

An Interview with Mrs. Dorothy Pinder

conducted May 13,1993

By Phoebe Juel

Phoebe:It is May 1993 and I'm doing an interview with Mrs. Dorothy Pinder who works here at the Grinnell Herald Register. I guess I begin by asking you to tell me where you were born and when you were born and some of your earliest memories of childhood.

Mrs. Pinder: O.K. uh. actually I was born in Des Moines where my father was in the printing and Newspaper business, and uh when I was 20 months old some extent in that area anyway, then we moved to Storm Lake. In Iowa up in the northwest part of the state where we lived for twenty years, and where I grew up and graduated from high school so most of my memories uh are in are of another community than Grinnell. Similar to Grinnell in many ways, it was about the same size, it was a college town,so uh there were similarities. My father was a graduate of Grinnell college and he had worked at the Herald Register when he was a student here and stayed in the newspaper business all those years and when he left Storm Lake he came back and bought the Grinnell Herald Register. Uh but my memories of growing up were in a small community, like Grinnell but on the shores of a lake ,and uh, I had a very, very happy childhood there.Much of it took place on the lake with swimming and boating and various activities like that,and uh I was born in 1922, so um, you're inquiring about the thirties and forties, I was 11 at the time

of the beginning of the depression which is something that your generation is often interested in, our memories, those memories of the depression.

Phoebe: Yes ma'am

Mrs. Pinder: And uh, I don't have a lot of specific memories except that I can recall banks failing and um..because my family owned its own small business and my father was regularly employed we did not suffer the unemployment that some of my friends' parents did, I can remember that they were very lean times, because if you're in business and other people don't have money then your business is not going to prosper particularly. And one of the things that I remember was a black coat that my mother, winter coat that my mother, wore for years and years and years because there wasn't enough money to change having coats, of course that was a small matter compared to things that many other people went through. Of course at that time also it was not only, in this part of the country, not only the economic depression that was going on, but there were huge dust storms that were blowing away the topsoil in the farming communities, so many farmers, farming families, lost their farms, just as several families did in the farm crisis in the eighties that was very reminiscent to me of those times, the hardships that the farmers suffered. One of my friends' fathers, a school friend of mine, who had been a farmer and lost his farm, the family moved to town and um.. lived in a very, you know, small place, but um because he was out of work he became what was called a man o' block, which

was , in which ten families in a area of the community each agreed to hire him for half a day,so he had five days employment, forty hours a week employment, we hired him to do the yard work and things like that, of course wages were very low at that time. That man's older daughter, older that, that classmate of mine later um, helped my mother in our home,um, and uh, she was not a live in person, she came in by the day,uh and my mother felt that she was helping this young woman and her family also, but she was employed at 3 dollars a week which is an incredible sum compared to what household help gets now, I think the going rate for household help in Grinnell at this time is seven and one half dollars an hour which is above what many offices and factories pay.

Phoebe:Yes

Mrs. Pinder Uh but uh, that girl was happy to have that employment and uh both she and her sister by dint of a lot of strength of will and one thing and another went on to college and the one girl, my class mate married a man who became superentendent of schools so uh, it's not that people can't do things if they have hard ships they can do things if they have the will to do them , so we were always very proud to know that family that uh,showed so much grit, enterprise or whatever else you want to call it. And uh, uh one of my memories of that time which doesn't have to do with economic times but my younger sister contracted scarlet fever uh and uh , she was uh, that was considered one of the most dread diseases there was at that time. We were all quarantined in our home

my father had to live outside our house outside the home , he lived in a hotel downtown in order to go to his business, but we were all quarantined for three weeks. I think scarlet fever is not considered to be a very serious disease..

Phoebe: No, most people now are vaccinated.

Mrs. Pinder: Right, but at that time it was felt that it would lead to, to uh any numbers of dire results. It was the only time I really can remember seeing my mother cry, she called my aunt who was a nurse in Omaha to come and help us because she was afraid that my sister was going to die. And she recovered very well actually, but we were not permitted in her room with her at all, and she had to stay in there with her blind curtains drawn, the window shades drawn uh because they were afraid blindness was supposedly one of the side effects of scarlet fever at that time. And uh,uh, as I was growing up like many other children my age we were able to take music lessons, piano lessons, I played the violin my sisters each played instruments and those were a very large part of our lives to be able to participate in music groups and take private lessons, and we all also went to Sioux City to Morningside College and took lessons there, they were considered to be,... actually I had a very good violin teacher, my sister played the cello, and um some of her friends went to Sioux City to study with the teacher there, but uh, that had an influence on us too. At that time Sioux City was the biggest city in our neighborhood, er in out part of the state and if we needed to do shopping that we couldn't do in Storm

Lake that's where we went, and we all went to Girl Scout Camp in Sioux City too..

Phoebe: Did you drive or did you take the train..

Mrs. Pinder: Well we drove my family had a car..and we.. should I be having you as me questions or should I just ramble..

Phoebe: Oh no, this is wonderful,I'll occasionally interject with some questions but..

Mrs Pinder: Well no we drove, in fact, I don't know whether this is of interest or not, at one time I was the youngest car owner in Buena Vista County, because when I was born my grand parents gave my parents a Model..T or Model A Ford I can't remember which, but it was registered in my name so I was the youngest car owner in Buena Vista County so my family had a car from the time I was quite young.the car that we had after that was a Plymouth, it was a kind of a roadster, it was much larger car, I have a picture of our family with this Model T it wasn't a very big car but I got around very well, and um this Plymouth that we had after that I remember one time we were out for a drive in that and it stalled right on the railroad tracks. Which was of great concern to us of course but we managed to get it off the tracks before the train came, but that was sort of a frightening episode but uh to answer you question about how we got to the city we did drive. And uh we went to the Girl Scout camp by the week or so at a time and later when I was in college I was a councillor at that Girl Scout camp and still later my oldest daughter was

assistant Woodberry County Attorney, in Sioux City and we drove out to see this camp ground and it has all disappeared. Which is too bad it was a beautiful camp ground just lovely, and uh it was out in a park outside of Sioux City called Stone Park but uh I wasn't able to really see that camp where I had spent so many happy hours.

Phoebe: Uh well, what did people in their teens and twenties do for well, I guess amusement in the essentially during the thirties, because often I know people my age tend to take for granted things like video cassette recorders and television and the easy availability of going 50 miles away to do something or see something, so uh, what did people of say, my age or a little bit younger do during the nineteen thirties and forties..

Mrs. Pinder: Well,uh our school activities took up a lot of our time and I know they do now to I don't mean to say the don't, but I think our lives were a little more centered around our school instead of outside entertainment. Uh we did a lot of bicycling and that lake that we lived on we would hike around the lake , but hiking was a big thing and bicycling and uh, well of course we had radios. I remember listening to things like Amos and Andy, and some others but we didn't spend a lot of time, we weren't dependent on the radio for entertainment, it was just something that was there that we did occasionally, and my parents always listened to the news on it, I remember, but uh.. Oh I don't know we just spent time with our friends, we played games no lawns , i don't see young people playing games on their lawns any more, just funny old games like kick the can, and things

like that. I don't think that young people have the opportunity to do those things because they have so many diversions uh and uh.

Phoebe: I think that Nintendo hurt front lawn playing quite a lot.

Mrs. Pinder: I'm sure it has and I don't know enough about Nintendo to discuss it but i do hear other people mention it. Uh but i don't know, we helped in our homes and we learned to, to things that I'm not sure young people learn to do now a days, of course people don't need to iron very much any more though I find that my daughters with they knew how to iron, because wash and wear fabrics need to be ironed,so I have tried to teach them how to iron, but we helped, and aside from the fact that our mother had household help in the form of this young woman that I mentioned earlier, we were expected to learn to dust an iron and help with the washing and things like that. I was just expected of women that they know how to do those things, or young women because they would need those skills as they grew older, which I think is still true and some times I think that younger women are missing out on learning some of those kind of basic things that carry out through times that you need to do those things yourself, even though there are a lot of labor saving devices I know. But uh we played with our friends, and I also belonged to a very active Girl Scout troop clear through high school, till I graduated from high school that troop was active and we did, had wonderful leaders and well did a lot of really great things, things I still look back on and hark to and depend on, um such as

nature walks and going to state parks and having naturalists, we had a wonderful lesson one time on snakes. We went to a small state park, not very far from Storm Lake and uh.. I still, I'm not afraid of snakes, my husband is scared to death of snakes *laugh* but I'm not afraid of snakes. All because I had, this park naturalist did a wonderful job of explaining different kinds of snakes to us, we touched them, he handled them and we handled them and that seems very tame I'm sure but it was really, really great. And then this uh, scout troop also had a puppet show that we did, and actually in a way that was an outgrowth of the depression because we had an artist from Sioux City that came to help us with this uh puppet show, and she was employed by, she was a W.P.A. artist. And that probably doesn't mean anything to you..

Phoebe: The Works Progress..

Mrs. Pinder: The Works Progress Administration, during the height of the depression uh one of the self help programs was the Works Progress Administration, and in Iowa there was a lot of art that was developed as a result of that. This woman came from Sioux City and showed us how to make the puppets, I still have one of them they're wonderful, I don't mean puppets I mean marionettes. these were string, strung marionettes and were had a stage and we did Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and we had all of those characters some of them were doubles even and we had a stage. All these marionettes were costumed and we learned how to operate them from a bridge above the stage and

uh and the puppets were all painted very realistically and I wrote the script for it I remember, from the story, and we traveled to several communities neighboring communities to present that show, that marionette show, I'm using the word puppet incorrectly. And uh that was a really great thing for all of us, I still have my, though I did not operate one of the marionettes because I was the writer for it, when we divided up the assets of the show I was given the poor Snow White, not the one that later was very grandly dressed in that story. and uh so we had lots of what I felt were very good activities, good role models and adults that helped us learn to do things. and Uh, uh I can't think of any other specific things, am I giving you the kind of information ..

Phoebe: This is wonderful..

Mrs.Pinder: now is there anything else along that line... In the forties, you said the thirties and forties...

Phoebe: Yeah, uh, how did the coming of the war start of affect you, I know that things started to become rather tense in '39 and more so in '40 and '41. Do you recall that impacting on your life do you remember it coming..?

Mrs. Pinder: Well I, I uh remember the news, about the events leading up to the Second World War, the events in Europe, and uh then uh I went to a small college in Missouri for

my first year in college *intelligible* in Nevada, Missouri and then I transferred to the state university at Ames for my last three years of school and uh, I had been to a concert Sunday afternoon, December 7, I was at a Christmas concert a Christmas musical at one of the churches near the Iowa State University campus, as we left that concert, the word had come that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, and of course everybody left very silently, and when I got back to my dorm I called my parents and I remember I discussed it very briefly with them, I couldn't get through the lines were so busy when I first called. It was a very traumatic time of course. And then most of the young men who were in school when I was left to go to the war of course, and the women, well I was a journalism major and I was working on the school newspaper and most of the roles on the student newspaper were then filled by women, who uh, not very many women I knew went to the war there was a big, in Des Moines, there was a big W.A.C., women's army corps, headquarters at Fort Des Moines, so we were aware of the fact that women were involved, in fact I was just reading a story in the paper recently by a woman who had been in the service during the Second World War, you probably didn't see that you've been so busy, but she was commenting on the fact that they were the forerunners of the fact that now women are going to be accepted into combat and all, but uh I don't recall any of my friends actually going to the war, but uh a friend of mine who worked at the student newspaper became the sports editor and she later became the sports editor at a big newspaper, which is kind of unusual but because of the experience that she had.. Though actually in the real world, as we called it outside of college, women who filled

men's roles often had to give them up and the men came back and took the jobs back, so a lot of women were put out of work when the war was over.

Phoebe: Did you have any family members that uh, went to fight in World War II or any male friends that went.

Mrs. Pinder: Well some of my high school class went and one of them that I know of didn't come back. At the time that I was in school at Iowa State there was a Air Force R.O.T.C. unit uh there, which later came to Grinnell, I don't remember exactly how that happened but uh they were housed temporarily at Iowa State and then came to Grinnell, and a young man that I had known from that group that I kind of kept in touch with was later in the Battle of the Bulge, and I don't know whether that means anything to you

Phoebe: Yes Ma'am

Mrs. Pinder: He lost his arm, he didn't lose his life but he lost his arm and it was very hard on him. and I felt good that he didn't lose his life obviously, uh there were Red Cross units that were, I was not specifically, I don't recall being specifically involved in this but one of the things that happened was that a lot of women did, got together under the auspices of the Red Cross and rolled bandages and did things like that. Oh I think of one other thing that I did that had to do with the war, because there weren't a lot of men

around, during one summer when I was in college, I think it was more than one summer, there was a canning factory in uh Storm Lake that canned corn and beans that were grown in that area, and a lot of the uh, a lot of that was needed for the armed forces and there weren't enough people to fill those roles so I uh, several of us college student would work in the summer in this canning factory doing very menial labor but it was considered part of the war effort. We were helping food, helping get food for the armed forces, I must say that even though it was very menial labor and I would not want to spend my lifetime doing it I think that everybody ought to do something like that in their lifetime just to find out what it's like and appreciate the things that we do have and people who spend their lives doing things like that, I think it's good for us to find out how other people exist instead of just our own little circle of friends.

Phoebe: How did things like rationing affect you?

Mrs Pinder: That's what I was going to comment on also, that we all had ration books with coupons you know, every family, every member of the family had one uh, and so we were limited in what we could purchase with those stamps. It wasn't what you purchased but what you were allowed to purchase. I don't recall that it was such a terrific hardship most of the cook books that were printed at that time, I still have one or two, came out with a lot of sugar saving recipes there were whole sections of recipes where they were cooking without sugar. And uh, uh of course it wasn't only food it was gasoline we were

rationed on gasoline and mostly meat and sugar and gasoline were the three things that I recall that were limited, and I don't think anyone of us really suffered, we probably, it was just kind of a thing you know, a diversion or what ever. Everybody talked about it, but I don't think that anybody really suffered that was just part of what was going on at that time, part of the whole war effort.

Phoebe: Often you read about people saying that World War II was the "good war" that it meant an awful lot to people of that generation, because they, uh felt that they were fighting for something that was noble and worthwhile, uh do you recall having that sense at all? That the war was a justified war and that it was a war worth fighting and that people were proud to be trying to make the world a better place.

Mrs. Pinder (long pause): Oh I don't recall that sentiment, I hope I'm not blotting that out but I honestly don't recall that. Uh well, I uh you know, war is really awful, war is really terrible, the things that happen are just are really awful, and I don't think anyone, well I suppose there are people who feel it is justified I uh think that people felt they were doing it because they had to do it, because of the people that were being threatened by the uh, by the uh, invaders and people who were trying to take over land and property, I think they felt that it was just something they had to do. I think they felt there wasn't any choice. Now in this day and age we probably would have, well efforts were made to try and prevent the war, but then there was also, spoke about the period before the war that