

P: My name is Pascale Fisher and today I am talking with Betty Ernst at 631 Park about er, early life in Iowa. Why don't you tell me about yourself, where were you born?

B: I was born in Victor, Iowa which isn't very far from Grinnell, and I never dreamed that I would be coming back as close to my birth place as I did, and uh, but my father was a minister so we moved quite often, and so that as a result before I was married I lived in 5 or 6 different towns here in Iowa and uh they were all small towns and of course church oriented, since our, my life was church oriented since I was a ministers daughter and that I find kind uh, has colored my whole life just because we lived in a parsonage and you were sort of were, uh, well you had to be, an example for everybody else

P:uh-huh

B: so people thought, although my mother always said that the preacher's kids got the way they did from playing with the deacon's children [laugh]

P: [laugh] What, what did your father [muffled]

B: He was a Congregational minister,

P: uh-huh

B: which is as I know now, is a, is a very [pause] progressive I guess and not as, uh, as, uh, [pause] well we, I don't think we were held down quite as much as Methodist and Baptist preachers kids were, but we were held down a lot because that's just the way it was in the early 19 hundreds

P: What year were you born?

B: nineteen-eight

P: nineteen-eight

B: See so that makes me eighty-four

P: oh, yeah

B: so I lived there and I lived in, as I say, five other different towns in Iowa see now, Victor, Riceville, Elcator, Waverly, Muscatine, Stuart, six

P: oh, wow

B: and then of course after I was married then I came back as a bride to Ames and then most of our married life was spent out of the state, then we retired to Grinnell...

P: um-hum

B: and came back here then.

P: What was your early life...uh were you...where were you living for most of your early life and...?

B: Well, in all those little towns that I mentioned and they were all in north-east or eastern Iowa and uh

P: so they were all small towns?

B: All small towns, except I al..., we always thought of Muscatine as a big town but of course at the time we lived there it was probably 5 or 6 thousand now it's probably 25 or 30 but uh that's all happened since we lived there.

P: yeah

B: so uh, but uh, oh your life in those days if you were a preacher's child it evolved completely around the church and school and I was one of 5 children and uh, so everything was just around the family really

P: um-hum

B: and of course before you had t.v. and radio and, and all of those things you made your entertainment and uh, as I, I remember all of us kids thinking about, we wished people would, when you got together as a teenager if you could only go to someone else's house...

P: yeah

B: ...instead of your house. But our house was the one that had the piano, and our folks would let us, as I am finding now, they let us do lots of things, if we were home doing them, they just hated, they never knew, I guess, what we would do away from home. And they were very, very...generous about what kids did at home, we couldn't play cards with playing cards, now, we could play with other kind of cards but we couldn't, we never had a playing card...

P: uh-huh

B: as we know playing cards in the house.

P: was that not...

B: That was...

P: part of the religion?

B: yeah, it, well preachers just didn't do that,

P: ok

B: and we didn't have a Sunday paper, now they didn't care if we went to other peoples houses and read the Sunday paper, but we didn't, and on Sunday you went to church and you did things, that, and of course early on in my very early life you couldn't do anything but go out in the woods and you couldn't play card games on Sunday you could play outdoors, but um, you didn't do things that you did on other days of the week, you just didn't do on Sunday.

P: um-hum

B: And uh, but...

P: Where you guys in church all day on Sundays?

B: No, you went to Sunday school and church in, in the morning sometimes you might in the afternoon and then there was another church service in the evening, and you were expected to go to all of them.

P: um-hum

B: That was just the uh, uh... routine at the preacher's house [laugh]

P: yeah

B: Unle... except that once we, I was 10 when my youngest brother was born, and uh, I realize now, that mother didn't have to participate in everything when he was a baby. But uh, she uh, aside from that she participated in almost everything although as I have looked back now with five children I don't see, and no, um [pause] we didn't have an inside toilet until I was... in junior high, which would have been [pause] 1920's, somethin' like that when I was 12, uh, we still had outhouse, we did have water in the house, as I recall, but we didn't have an inside bathroom until then, that's something my husband George can't understand, he uh, grew up in Des Moines and he doesn't remember ever not having electricity or a bathroom, and I can remember electricity just as plain as day I can remember the house where we had it the first, and of course it was just one wire hanging down from the middle of the ceiling, and uh, it's very much like the Grinnell museum if you haven't been to the Grinnell museum when you come up there in one of the bedrooms upstairs we have one of those lights, it's just a cord hanging down with a light bulb on it, you couldn't even turn it on at the wall you had to turn it on...

P: um-hum

B: and when you think of that wealthy family, there were light switches in other parts of that house up here, but not in this

little back bedroom that was for the housekeeper...

P: yeah

B: or the maid.

P: When did you guys get electricity?

B: Well, it's not until, um, I think it would probably be around World War 11,

P: um

B: I think... I, I, I'd really couldn't say, but I remember it, um, all the time when, my little brother was born in 1918, and we always had, had it after that as I recall. But, we didn't have central heating either

P: yeah

B: we just had a, a, um stove in the middle of the [pause] this would... the dining room and the living room and the kitchen were sort of all together in that one parsonage that I remember most.

P: So this is after World War 1 that you guys got electricity?

B: yeah

P: ok

B: um-hum, so that would be somewhere along in there I think. And when I stop to think about it, that we didn't have electricity until we had a car, almost, which just almost boggles the mind, I haven't thought about that connection of electricity in the house [laughing]

P: yeah [laughing]

B: and, but of course, uh, dad really needed a car even in a small town, you have people that live out in the country, and, and, I remember uh, going to uh, since I was the oldest girl and I had always taken piano lessons from probably when I was five or six, so I really got pretty good at playing hymns

P: um-hum

B: and things like that so, and dad had three churches, one in town and then two country churches and of course they didn't always have people that could play the piano or the organ, in those days it was usually the organ. So, I would, could go with him and play the organ for church services.

P: When was this? When you were young?

B: This would be when I was 8,9,10 and then on up to 12 probably, I suppose. And uh, and we, he just drove, he had a two wheel cart with a horse [laugh] and uh, and in the winter time a sleigh and it was co-o-ld but we had a...

P: [laugh]

B: buffalo robe and, and uh...[pause]

P: Wow

B: So I, uh, [laugh]. Goodness, that takes me back a long way [laugh], hadn't thought of those things in a long time.

P: So, how many siblings were there?

B: There were 5 of us, I was the middle one, there were two boys order, older, and a girl and a boy younger, I, and uh, uh, I don't remember, um, I know they'd say that the middle one always, um, well, I don't know. The middle one gets it from top and bottom, but evidently, I was, uh, my brothers and sisters tell me that I was a very sassy, smarty kid...

P: [laugh]

B: and [laugh] and, they say I was the only one that stood up to my father, but I never, think of that, that doesn't, and I don't, I wasn't, I don't know, uh, I don't think, I know, I'm sure I was probably was a sassy kid, I don't know. My sister tells me, the one that's just younger than I, she says I, and she said I made life miserable for her, but she never has stood up for herself [laughs], ever, and she still doesn't, and uh, she let's her husband walk all over her and I'm just appalled, so that I don't think that, uh, I don't think that she remembers right [laughs]. But probably I did make life miserable for her, I don't know.

P: So what was life like in the beginning? When you were in the teens?

B: You mean in my teens?

P: N'uh, well in your teens and in the like nineteen-hundred teens.

B: oh

P: Like what was the day...were you in school then?

B: Oh sure, I went to school every place. [pause] I don't remem'...it was just, uh, there weren't the outside distractions and, oh, it was just a wonderful life. You just grew up, you didn't have any problems [laughing] except with your brothers and sisters when you couldn't, or when you couldn't do that other kids were doing, that your folks wouldn't let you, we didn't get to go,

we didn't have the money to go to movies so we didn't go to movies very often when I was, in those, when I was, oh, ten or twelve, we didn't go every Saturday like lots of ki', like George remembers doing in Des Moines

P: uh-huh

B: and uh, in fact they probably only had movies on, um, Saturday and [pause] Friday, Friday and Saturday nights, I suppose in those little towns, but they were all so little that you, could go any place, and you would go to the store for your mother and you could go and get the mail, you had to go to town to get that, and you took turns doing that, and all of us had chickens, and pigs and cows right in town and so you had, uh, jobs that you did for your mother, and things like that, and uh, so you, you, you just grew up doing the usual, did the dishes, you helped your mother some, you made the beds, you learned how to clean and, uh, I'm sure it wasn't very good but you learned how to do it, an'and, although when I think back my mother, I've never had help, period, you know with quotation marks

P: um-hum

B: anybody that came in and did anything for me, but my mother all the time all the time I was growing up hired a hired girl, who would have been a, um, high school girl that worked for her room and board...

P: um-hum

B: for us and then she'd go home on the weekend and then she'd come back monday morning and go to school, and that was how country girls that were in, um, that lived on farms went to high school. And there would just be all s', a lot of 'em in our little town as I recall.

P: Were these generally American girls?

B: Yeah, these would have been, because that's what was available in north-east Iowa.

P: yeah

B: You see, we didn't have {{{{E}}}}immigrants coming in there at all, all the land by the time we got there was settled and uh, so, uh, these would have been, now they c', they would have been maybe, what, first generation? Maybe. Second generation, maybe. But they were all, uh, people that uh, who their parents had been here for a long time, I'm sure, and uh, they were just like big sisters to us

P: uh-huh

B: really. And uh, but uh, it really, it was a very idyllic life

when you st', when you stop, compare it, it just doesn't compare with things now a days [laugh], at all...

P: yeah

B: because there just weren't all the distractions that you have now a days, and, and that makes such a difference I think. And uh, but we played all kinds of games, outdoor games. We, uh, this one... the big parsonage in Riceville had this enormous yard along the side and it was very easy for ever', and no trees in that partic', we had lots of trees around the house, but, this part of the yard, and it overlooked, there was a window on the side of the house that looked over this whole yard, and my mother would sit in the low rocking chair, like this, with, and my little brother there and they would, she could see what was going on, and she'd knock on the window if we didn't do something that was right [laugh].

P: [laugh]

B: and that window is, it was before, um, picture windows as we think, and there was a window that would have been as big as that one, and the story that they told us when we moved into the house, but it had a great big scratch the whole way across the window and the one, they told us that um, that window had been ordered for a store down town and when it came in on the train and they were unpacking it one of the men said, uh, "I've always heard that a diamond ring will scratch glass, I wonder if it's true" and he went like this with his ring and it was true, so the store keeper wouldn't take it

P: Oh no!

B: so somebody, I don't know whether they said, "well let's put it in the parsonage" or whether he owned that house before the church bought it. So a few years ago we went back to that little town, and I went over to that little house and it's gone now, I was going to go in and tell the lady about that story because no one else had ever heard that, and my brothers and sisters don't seem to remember it, but boy I... I don't know why I should remember it, but I do seem to, but uh.... But there a', in those days there were, every family was big, pretty much, so you had all kinds of kids to play with and your imaginations just ran riot. And one of the parsonages that we lived had a barn and a pasture behind us with a crick running along the edge and while we lived there my older brothers even built a boat and sailed it on this little bitty crick. I don't see, whenever I see it now it uh, it isn't big enough to float anything and it must have been bigger in those days but thy tried it, and you could just, on Sunday, mother grew up in Cleveland and she could never get enough of the out of doors and so on Sunday afternoons we would go walking along the railroad track and there were always wild flowers and things like that all on the way of the railroad track and uh, that was one of our favorite thing to do. My folks were the only ones, of her family, of both families, that left Ohio, and so we were different from any other

family because we didn't have any relatives that lived in town...

P: Yeah.

B: most people had relatives, you know grandparents or something like that and we didn't have any, and as it turned out my children didn't have any either because I married a college professor and we moved a lot, and so uh, you just got acquainted with people there and of course falling into church environment, you've already got some people there, the people that belong to that church look after you sort of, so you that you have an extended family and, and I know now, I realize now that, that, they did lots, the members of the church did lots of things for us just because we were the preachers family

P: yeah

B: and i think of people in those churches as almost as more than my aunts then I do of some of my own aunts because I really knew them better

P: yeah

B: because, uh, our relatives from Ohio came out to see us, oh, maybe we'd have one or two every year, but we went back to Ohio only every four years, and of course when you don't go any oftener than four years that means I went back to Ohio 'bout three times while I was growing up, you know, and uh, so it uh, it's a different, uh, world than it is nowadays, so...

P: What was dating like then?

B: What was what?

P: Dating, in the small towns.

B: Well by the time I started to date, I would have been in Muscatine which would have been, see the biggest town we lived in. And, we did...you did a lot within the church, but, uh, our church was on the south side of town which is not the best side of town.

P: uh-huh

B: You know what I mean by best, it was where the, uh, workers in the button factories and sash and door factories, it was one of the smaller churches in town, and I didn't really feel put upon, I dated kids from the church and occasionally somebody from high school, although really, as I stop to think about it, I didn't date that much, but then there were things going on at the church so that you didn't realize that you were missing much. Just, there were a lot of people your age that didn't date much either

P: um-hum

B: and of course there still weren't things to go to except movies, and things of that kind, and of course, on Saturday, I finally got a job working at the Woolworth's five and dime, which you worked all day Saturday 'til nine o'clock, I believe, on Saturday night. I think I got a dollar and a quarter for that eight hours of work. And, toward the end, now that I stop to think about it, I instead of my folks coming to pick me up, one of the boys did stop, he'd be waiting outside the door to walk home with me, and it was over a mile home. So it would have been a long walk home, but then he lived next door, so it, you know, he was coming home too, but uh, my goodness I haven't thought about that in a long time.

P: What was high school like? [pause] As a student how were you?

B: Oh, I don't know, I don't think I was really very good, but I don't know. I, uh, I took Chemistry and science, I was always science oriented, [laugh] this last, um, month when they had women in Grinnell, did you see that in the paper about women in Grinnell, 'bout, and they profiled some of us in that paper...

P: I don't think so.

B: and when I was in college I majored in Chemistry. I sent this article to my brother, or my son! And he said, "Oh, I didn't know that you..." it says in there that I trained to be a chemist, which I did. But then I went into nursing school, used my chemistry then to go into nursing school, and uh, he didn't know that I had majored in chemistry. Of course, I was what, one out of two in the class at that time, there weren't very many of us in Chemistry in those days.

P: One of two women or one of two...?

B: Two women, yeah, two women, um hum, and uh....but I just, oh I loved Bacteriology. I probably would have then gone into medical technology I expect but uh, then after two or three years at nursing school, then I met George, you know once you...so I got married, and you see that brings us up to the Depression time, we were married during the Depression, and if you were married they wouldn't even look at you for a job. Married women couldn't teach, if you had one wage earner in the family that's all you needed. There was no point in even asking people, and so I never have, except during World War II, I've never worked outside the home. I've just...during World War II we lived in Madison, Wisconsin and I did work the seven to eleven shift at the local hospital those years while George would have been home then, you see, to take care of the two children. And uh, then uh, so I'm one of those few people that never has worked outside the home, and there aren't so many of us really.

P: What was the Depression like for your family?

B: Well, when I was at uh, it was in the tail end of college and

then the years I was at the hos', in a hospital nursing school. And really, in those situations we really didn't feel it that much. And then after, see we were married in 1934, and George was getting hundred, no a little more than a hundred dollars a month. And then after, that summer after we were married he was cut to a hundred dollars a month. But then he had a job, and uh, so you, you were glad you had a job

P: um-hum

B: and everybody else was paying the same kind of rent you were and rents of course were, were, as I recall our, our, I think our apartment rented for twenty-five dollars or something like that. But when you think that milk was what when we moved, we went to Ames, I went to Ames as a bride, he was working at Iowa State then. And uh, when we went to Maryland then, uh, milk was at twenty-five cents a quart, you know, and uh, so that uh, you just made do with what you had. And uh, as I say we were lucky then, luckier than lots, we always, George always had a job and uh, so uh...

P: What was he teaching?

B: He taught engineering, he's a civil engineer, and he taught, he became a specialist in reinforced concrete as far as buildings, and uh, highways, bridges and things of that kind. And did research in those fields, so that he did, he became quite well known in his field of reinforced concrete. Because of all the research projects that he had done

P: uh-huh

B: and uh, we were at Maryland then for what, four of five years and then we went to Syracuse University, and then we got caught there during World War II and of course all the boys went off to war and there weren't any students in engineering, they were all gone practically. So um, then he uh, was appointed to a uh, testing laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin where they tested wood products and things in which they would subst', how they could substitute wood products for metal products, because uh, metal was being used for armaments and things, and so, they were making things out of wood with different kinds of resins and things and substituting them for uh, for the uh, metal products. And that's were we were until the end of the war and then we went to the University of Nebraska and spent then the rest of our life at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

P: Yeah, what college did you go to? [pause] What college were you at?

B: I went to Parsons college at Fairfield, which is that one that has now become Harasha University. It, uh, they had a president, when, oh in the, I don't know, late thirties, early forties maybe, that uh, wanted to make it a really big university and he got it so much in debt that they finally went bankrupt, and uh.... At the

time I went there it was, it uh, the school had an enrollment of five hundred or something, it was really quite a prestigious school. And uh, it was a Presbyterian school, and uh, so it, but uh, it had a very good reputation at that time.

P: What years were you in school?

B: Twenty-six to thirty.

P: Twenty-six to thirty.

B: And uh, then I went into Evanston Hospital and that hospital was affiliated with Northwestern and got my nursing degree then from Northwestern. But as I say, the only time I used it, except with the family, was during World War II.

P: What was college like for you?

B: I beg your pardon?

P: What was college like for you?

B: Well, there again I had to work, I worked for my room and board all four years that I was there with the same family. And it was a wealthy family there in town, and uh, he ran a clothing store, and uh, they were a family that... he was a merchant there and they belonged to the country club and so my job, it was primarily taking care of their youngster who was five when I went there and uh, they uh, I got along well with kids and Louise would mind me pretty much and they had a wealthy sister, er Mrs. Hear's sister was a wealthy woman in New Jersey and she said that if I, she thought I was good for Louise and if I would, she'd pay my tuition if I'd keep coming back every year, so then I went all four years then there and uh, Aunt Katherine paid my tuition those four years I was in school. And they took me on trips and they, I went, I was an early nanny I guess [laughs].

P: uh-huh. Aunt Katherine...?

B: But then I did house, I did a lot of house work and uh, dishes and uh, Mrs. Hear did a great deal of entertaining, and uh, so I uh, that was, [pause] it was just good old waiting table and doing, learning how to cook the way she wanted it done, and uh, but it was an introduction to beautiful china and sterling silver, and crystal wear and table linen and Chippendale chairs at the table, and antiques of all kinds around, that we didn't have at home. So it was, it was an education in itself to me. And uh, I have never regretted that I was forced to do that just because... and how, when I think now, I don't think my father ever got more than [pause] twenty-four hundred dollars a year, if he got that much salary. And yet all five of us have college educations, we all had to work for our room and board or, and work along the side and everything...

P: um-hum

B: but, you just, there was never any question but what we would go to college. And, I have a son-in-law now, that, he's just appalled, he's, he said that when he thinks of the age that my parents would have been, which means they were in school in the 1890's, and to think that they insisted that their children, when lots of families..., and course mother did not graduate, she went to Oberlin, but she had two years, I think

P: Oh wow.

B: maybe at Oberlin. And uh, but he just can't, and they had seven children and five of the seven got college educations, and uh, for that time, that's really unusual too, and of course to be a minister, you had to have a college education, and uh, but then dad starting preaching, I think, when he was a teenager, and saving his money, and um... [then referring to the quilt she is working on] This pencil is not supposed to disappear, but these dots, this is the third time that I have marked it [laughing]

P: Oh-oh-oh.

B: and I, so I have two designs on here and I don't know which one is which. So I guess maybe, I'd better put it away until [laughs]...

P: How long have you been doing quilting?

B: What?

P: How long have you been doing quilting?

B: Oh twenty years I 'spect. Not much longer that maybe. We have been retired, oh I guess it's probably twenty-five now. And um, I'm pretty good. I do...

P: Yeah, I see all your stuff up on the wall, that's beautiful.

B: Aren't those somethin'. That was what...[walks to go get the quilts so voice is muffled] ...George gave me a book for Christmas that was illusions in quilting.

P: um-hum...that's beautiful.

B: That's a city scape, sort of. It's supposed to look like tall buildings sometimes, when you look at it just right. And um...[cut off because it was the end of the tape].

B:...you didn't necessarily have a waist line, and it was before zippers, so that they, they fit loosely, and uh, so sewing wasn't the problem. I had always made doll cloths. I liked to play with dolls but it was making the cloths and putting the cloths off and on that I liked better than, than the playing with just games with

the dolls, so uh...

P: Where would you guys get your dolls?

B: Where what?

P: Where would you get your dolls?

B: Hadn't the faintest idea.

P: Were they store bought or made?

B: No, ours were always store bought as I... yeah, yeah. but and I don't have, I never have had, don't remember ever, in fact none of our toys have really have, survived [laughs] the family. When I see what we have at the museum, we've got, there was a family here in town, I don't think those children played with anything, we have, their toys are in such good shape. And we have a Victrola, there's not a scratch on it...

P: [laughs]

B: [laughing] we, I just can't imagine a family, we were hard on things, but I guess, but....

P: But with five kids.

B: Yeah, one of the things, though, that we had that nobody else had and that was a piano. But this town that we lived in had a family that belonged to, a Kimbell piano company family, and when player pianos came out, which I suppose would have been around World War I, or something like that maybe, they got a player piano and uh, asked the preacher if he would like to have the ordinary old piano, one of those big old black behemoth things. But the folks took it everywhere we lived, and the last, I remember mother telling me that the last time it was tuned which would have been, well probably Stuart I suppose, and um, he said it was so old he [laughing] couldn't bring it up to pitch, it was still a B, it was a B-flat piano, but of course everything was tuned into B-flat, so it was tuned alright but it wasn't up to concert pitch. But we all took lessons on it, and uh, but preacher's kids are very apt, are very used to using other people's casts offs, because they couldn't, furniture, clothes, anything. Oh, you just accepted it, that was the way it was and you didn't think, and of course in those days people didn't dress up as they do nowadays, at least we weren't aware of it, as I look back now, the banker's children, and the banker's family were, I'm sure, dressed a lot better than we were, but kids wore overalls to school, and uh.... So that uh, and we always had shoes, I don't ever, I didn't like to go bare-footed, my sister did, and I don't know if they went bare-footed to school or not, I never did, I'm sure because I never liked to go bare-footed, even just out in the grass and things, that was not for me, but uh.... I don't think of myself, I am sure we were poor but you just, you just don't think about it. We had enough to eat, and uh,

course, a lot of it was given to us. Oh and the sad day! One day, one winter somebody brought us a half a hog, it was really cold weather. And um, we had always used the ice-box and the ice-box was out on the back porch, because then when the ice melted it just dripped off, so in the cold weather we, you couldn't use it for ice, so we put it on the back porch or left it on the back porch. So the folks had put this half a hog in the refrigerator on the back porch, and the next morning some dogs had smelled it out and they had hauled all our meat...!

P: Oh no!

B: Oh dear, there was much gnashing and everything. And the preacher should have known better, he might have known that that could happen, and...[laughs]. So....

P: That's funny.

B: Yeah.

P: So, what were your daily chores? Like did each of you have certain chores that you were supposed to do?

B: Yeah, we always, you always helped with the dishes, and setting the table, and there were certain, you always played, and you did things, I'm not sure...I'm sure I must have had some jobs that I did with my little brother because I would have been ten, but i just remember just taking care of him a lot. It's what, it's the only thing that remember and of course you took him for walks and uh, in the baby buggy and things of that kind, but uh....

P: What were your brothers doing? Were they, would they not take care of the baby?

B: I haven't the faintest idea, about that.... Of course, up, let's see, at the time Carl, we would still have had farm animals. So I'm sure... and they worked in the garden in the summer time, I know. But, I don't really... [pause]. When your a kid, you just think about yourself, you don't

P: Yeah [laughs].

B: think about other people, if you think that you're imposed on and, and that, but you don't, I don't, at least I never, I don't remember it, this...after all that was eighty years ago, why that's a long, been a lot of water under the dam since then. I'd be interested to hear what my children would say now [laughs] about how much they did for us. And of course, we were the last ones to get t.v. and we were the last ones to get a, a dishwasher and all of that always, and um.... Because we were always, George's education and of course we were saving for the kid's education. And, we had three children so that we worried about paying our insurance, and, and having some laid by so that when the kids came along we'd have something, and it seemed to me that we would never

get them educated. [laughs] I remember that, so, but we did, and they all got it, so....

P: What do you remember of World War I?

B: Well, we relied, the only way you got information was through the Des Moines Register which came in on the train in the morning, and it would have been in the mail box when we went to get our mail. Which, I suppose, well it seems like it was the middle of the morning now, whether it would be every day or not, I don't know. We would not have had a {{{{{{?S??}}}}} sunday paper but uh, we had all kinds of magazines and we just poured over them and we would fight over who was going to be the first one to read favorite columns and things. And uh, I re' [pause], my father being a preacher and during World War I, they had what they called Liberty Bond drives, in which you, speakers would go out and try to get you people to buy Liberty Bonds and, I remember in 1917 and '18 getting to go to more movies then we had done before because dad would be, when they were changing the reels of the movies, they didn't have, it wouldn't be continuous like it is now, you got to the end of the reel and in that interim then he would make a talk about buying Liberty Bonds, and um, we got to go to the movies then, I mentioned that to my oldest brother the other day and he said he doesn't remember it but I am sure I'm right on that. But that meant our father was real special, 'cause he got to give speeches you know, [laughing] and you thought that that was pretty good. And um, but, I do remember when the Armistice came. And all, they rang all the church bells and the school bells and of course, we had a false Armistice, you know, before it was really settled and so we had a second round of that as I recall. 'Cause I remember my mother talking about that. But um, and then you always participated in parades and things, and on Memorial Day all the school children were to march to the cemetery and then you put wreathes on all the graves and things. And uh, in this little town you met over at the school house and you were all given, um, little wreathes or sprays of cedar twigs, and you dressed in white usually. I suppose it wasn't more that a mile out to the cemetery, it seemed like a long way, but, and I don't remember that there was a side walk all the way out....

P: What town was this?

B: Riceville was the name of the town. But we would go out to the cemetery, and that was, you just expected to do that every year. And dad always, preachers were the ones asked to give speeches and things and I don't remember any specifically, in fact, I don't remember any sermons that he ever gave, 'cause I don't think I ever listened.

P: [laughs]

B: And um, and I foolishly we um didn't make any point to keep any of them. And after we moved here there was a notice in the Registrar one Sunday that they were, they had realized they had

very few sermons of early ministers and if there was anybody that had sermons they would appreciate getting them. And I thought that I still had a box of um but I couldn't find them, so we, the number of times we've moved why I expect that's one thing that went too. So uh, but I, since the children are gone, and I've gotten interested in history and research and I help at the museum a great deal, and uh, I've really gotten interested.... I'm ashamed to say that I never took an advanced English or History course in college [laughs]. So I have had a lot of catching up to do I didn't do any reading, any fictional reading, oh I read some, but not like I should have, and uh, so I've had a lot of historical things to catch up on, so...[phone rings and I cut off tape]. Where were we?

P: Back on sermons and history and catching up on history.

B: Yeah, well, while we were, after the children left, when we were there in Lincoln, uh, I had a chance to become a dosin at the William Jennings Bryan home there in Lincoln, which had become a property of the state, and they had opened it for tours and things. And it was, he was one that had been a candidate for president at one time and was a lawyer there in Lincoln for many years and had this beautiful old home up on the edge of town, and I began to catch up then and so when we came to Grinnell then and had a chance to uh, help there and I am sort of an authority on all the cemeteries in the county [laughs].

P: Oh wow.

B: And that is one way of learning history, finding out about early families and so forth, so uh... [mumbles, something about her sewing].

P: When were your children born?

B: Oh, we had one child born in Ames, one child born in Washington D.C., and the last one was born in [pause] Lincoln, Nebraska, is that right? Yeah, Lincoln.

P: When was that?

B: Well let's see, 1935, 1940, and 1946.

P: So you were having children during the War?

B: Yeah, um hum, and uh, which made, well you have to, that was why I went back to work at the hospital, but then it had during, when George was able to be home because there weren't, everybody else was, was working in other things so that there, you didn't have, unless you traded, um, help, you just didn't have baby sitting people. And um, so, it uh, but those years, yo had money and you saved it because you couldn't buy anything, and uh, so that was, those years at Madison, on a good government salary, and we saved enough so that after the War then when we moved to Lincoln, we were able to buy our first house, we had never owned a house

before [laughs]. And uh, but then when you think in those days a house cost six or seven thousand dollars, you know that seemed like a lot but nowadays it doesn't seem like very much [laughs]. Course it wasn't much of a house, it didn't have any insulation and things like that but it uh, it uh, for it's time it was a good old farm house, and it was close to school, and uh, it uh....

P: That was Nebraska?

B: Yeah, in Lincoln, Nebraska, and it was near a public school and in fact it was right next door to an elementary school and then about a mile from both junior high in one direction and a high school in the other. So it was a good location and we lived there for twenty-seven years

P: Wow!

B: [laughs] And it was what, two or three miles from the campus, and that, George walked it a good bit of the time because it was good exercise. And uh, there was a bus that ran not too far from our house but we never had more than just the one car, but uh, we got along. And uh, Lincoln was a hundred and fifty thousand maybe a hundred thousand when we moved there, and it was, that's a nice size town to raise kids in. It's still small enough that they can go around on their bikes almost any place. And uh, church isn't too far away and the school isn't and school, everybody is participating in school activities so your just like everybody else. And there are nice parks to go to and uh, so that uh, we were, enjoyed Lincoln, but then in our days the only way you got a raise in salary or rank was to move, so that's why we went, were, at five different schools. And yet, now the kids I think, our oldest daughter married a college professor too, and uh, she's never minded moving, she went to two or three different schools. And, and, you do, of course, I was so used to moving that it didn't, I didn't think anything about it, I, you just made new friends, and started in where you were the time before. But I know lots of people don't like to move like that, but uh, I wouldn't have gotten to have lived in as many different areas as I did and I was, I just supposed that's the way everybody did [laughs]. Unless they were a business person whose father owned the company or something like that. I uh, but uh....

P: When were you married?

B: 1934, January first, I was the third generation to be married on January first.

P: Wow!

B: And I married my, I wore my mother's wedding dress. And um, we were married in this little bitty church in Stuart and I was the first, that was a church that must have, well I don't know how old it was, but it must have been.... But in that town people just didn't get married in church, you were married at home, of course

that's, lot's of people were married at home in the early nineteen hundreds. So I was the first bride in that church after all those years. And uh, a very simple little wedding, of course.

P: Was that near where your parents were living?

B: Yeah, that's where my folks were living at that, dad had not retired yet, he retired within another four or five years I expect. But uh, so, and goodness we were in our mid and late twenties, so we never thought that we'd ever see our fiftieth wedding anniversary, and we're now just about to celebrate, this January first, we'll be celebrating our sixtieth!

P: Oh wow!

B: So, we've had a long life together and we both come from long lived families. My grandmother and my mother and her youngest sister all lived to be past ninety-seven, and my mother's youngest sister just died last fall would have been, if she had lived to the end of October of that month when she died, she would have been a hundred. So we come from long, we've got a lot of long lived genes in us, I hope I don't live that long [laughs]. Although, you know, you don't have anything to say about it, luckily we've all been healthy, and um, my father died in his seventies, but mother lived to be ninety-seven, and uh, so you take it as you come, you just hope that you are one of those that keeps their faculty and doesn't age and so forth. And we've been lucky and haven't had any serious, really serious illnesses, but we've, you know, I've always watched, I knew enough nutrition that I've always watched our diets and we haven't gained a lot of weight, and uh, so we, George is getting cataracts so one of these days we'll probably have to have that done, but at this point I haven't yet....

P: Yeah....

B: We just hope for the best. Living in a retirement community I think is less stressful than living when you are out in town, we've, next week they start washing windows on the outside, and uh, when we think of our old house that had something like thirty-five windows, you know a two story house with thirty-five windows and then when it had to be painted it took twenty-six gallons of paint and [laughs] and all the plumbing things and snow on the ground, here, we don't have to think about any of that. And, I'm sure that that has added, and I, one thing, I think that most of us who have lived through years of no air conditioning, having air conditioning, I'm sure that that is one thing that contributed to my mother, my mother lived here too before she died. And those last ten years when she had air conditioning, when she, she didn't want it she said, but then we made her have it and, hot weather is debilitating [laughs]! Day after day after day, and I just can't help but think that does make a difference with your longevity to just have that.

P: Do you remember any particular winters or summers from when you

were little or how did you guys cope with...?

B: Well, you spent a lot of time outdoors under the trees. And drinking lots of ice tea, not ice tea but lemonade, we all had lemonade at our house, and we made ice cream after ice cream after ice cream, that was one of the things that my family, we made an awful lot of ice cream, with, you know, a hand freezer that you had to wind yourself. But you'd do it with the neighbors and it was just a wonderful occasion, you know. And you'd, one of the things that that church there in Riceville would do in the summer time, they would invite the preacher's kids out to the farm for a week at a time to give mother a vacation. And we'd go out and they would let us ride horses and of course we gathered eggs and we just did everything that they did on a farm, and because, although we had eggs and uh, we had chicken, and pigs, and cows in town too, but you didn't have as many as they had out on the farm. And we all had to help in the garden always in the summer time, so you just did the same kind of things but out on the farm, well you churned butter you know, and, and I don't remember, they would all have had, not have had electricity or running water in those early days either, so you see. So that, I hadn't thought about that angle, but I'm sure that we just [pause], it was a lot [laughs], I didn't think about it was work because we were helping Mrs. Banks and you know you just, those kind of things. And uh, and the boys went out too, of course after the boys got into high school they, and got old enough, the brother who went to Iowa State he had a permanent job coming home and helping in the canning factory. He was one of the few college boys in town, and uh, he was in great demand to do things like that.

P: This is your older brother?

B: Yeah, my oldest brother, yeah. And uh, so it uh, but it uh. We went down to the crick and went wading and swimming in the crick that was behind our house. Of course, the Fourth of July was always a big occasion, and Chitaqua! Have you ever heard of Chitaqua?

P: I've heard, I've heard the word but I....

B: Well, it's a town in Indiana and back in the, 1875 or something like that, they started, there was a Lake Chitaqua, and there was a church camp on that lake and they started at that time, Sunday schools were just getting started all over the world, and so, people had not done much bible study or anything, so the Methodists, I believe it was the Methodists, started this church camp out on Lake Chitaqua, and uh, it was primarily for bible study and so you'd go out there and you'd camp, and it started out just for a weekend, and everybody, and of course they couldn't after they got started they realized that they couldn't study all the time, that they had to have some recreation, with a lot of young people around. And so they started having different things besides just classes and then they enjoyed it so much they talked them into having it for a whole week, well then if they were to have it for

a whole week they had to do something more and so then they started bringing in, they weren't too far from Chicago. So they'd bring in speakers from Chicago, well then people started building cottages around the lake and they would have, they'd still have their Sunday school camps but then they'd start having, and they would have, a man, somebody would come from Chicago and he'd give two or three talks for two or three days and then they would have drama companies come down and give a play, and then they'd have orchestras come down. So then they started having all this entertainment well then somebody had gotten the idea, why couldn't they schedule, in fact it was someone from Cedar Rapids who first started it and they started scheduling artists for all summer long and they would go to a town, and it was always, a bunch of college boys would be the ones who would put up this great big circus tent, and then the lumber yard in town would donate lumber and they would make benches to sit on and there would be a stage there, and they would sell tickets for the week. It would start usually on Sunday night and go through Mo', Friday night I think, and then they would take down the tent and then they'd move to another town, and then every day during, in the morning they'd have children's programs and then in the afternoon and evening they'd have adult programs, and sometimes the adult programs were ones that children would enjoy too. And the deeper ones were usually all at night, so they would sell tickets and that one week of Chitaqua in any town and you'd stop, they would, I don't know where they went from, I suppose went from Riceville to Cedar Falls which would be maybe thirty miles and they would set up. And that was all over the Middle West, and uh, every, oh, it was just wonderful. Without radio or t.v. you see, we didn't know, except from what was in the Des Moines paper, we didn't know what was going on anywhere and we never saw a play live or anything. We did have those early movies, but boy The Perils of Pauline weren't any great...

P: [laughs]

B: ...as we look back now, although we thought they were wonderful! Because we'd never seen anything but stereoptican slides before that. So Chitaqua was, and you always, you looked forward to it for a month after school was out, and then you participated in it for a week, and then you did it all over again, just among your friends you know, just because you'd been doing it at Chitaqua. So Chitaqua was always a wonderful thing, that to do.

P: So that happened every summer?

B: Every summer. Until, it was during the teens and the twenties, I think and radio was the thing that washed it up. Once people got radios and could hear things that were happening in Chicago, then they spent their time listening to radio. And I know, some of my friends that uh, went to Coe.... One of the, I know one of the women that I knew that went to Coe, and she was, when I knew her she was an English teacher, but she had trained, she was a pianist, and she was going to be an accompanist, and um, but her senior year in college, her English professor told her that she might just

as well make up her mind to go to graduate school, that she, Chitaqua was a thing of the past, that there was no career in that, now with radio. And so she did, she went to the University of Iowa and was a wonderful English teacher to my children [laughs].

P: Do you remember anything about the winter of 1936? It was a really cold one.

B: Ah yes, we lived in Ames. We were living in Ames, our youngster was a year old. There was one week where it didn't get above ten below zero.

P: Oh!

B: And oh, you were just house crazy. And I was learning how to knit. And I had a friend over, I suppose six or eight blocks from me, and George had bolted one of those baskets on a sled. And I put Mary Jane in that basket and covered her up [laughs] and I haven't any idea what I wore but I must have been bundled up to the ears. But I went over to Irma's and got some instruction.... As I recall, it wasn't too bad and oh that summer was just as hot, that, that following summer. And oh, the baby got so hot. We put chunks of ice in the window with an electric fan blowing on it so that the cool air would come into the house, as I recall.

P: That was that summer?

B: In the summer after that. I don't have any recollection of how George got to the campus, whether he rode the bus, we had a Chevrolet, but, and I don't remember him....

P: Did you guys have horses?

B: I beg your pardon?

P: Did you have horses?

B: No, we never did. We never did. Growing up we did. Dad had a horse. Isn't it funny you remember the name of the horse, her name was Flip [laughs]. I don't remember that we had more than one, than that one horse. We had her a long...[tape ends].