go to the Ladies Circle. We help with all the funerals and do a lot of cooking and things like that. We have a big pie-making fundraiser every year. This year we made 314 apple pies. It’s a really fun day. We get everybody involved, the young people and the old people. Before the pie-making day, the Ladies Circle mixes up all of the sugar, flour, and cinnamon. Some of these ladies are in their 80s and close to 90 so they wouldn’t be able to help in any other way so it’s a nice way to get them to be able to help, they can stir up or mix up the flour, sugar, and cinnamon. [25:00] Then the young people come the day that we make the pies. This year we had an 11-year-old girl that was rolling out dough crust and doing an excellent job. Otherwise a lot of the boys like to be on the peelers, they like to peel the apples. A lot of them are the runners. where they run the pies up to the, we have an ice trailer in the parking lot where we put all the pies to freeze them right away. So it’s a good way for the young and the old to work together. It’s a fun thing. I mentioned the Thanksgiving boxes, at Christmas time we usually reach out to families in need and help. We usually give money to the school for dental work that some of the families can’t afford. We’ve bought swimming passes for families so families can go swimming. Those are just some of the things that our church is involved it.

*Can you tell me about your involvement with the Food Pantry?*

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Yes. I know it was after 2008 when the raid happened and I’m not sure if it was that same year, but I have been involved helping out there ever since. We had it up where we used to have a hospital. We used that hospital until it just got so crowded in there that the local feed company had an extra building that they didn’t really use, maybe they did a little storage there, anyway they offered it to the Food Pantry rent free to use so that was a really, really good thing. Then we moved down there. First I was helping take the people through. Our Food Pantry, you have to have a driver’s license to register and you have to fill out this registration form. You have to meet the guidelines for your income. I don’t know that there has ever been anybody turned down. Usually they all fall within the limits. Then after that, when you come you have to show some kind of ID. It doesn’t necessarily have to be your driver’s license after you have originally showed it to them, it can be anything with your name on it then you are able to go through. In our Food Pantry we take the people through and they have a choice, they can take what’s offered or they don’t have to. If they don’t use it, a lot of them will say no we don’t use that. Which is kind of nice. We feel that way we aren’t really wasting food. Some places they might just box up something and that’s what they have to take. This way they get a choice. If you have a family you usually get to have more. The number of cans of things maybe or the number of meat items, you get to have a little more if you have a family. At first I was involved with walking the people through, which was really fun, you really got to know people that way. Then I guess it was when I had my hip surgery and I couldn’t do that anymore, but I really wanted to be involved. At that time the lady that was doing the registering, something happened with her, and I said I would really like to do that so I have been doing that ever since. They come to me first and show me their ID and then I mark down that they have been there.
and send them on their way through the Food Pantry. We meet just once a week on Tuesdays from 2:00 in the afternoon until 5:00. When we are all done I have to tally up everything. Each week you tally up and at the end of the month you have to send in a monthly report. [30:00]

They keep track of the number of households served, the number of individuals actually served, and the pounds. We don’t actually weigh, but we have the plastic grocery bags and we figured for an average each one is about 10 pounds. Depending on how many bags they have that’s how we figure out the weight of the food that we give. The quarterly work, there is a lot more to that. You also have to send in a report and then at that time you have to go through all of your names and if there is somebody that hasn’t been there for a long time, then you can take them off your active registry. I always keep them in another book though because at times people have come to the Food Pantry and then maybe they found a job where they don’t need the Food Pantry anymore and so they don’t come for a while, but then maybe something happens and they’ve lost the job. They’ll come back so then I can hunt up their names or if that happens and their name has been completely dropped then they just have to fill out another registration form and go through this. We see that happening quite a bit. We don’t ask them questions like that but it could be that hard times have come. With the economy now too maybe it’s a little tougher. A lot of them work at the Jewish plant. The Jewish people have a lot of holidays and when they have holidays they don’t work, of course, and when they don’t work they don’t get paid. This last month of October was one where there was one week that might have had three days where they couldn’t work. Our numbers have been higher at that time.

After that it kind of drops down again. Kind of get to know how the flow is going to be. This has been really fun to work at the Food Pantry because you get to know the people. Then you see
them downtown and you smile and talk to them and say hello. They are just so happy that somebody will talk to them. I think it has been a good thing for most of the people. A lot of people grumble about it saying that well they just want a free handout. We don’t really see it that way because of the fact that at times they say no we don’t need this right now, maybe the next time. At different times people have said things are just tough right now. I really don’t like to come here but I really need to now. We always tell them this is what it is for. When you need help we are here to help you. In that way I think it has been a good thing. This is one of my favorite things. Somebody said why do you do this? And I said because I like to do this. This is a good way to meet the people and I really like the people As we’ve seen the families grow up, we’ve seen Ladies that come in here that are obviously pregnant and then pretty soon we get to see the babies. Now some of them are grown up to be teenagers already. You get fairly close with them. One incident a lady came in and came up to my desk. She was pregnant and she looked kind of stressed. I kept watching her and I said to her are you not feeling good? She put her hands on her stomach and I said are you in labor? She shook her head yes. She couldn’t really speak the language too well, maybe a few words. I said well can you go through and she said yeah I think so. So she did go through but when she got to the end I said you aren’t walking are you? And she said yes. I said oh, no, you aren’t walking. I said I’m going to give you a ride home. So I gave her a ride home. Somebody else could take over at my desk at that time and I gave her a ride home. She would have had to walk at least three blocks carrying three or four bags of groceries. So anyway I gave her a ride home and I think that same night she went to the hospital. [35:00] She very proudly came in in a week or so
to show us her new little baby girl. Since then, after the little baby was maybe a year or so old, she has gotten a job so we don’t get to see her much anymore but I am tickled every time I see her downtown. That’s just one of the incidents that happens.

*Were you here around the time of the raid and what were your experiences around that time?*

That was a scary time. It was really funny, I was outside hanging up clothes at the time and noticed all the helicopters, or several helicopters hovering around Postville which is very unusual. We see helicopters going and we know they are going either to LaCrosse to the hospital, Cedar Rapids, Rochester, or different places. But these helicopters kept hovering and they weren’t the kind that were for dusting crops. At the time I didn’t know what happened and I don’t think it was until the afternoon that we heard there had been a raid. We didn’t know a whole lot about it just that there was a big need for people to help out at the Catholic Church.

Harold and I immediately went up there and it was chaos, people all over the place but we found somebody that said *yes we need help in the kitchen. We need to feed people.* All these children are here. They don’t know where their parents are. They don’t know if they’ve been taken away. You were so busy that you didn’t have time to think a lot, thank heavens because you would have been very, very upset with everything. We ended up helping, I can’t remember how long this went on, I’m sure over a week that we helped there. It ended up that people were staying at the Catholic Church to sleep, I suppose a lot of the kids and even a lot of adults too that were afraid to go home, afraid that they would also be arrested. Some of the people weren’t working at the time and I’m sure some of them didn’t have their papers or anything, so they knew that if they would have been there, they would have been arrested also. No wonder they were afraid to go home. Then, I’m not even

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sure why we opened up our Presbyterian church also. Oh, I remember now we had a group of Guatemalans that were using our church on Friday nights for their church services. They had been doing this for a long time, and were a really, really nice bunch of people. It had grown from maybe seven mostly men to begin with that started it, and it grew and grew, women came and families came. I think at that time there were like 80 people that sometimes would be there. They would have their church service and they would invite us to come. We were welcome to come anytime, but they had a special time when they invited us and they cooked a meal for us. That was so good and it was so much fun. We didn’t understand the sermon of course because it was in their language, but you just had that feeling when you were there. The music was so rousing, they really put a lot in the music. I assume, but I don’t know, that a lot of them are Pentecostal where they really put a lot of emotion into their worshipping. I think some of these people felt that being this was the church that they come to they would feel more comfortable in our church, so Harold and I opened it up at night. Our Pastor said we could do this. We had gotten some air mattresses and some sleeping bags, a lot of blankets, people had been donating blankets and pillows and things. So we had things set up in rooms where people could come [40:00] and stay. The one night in particular there was a scare in town when a train car came through town that had the word IC&E on it. This is what really scared the people, they thought that they were coming back to get them. All it was actually was just a train car with those words on it. Somebody had seen it and put a scare in, that night was really a scary night. All of a sudden we saw a lot of activity, a lot of cars just zooming up and down the streets, going to the Catholic Church. All of a sudden they were turning into our church. Women would come running in the church holding their kids and the look on their face was just, they
were terrified. They came and went down in the fellowship area where there were blankets and things. We had quite a few staying in our church that night. Later the next day the father from the Catholic Church came over and explained. He knew Spanish, so he explained to them what happened. We did keep it open after that and still had several that would stay at our church. The Catholic Church still had quite a few that stayed there. It took a lot of food of course and I remember there were a lot of donations. People would donate money and organizations might donate things. A store from another town donated a whole bunch of chicken. One meal they asked some of the Hispanic ladies, mothers, that were staying there if they would like to help cook it. I think they were really pleased to be asked. They made a big pan of, I’m not sure what it was called, but it was excellent, it was something really good. They of course all enjoyed that. I think it was a long time that the Catholic Church had a lot to do with helping these people. The women who had their husbands taken away and they had children at home had no way of earning any money. They had no money for, I assume no money for food or housing or anything. I’m not sure how that went, I know there was a lot of money donated. It was through the Catholic Church and people from Luther College were helping with all of this to help these people pay their bills. I’m not sure how long that went on, until some of the men were then later released. A lot of them were deported and maybe after so long they got to come back, I’m pretty sure. That’s kind of what I remember about that. I felt so sorry for those children that just had no idea what was going on. I’m sure some of them lost both of their parents for a time being before they knew where they were. I think some of the mothers were later released with ankle bracelets so that they could at least be with their children.

*How have you seen the Postville community regroup over the last six years?*

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I think probably through the Diversity Team, Diversity Committee, they are the ones that look at everything that’s happened and they work through Luther College, work through a lot of different places to see what they can do to help the town regroup. I know there has been, like I said before, these meetings that we’ve had especially when the Somalis came to town and we didn’t know anything about them. That was really something different for us and I’m sure very different for them too. The different meetings that we had with them probably helped. I was thinking that there were other things, ways that people were trying. I know at the Lutheran church now there are some Hispanics that meet and have a church service there too. It seems like the town in a lot of ways is trying to help the different people. Maybe trying to help them with learning some of our ways, some of the things that we’ve always done. It seems like I’ve noticed around town, at first it used to be that you’d drive around and you’d see that no, this lawn wasn’t kept up and just little things like that, that probably were done that way because they didn’t know how we did things. You don’t see so much of that anymore. I think they are all maybe learning our ways. I know that a lot of them are trying to learn the language, which is really good. If they are going to be here, I think it would be very good if they learn the language, otherwise they are going to miss out on so much fellowship and community things if you don’t know the language. I know I’ve heard something, it was the same way, way back when the German people came here. They spoke German and I can’t remember how many generations they say before they become English speaking. Do you know RaeAnn? Have you heard that?

I don’t know.
It’s So many generations before pretty soon the kids learn it and then maybe their parents learn, for sure their children are going to learn the language. Pretty soon it becomes almost their first language. You see that a lot at the Food Pantry. Mothers will come in with the kids, and quite often I have to talk to the kids and they tell the mother what I am saying and that way we can communicate. I think there were a lot of, mostly women around town that would do individual tutoring for these people. They were mostly retired ladies that would help these people with the language. I’m not sure if that is going on now, but I know that there are classes offered. A lot of them are trying to learn the language. I think as the kids go to school and participate in things and it draws the parents in, I’ve seen a difference now where you see more parents coming to things. When I read the honor roll now in the paper, you see many, many names that you know aren’t originally Postville names and that is a very good thing to see. You see more of the kids going all the way through school where at first when they came usually when they got into High School quite a few of them would drop out. You don’t see that any more. Quite a few of them are going on to college, and participating in sports, music programs, and plays.

*Have there been any changes in the stores in Postville or the Churches?*

Yeah, quite a change in the stores. There were a lot of stores closed, I’m sure even before the raid a lot of our stores were closed. Some of them have been rented by different nationalities. We have, like I said before, Taste of Mexico the Mexican restaurant. At one time we had a Jewish Restaurant and store that had a deli. [50:00] That since has been closed, but another Jewish bakery and store has been opened. Now we have a Somali store, only one that I can think of, and several Mexican stores where you can go. There is a used clothing run by, I’m not sure if she is a Ukrainian or Russian Lady, but that’s a really nice store. We’ve had a lot of
businesses open with our diverse population. Now you’ll see clerks too that are Hispanic which is really nice I’m sure for some of the Hispanic population that still doesn’t speak English to have them, so you see a lot of that. I think there are a lot of people of different nationalities working with the school maybe as interpreters or maybe just helping in the school in some way. The churches, there have been, I can think of three churches that have started with the different populations. Several Pentecostal churches, and, like I said before, there is a Hispanic group that meets at the Lutheran Church. Our Guatemalans, I think a lot of them that we had at our church were deported. A few of them met for a while after the raid, but there just weren’t enough of them anymore to keep it going. Right now we don’t have that Guatemalan group at our church. Several of the closed business places downtown now have churches in them. There is a Mosque for the Somalis in one of the buildings too, so that has really changed.

How have you felt about the media’s portrayal of Postville over all these years?

When I think of it, it just seems like right away I am thinking negatively. It seems like anytime anything bad would happen it would be in the paper of course, when bad things happened. Maybe I’m not so terribly aware of it, except that different people would say to us, someone said to Harold well you are retired now, where are you going to retire to? Harold would say well I’m not retiring any place, I’m going to stay in Postville. They’d say why would you want to stay in Postville with all those people? and blah, blah, blah. Where did they get that attitude? I’m sure it came from the media or things that they have heard. Word of mouth too maybe, but I know there have been several books written about Postville and I’ve read several of them. A book like that is naturally just the opinion of whoever writes the book or the people that they interviewed, and depending on
who you interview you get the different slants. I know the one book it seems like they interviewed more people with a negative attitude about it. So I think the media is just like it is everyplace. Maybe its our fault. They think that people want to hear bad things rather than good things. If something good [55:00] happens, if somebody does something, like a Hispanic person will do something very nice for somebody, which has happened a lot, you never hear about that. But if there is stabbing and it happens to be a Hispanic person or a Jewish person, which has happened, you certainly hear about that. I suppose its probably no different than any other place, the media just likes sensational things I guess.

What are your hopes for the future of Postville?

I hope that, naturally, we will keep going, I hope that we can keep the school. I know at one of our meetings, that I didn’t even think to mention, the question was asked to the, I’m not sure if it was the Hispanics or Somalis, maybe both of them, why did you want to come to Postville? I know for job opportunity at the plant was one of the options and I kept thinking well that’s probably what they will say, but many of them said because of the school system. It seems like our school has really tried hard to work with the people getting interpreters and it couldn’t have been easy or I’m sure it costs them extra money to do this. I hope that the school system can still keep going and still be able to handle all the diverse things that they have to handle. I hope that a lot of these little businesses thrive and keep going. I don’t see a lot of crime here in Postville. I know Postville has its usual problems that all towns do with the young people and the drug abuse, I don’t think it’s any worse than any other place. My hope is that the people who live here will try hard to get along and to understand each
other, that the businesses keep going, the churches keep going, and that we all learn to live together and just enjoy it.

*Well Dona, do you have any closing comments or anything that I haven’t covered yet?*

I’m really thinking here, well you covered a lot of things. No, I think you did a pretty good job covering things.

*Alright, well thank you for talking with me today.*

You are welcome. [58:15]