

Mary Ellen Lynch Interview, Grinnell, IA
Interview by Frank Heath and Laurel Tuggle

Mary Ellen Lynch: (Speaking of the Hobby Lobby radio program.) And nobody can remember. The radio program back in the late 30s. In '38. I don't know how come they came to Grinnell. It was one of the radio stations, they came out here for a week for a contest and the girl that won it was Jean Bates. Her dad had the Bates flowers and she rang bells or something and nobody can remember. At my age I don't know why I remember. And nobody else does and if there's anyone older than me they'd have to be in their 90s. Because I'm 87 1/2 and I don't know when it is because if I knew the date we could check the newspapers. Look at the Heralds on film.

Frank Heath... The Hobby Lobby, huh?

Mary Ellen: It was Hobby Lobby was the name of the radio program. And we listened to it and why they came to Grinnell I do not know. And they had a platform set up just outside of where they have the Farmers Market. That's where the flagpole was and she played the bells and she won and she got a trip to New York. And I keep thinking is there anybody older than me that would remember it? Well, no they don't. I know it was in '37 or '38, I'm sure. She graduated in '38 so it might have been '37 I don't know. I remember it and I had a little Hobby Lobby thing that they gave away and my neighbor lady came over she lives across the hall and she showed it to me. She didn't know what it was and I said oh yeah that was a radio program, I remember it.

Frank:...The Bates peoples don't...?

Mary Ellen: Well, there's none of them left. Well Joy is still living she's my age but she's mentally out of it, she's in a nursing home in Oskaloosa. She had kind of a rough life. And the Howells took over Bates after Roy died. Mr. Bates' wife was a Buchanan. Maybe you've heard of Fannie Buchanan? She was active in the state with 4H, Iowa State. She had a little cottage, like it's up on East Street across from the college, up by the college dorms, up there, well it doesn't look now like it did then. I'm not sure how it looks now but it's a little one-story house.

Laurel Tuggle: Well I guess we could start with some background stuff about...were you born in Grinnell?

Mary Ellen: Yes in 1925. An interesting thing is my husband was born in November 1924 at St. Francis Hospital. I was born January 20, '25 at St. Francis Hospital. Then I have a daughter who was born January 12, 1946 so that she was considered the first one where both parents were born out there, she was the first grandchild that was born out there and she's 66. She'll be here next week. She lives in Wheat Ridge Colorado.

Frank: St. Francis Hospital?

Mary Ellen: Yeah it's where St. Francis Manor and all that is now. It was a big square kind of an oblong building. I don't know when they built it but I was born there in 1925 and then I grew up on West Street, 229, where Kentucky Fried Chicken is, is where I lived. And then they moved the house over on the south end of Pearl Street. It's the last house on Pearl Street down by the lake. It was kind of a hill, we were kind of up on a bank then but they leveled it off now.

Laurel: Did you have siblings?

Mary Ellen: Yeah I had twin brothers, one died in the war. January 24, 1944. He was a tail gunner on a B-17. And then I had a sister. she died nine years ago. It will be nine years in December. I'm an orphan. My mom lived to be almost 96. She was 95 when she died. And her memory was good clear till the end. Now when I think about something I want to ask about there's nobody to ask. Everybody's gone. And if you don't know the dates you can't look it up in the paper it's kind of like that Hobby Lobby thing. I suppose I'm the only one in town who remembers it. Well there's got to be somebody else but I don't know who. And if they lived in the country chances are they would not know it would have to be somebody who lived here in town and they have to be up in their 90s. And I don't know who it would be. Because a lot of their memories are giving. Mine still sticks to me, I still remember. And I can remember the lake. I told him on the phone, it dried up... the more I think about it I think it was probably '36. I was 11 and it didn't completely dry up but there was water up near the middle, it kind of goes down and around and it was up near the bridge.

Frank: Arbor Lake

Mary Ellen: Arbor Lake, it dried up it was so dry. That was during the Depression, well during the Dust Bowl. Cause we had, the dust came up here and we had red sunsets and it was all over the Midwest, that dirt. Flying through the air, it must have been terrible, but I can remember that. Oh hot, and nobody had electric fans. Well they didn't make that many of them. My aunt had one because she worked for the utility company. Oh well, we liked to go up there and sit in front of the fan. We had a screened-in porch and we would just put a quilt down and people slept out in the yards and my sister and I we slept on the quilt. Everybody did. And I had friends that, the minimum rate for utilities was a dollar, they didn't even have the dollar to pay so the lights were shut off and they had kerosene lamps. That was back during the 30s. It was really rough. Nobody had anything. So we made our own, you know... we had the clubhouse over there on Pearl Street. Just different things... I remember my dad bought a pass up to the college, they had a 20 yard swimming pool... it's since been torn down. It was right along the tracks below Eighth Avenue and that's where we all learned to swim. And we'd walk from down there where I lived clear up to there in the morning for swimming lessons and then we'd go back in the afternoon and splash around and then we'd go back at night. We were young then and we had roller-skates. We'd skate all over town. We wore them out and got another pair. I think they were around five dollars a pair. That was a lot of money in those days. We never had a bicycle. We couldn't afford it I guess.

Frank: What did your dad do?

Mary Ellen: He laid and sanded floors. Well, my grandpa was a carpenter, and my dad, he could build, there's a house on Eighth and West that little bungalow. He and another guy built that. It had plastered walls in it, that's not plasterboard. He built that in 1949. We lived down there and in 1944 we moved up to 322 Elm St. that was a big house. Well, about that time I got married and my sister got married and a great big house was too much for the folks so they sold that one and bought that little, or built that one on that corner. They lived there till '55 and then they built another one down on Elm Street... 821 Elm. And that's where they lived until my dad died. He sanded floors, mostly gym floors because he was the only one in the state that did it, so all summer long the schools had to have them done so off he'd go. He'd leave on Monday and come back on Friday night. All over the state of Iowa that's how I knew where a lot of towns were, because that's where he'd be working. And my brother worked with him.

Laurel: Did he do that throughout the depression too? Or did he have to find different things to do?

Mary Ellen: Well he worked with his dad as a carpenter but he wanted to get into the floor business but people couldn't afford to have their floors done. So he did do some floors but mostly he did gym floors. I don't know what they use for gym floors now. And my mom graduated in 1914 and she was a bookkeeper. And she worked at the Glove Factory, Morris and Shults, as a bookkeeper from 1914 till '21, or maybe she worked till after she was married because my brothers were born in '23. So I imagine with two kids she probably quit working. And then she kept books for my dad. They're different people. My neighbor lady she's a bookkeeper and they're very precise they got to find that penny. If it's off a penny, they got to find it. It doesn't bother me, well maybe the bank's got it or I've got it, doesn't matter. But I don't know, what did you want to know about the town? If I know anything.

Laurel: What school did you go to?

Mary Ellen: I went to Davis. I started in September 1929, I was four years old, and then in January I turned five. And then in second grade, at that time we had 2 A and 2 B; I went from B to A, they put me ahead a half year so I skipped, there were five of us, and I guess they thought we needed to be in the A class, so then I got ahead. I went to junior high where is now the community building. I was 10 years old and in January I turned 11. I graduated when I was 17. I could've gotten through when I was 16 but mom said you may as well take some more classes there aren't any jobs. You couldn't get a job at 16. Men were out of work, that was in 1942. We were still meeting up until the spring, our class, but there were only 4 or 5 of us around here to meet anymore. So we were going to try to see if the class of '41 would meet with us and we could get eight or ten. Otherwise we'll probably have to, we just lost two classmates one died the second of August and one died the fourth, so we're down to maybe 35, and we don't know, some of them live away. So it's hard to know.

Laurel: How many did you graduate with?

Mary Ellen: One Hundred and twenty five. Well a lot of them quit, they didn't finish up. The war came along in December of '41, and they probably had their credits and they left and went into the service. But when they come back Mr. Cranny just put them in a class and said well, what you've been through, well, that's where you graduated, so that's what they did. He was quite a guy.

Laurel: Mr. Cranny?

Mary Ellen: Yeah.

Laurel: Did he work at the high school?

Mary Ellen: He was the high school principal.

Frank: What do you remember about him?

Mary Ellen: Oh man he was a little guy... I got a picture of him I found it the other day. He always wore a straw hat. I think I know where it is. He was really a great guy. He was on the draft board. And everybody that went into the service... he's the one with the straw hat on... that's down at the old Monroe hotel, and he was seeing them off. And Mr. Cranney had a picture of most of the guys who went in the service. He had big albums, but they disappeared. My cousin's husband had it and when he died nobody knows where it went. I should have kept it because then we would have known, because there were a lot of men from around this area killed during the war. My first husband was a policeman and he was killed, hit by a car east of town in 1948, just started on the police force, and he was hit and he was killed. I was 23 and he was 23, my daughter was a little over 2 1/2. Now she's 66.

Laurel: You got married in what year?

Mary Ellen: I got married in February of '45, in Bakersfield, California. He was in the Marines. And the second time I got married in April 1950. We came back here and he was killed, and it was a neighbor and so I married again and I had three girls. So I had four girls three of them were Lynch's and one's a (Bennigrew??) that's her last name, like Dennigrew, but with a B. She works for the EPA. She's an enforcement officer with the EPA in Denver and she'll be retiring in January. So she's got a good job. She comes back pretty often, she'll be back next Thursday.

Mary Ellen: I have a daughter in Auburn, California. Up by Sacremento. My grandson lives in Sacramento. He's a Spanish major and he works for the city library, the city of Sacramento, West Sacramento, and he speaks Spanish and he goes out with

the ladies with the Book Mobile. Course he can read, write and speak it, because they don't. And so he likes it pretty good. And then my other grandson, he has distonia (sp?) which is similar to Parkinson's. And he has a chip in his brain to keep the tremors down. It'll be four years in December. But he does a lot better now. They just got back from Europe, they went over in May. And they went to Belgium where my brother is buried, in the National Cemetery over there, and took pictures. Some lady has adopted my brother's grave. He was 20 when he died. We got the telegram on his 21st birthday, which happened to be on Saturday and the Red Cross lady did not work so the taxi driver delivered the telegram. So don't you believe that somebody comes up to the door. That was, at least the taxi driver brought it. Another lady lived in the country and they called up on the party line when her son was killed. But that was during the war and that's the way it was. They didn't have anybody to spare to do that.

Frank: Was he killed on a combat mission?

Mary Ellen: Yes he was on his sixth mission, they were heading for Frankfort Germany, I don't know if it was on the Rhine or on the Main, one of them, and he was shot down over Belgium. And Mary was at the town, I can't pronounce it, that little lace doily come from there, but he was shot down near there and then they looked it up on the computer and then they found out they shot the tail off the plane. We knew that because my dad and my brother had gone into Chicago after the war and had talked to the pilot, he was a prisoner. Four of them were killed and six of them were POW's. And I talked to one up across the border in Lanesboro, Minnesota. And nobody, they always asked for a volunteer for the tail gun and nobody volunteered so I don't think John, my brother would have volunteered and so I think he was assigned and he had to have known he wasn't coming back, because very few of them did.

Frank: Was he a big man or a small man?

Mary Ellen: Yeah, he was tall, six foot three or four. How he ever got in there I don't know... and skinny. Of course I was 5' 8" then ...I'm 5' 7" now. I was real tall, there were three of us really tall girls in my class, everybody else you could kind of look down on them. And I didn't realize how many short men there are in this world. I was a checker for 28 years in Denver and these people would come through and these men they were small and I'm looking down on them you know, and I'm not going to shrink you know I'm not going to stoop over, I'm tall and I'm gonna stand tall and that was quite a job, but now I'm paying for it, I'm kind of stiff and sore and everything, arthritis from all that. But I did swim a lot too. And that wore out the rotators. I've got three torn places in this left one and I've got to go see Dr. Charles next week. I don't know what they can do short of surgery and I'm not having that at my age. You just have to be careful. And I've got two artificial knees, had carpel tunnel, cataracts... I'm pretty good for the shape I'm in. I mean you know there's worse people. I can still drive, I go to the library and go around. I don't go out of town. But a lot of people are younger than me and they're getting Alzheimer's and that's a bad thing. I don't know, I think if I was going to get it I probably have it by now. But maybe not, who knows?

Mary Ellen: Mr. Cranny always went around in the hall with his glasses on his head, and I have annuals from '37 to '47, '49 now, I got two more, and he was a good friend of mine and he'd run down the hall, "wait up, wait up" he'd say. He'd say, why don't you study harder and I'd say I'm too busy having a good time. Well I knew I wasn't going to college. I knew we didn't have the money. So I went to work at the glove factory. And I got to tell you they talk about sweatshops and that's what it was because there was no air-conditioning. They had bamboo fans that went round and round and round. And it'd get so hot in that place that we go back in the back room and all they had was a great big sink and cold water and we'd wet a paper towel and put it on our neck and fan ourselves and then we'd go back. My job, I'd size every pair of gloves that came through there. They'd have the windows open. A lot of people made a living at that glove factory over the years. I don't know when they came but my mom worked in 1914 and I remember her telling me they were paid in gold pieces but I think when I went to work she asked me one time if we were paid in cash and I said no we got a check. And I started working for \$.25 an hour and then two weeks later it went to \$.35 and then in the fall we got minimum wage of \$.40, and I got \$.40 an hour.

Frank: What year?

Mary Ellen: 1942. And it was a sweatshop I mean it was hot... and cold in the winter. And they wouldn't let us wear slacks. Course women didn't wear slacks much in those days. Now that's all we wear, to keep warm or cool I don't know. Culottes, pedal pushers, clamdiggers, puddle jumpers we had all kinds of names, I don't know what they call them now. What do they call them, do you know?

Laurel: Just pants, I guess.

Mary Ellen: These are just pants but I have such long legs, they're short. But I don't want mine dragging on the sidewalk like everybody else. Mine are 30 inches long. I get them from Lands End and they'll never wear out.

Laurel: Was that a pretty good wage, for \$.40 an hour?

Mary Ellen: Oh yes, there was five of us graduated and Mr. Cranny, I don't know he just picked us out and we went over and went to work. The first day of June 1942. And then in '45 I quit in January, well February or January. And my first husband he came home from the Marines and I went to California with him he was stationed at Mojave. It was kind of out in the desert. That's the first time I ever saw a jet plane. We were out on the runway and we went over cause the jet had landed, and that was really something to see. Of course that was in 45 and now they're so common.

Laurel: So you didn't have to apply? Mr. Cranny recommended you, and you got the job?

Mary Ellen: Oh yeah they needed five workers and they all ended up sewing, except me, I got the job sizing, well I did sew binders kind of. And two weeks later I got the job, this lady left to go to California and I got the job sizing all the gloves.

Frank: What does that mean really sizing, what did you actually do?

Mary Ellen: Oh, put the tags in what size they were. They came across, and they always did the fur-lined ones in the summer, that lady she would line them and put them up there, and she worked so fast the fur would just fly. You'd breathe it in, I mean it was a job.

Frank: What were the gloves made from? Made out of?

Mary Ellen: Well there was pigskin and I remember with them they weren't lined, they were wet. Whether they wet the leather to cut it I don't know. The leather came in down in the basement and there were cutters that worked down there, the men, and then we were upstairs, you hemmed them and binded them. And then, you know, most gloves they had these three lines on them and what did you call that, they had strings through them somebody did that. And then they had to be tied. And then they decided, I had already quit I had moved to California, but they decided they were going to get a union. Well, not in Grinnell you're not. So then they just packed up and moved to Tallahoma (sp??)Tennessee. And that was goodbye Glove Factory. Now the college took it over and it's really a nice place. It's sure different from when I worked there.

Frank: How many pairs of gloves would you go through in a day?

Mary Ellen: I don't know how many. There was a little thing, it was two or 2 1/2 cents, we had to cut them out and put them in a book. Then they added them up. That was before computers. But I don't know how many, every pair that went through there, I got them. I sized them. I had this roll, the size was on the thing, and I would just grab that bunch and go through them.

Frank: How many people worked there, do you think, in the factory?

Mary Ellen: Oh I don't know there were a lot of them. I got old pictures, I don't know where they are now. When my mom was there... she was in the office of course. But there would be oh, I don't know how many there were.... must have been around 50 or 60 people, and then there were the cutters, the men in the basement. Then there was the office and the lady across the hall worked in the office and they did the payroll and everything by, they just had a sheet of paper. They didn't have computers. She got \$55 a month doing that. And lucky to have a job.

Frank: What other businesses in town then?

Mary Ellen: Well DeKalb came from DeKalb, Illinois, where the Elks is. That was the old washing machine factory, there was a washing machine factory back in probably

1900. And then of course Spaulding was there, where they have put up the new Transportation Museum. And the shoe factory I don't know what was in that before. The shoe factory took over, they didn't build it and the part of the smokestack that was there they tore down, they want to finish it back up and it isn't in good enough shape and they didn't put it back up because they planned on putting a depot there in the south part of the Transportation Museum because they figure in a couple of years the train will be going between Omaha and Chicago. Maybe not that soon but they think it's going to happen. If they can get Gov. Weasel to okay it ...that's what I call him. And 180 thousand people work and don't have insurance, and well, he's gonna have to sign it whether he likes it or not cause there's too much money involved. I'm a Democrat and I have always been a Democrat. I'm too smart to be a Republican. And the dumbest people that have not got two nickels to rub together are Republicans. I don't figure it.

Frank: Neither do I.

Mary Ellen: I just can't figure it out. And I'm still trying to figure out what Romney stands for he's flip-flopped so much. All they do is get up and badmouth Obama because he's black. People don't know what it's like to be looked down on for living in the south end of town, by your own kind, your own color. The blacks think they got it bad with the whites looking down on them.. try living in an all white town and you live south of the tracks.

Frank: In Happy Hollow?

Mary Ellen: I wasn't in the Hollow, I was... all those people did was come up from Kentucky and Missouri to get a job and they all made good and their kids went to college. They've cleaned up the Hollow and you don't even know... most people don't even call it the Hollow anymore. But they all worked, they were all good citizens, I mean they just needed a job. And when I was growing up the worst thing you could call anybody was the "dumb Missourian". If you can imagine even if you weren't from Missouri. I don't think anybody ever called me that but I never paid any attention to them. I figured shoot I'm just as good as you are. My mom told me nobody was better than I am. Unless you allow it and I thought I'm not gonna allow it. So I just went my way and if they looked down on me that was their problem not mine. Cause I didn't care. Everybody was my friend. The only way a guy got out, well, if he got into sports, he was okay.

Frank: When you listened to the hobby lobby what kind of a radio where you listening to? What do you remember about the early radios?

Mary Ellen: Well my dad built a shelf in the corner, and it was round, I don't know what kind it was. I remember years and years ago it was crystals. I don't know how that was rigged up and at night you couldn't get anything because it was dark and the signals didn't come I guess. I don't think we ever had a console. Some people had big ones like that, but ours were always sitting on a table or something.

Frank: Tell us more about Uncle Sam's Club.

Mary Ellen: Well we went down there, I don't really remember who run it. I remember I was in seventh grade I think and the college kids would come down and then they had us come up, oh what is that big dining room, it was on Sixth Avenue and East Street, it was a great big building there, it was the dining room but I don't know what it is and we went up there and they had a supper for us. And then I remember that I got, I don't know whether you've heard of this or not but, a "cashmere bouquet " tin of talcum powder. We got to go up there for supper it was a great big one, it has stained glass in it.

Laurel: Main Hall?

Mary Ellen: I never learned what they were. I knew where Cowles was but that was about it. And we used to go up there and roller-skate in that one over on East Street. I think it's East Street, yeah.

Laurel: The big brick dorm on the end?

Mary Ellen: Yeah, around back it was covered over and it was real smooth and so we'd skate there and then Ward Field was along a railroad track where they had, the high school played their ballgames there. I don't know who that was named after, but it was the college football field and we got to use it. And then the old Doodlebug, that was the train that used to come through campus. We'd go up in the morning, it went to Minneapolis-St. Louis. It would go up in the morning, sometimes it would be a day late, and then it would come back at night. Well invariably it would come when the ball games were on and toot toot toot you know. It was usually one car and the engine.

Laurel: And it was called the "Doodlebug"?

Mary Ellen: The "Doodlebug". Yeah. That's what it was, it was a train, just one passenger car. And then of course we had the Rock Island, and that one's the interstate now, the tracks would have to be upgraded now if we got passenger trains into Grinnell but it would be used I know.

Frank: I talked to a man who said the Doodlebug came into town one night and hit a Watkins truck. Remember the Watkins spices and all that?

Mary Ellen: Well, yeah, it could have but I don't remember it. I'm sure it probably did. And the college kids, they knew the dumb thing went through. But you never know when it was coming because it didn't run on time. But it was a Doodlebug. That's what we called it. Then clear down on South Park St. there was a hobo jungle there because the train went through and we were, my sister and I, the girls, we were warned never to go over there so we never did. And of course Lake Nyanza well we always called it the "rezzie", it was the reservoir because it was filled up with water. They talk about Lake Nyanza, well that's the "rezzie". And any old south ender would know it was the

"rezzie". And Arbor Lake was just "the lake". And then they fixed that up in the late 30s, it was a WPA project. They fixed up the beach and they had lifeguards and they put ropes out. I was down there one time, I think it was 1942, I'd gone down there. I was out of school and I happened to be down there, I went swimming. It was Saturday afternoon people didn't go so much then. And I remember this guy he was working in town I don't know just what, I happen to know where he lived he stayed with Mrs. Bliss, and he was swimming around out there and he went under. And he didn't come back up. So I went over and told the lifeguard, I said, "that man went down". I said, "he never come back up. Well then they scurried around and they called the fire department, and you can't believe all these people descended on the lake. And I remember when he come up out of the water his hand was up in the air. And the lifeguards didn't even know he was under the water. I never told anybody that I was the one that alerted him and he should've been paying attention. That was probably 1942, late August.

Laurel: So when you told Mr. Cranny you were too busy having a good time, what were you doing? What were you doing for fun?

Mary Ellen: Oh, I don't know. We just knew everybody and I guess we just had a good time.

Laurel: Did you go to shows or movies? Or just hang out downtown?

Mary Ellen: Oh we didn't have the money to go to movies. And no we didn't go much at night, I don't think. We had to walk. Maybe after we got out of school and got money we might have gone to the movies. Because they had \$.10 matinees on Saturday afternoons. Then on Tuesdays they had bank night and my aunt always bought a ticket and then I would go get the \$.36 that it cost and then go over and sign her name and then I could go to the movie, no matter what it was.

Frank: Why was it called "bank night"?

Mary Ellen: They give away, how much did they give away? Did they give away \$250? \$50, \$25? I can't remember but it was a good sum. Not that much I don't think. I think it was maybe \$25 or \$50. That was bank night, and of course it was the only air-conditioned place in town. It was pleasant. And you know if you weren't doing anything... I was 13 or 14 years old in the summer so I just went, not every Tuesday, but a lot of them I went. Then it was \$.36 to go at the night, well where the theater is now was the Strand theater, then where Brown's Shoe Store is was the Colonial and then they changed it to the Iowa Theater. And right south of that there was an empty lot there and the Model Restaurant was there, and north of there was a vacant lot before they put Browns Shoe Store in there and my brother had a popcorn machine there during the war. They didn't have popcorn in the theaters yet and so for a nickel a bag I think he sold popcorn. He had a little gray thing you know and he went down there and sold popcorn from spring to fall. My brother who was killed in the war, he run it for a while, and then he went into the service and my brother took it over. And he had it

during the war and then the Iowa Theater got popcorn, and wouldn't let him bring his popcorn in, so he got rid of it. Some guy bought it and took it to the farm. Probably made a chicken coop out of it or something.

Frank: Did you go to dances?

Mary Ellen: Well I didn't dance. They didn't have dances during the war because, well yeah they did too, up over where Biermans, up over there, the clothing store, up above that, the USO was up there, cause we had a thing here at the college, these were, what were they? They were not 1A, they were officer candidates, but they were not 1A, but I can't remember now but it was a good thing they came to town or some of those little girls never would have got a husband. That's how they got them. They were old maids and probably doomed to be one but then the soldiers came to town and well okay they got a husband. It was OCS and up at the college, and then after the war they put Quonset huts up there but I'm not sure where they were, I can't remember. But they were there for a while but as soon as the veterans were through with them the college got rid of them, because they were an eyesore. But they lived in 'em.

Frank: Were there horse stables or something at the college? Um, I'm probably not saying the right thing, but I had the impression that's where they put those Quonset huts... at the stables.

Mary Ellen: Well it's up north of 10th Ave. That might've been where they were. They were around up in there. It wasn't developed then. It's where the big sports complex is now, I think that's where they were. I haven't been into the new pool since they got it built. There's no parking up there. There's a handicapped, but you have to walk everywhere and I can't get around that good anymore. But I still get going and try to keep up with things. Like my Red Hat group.

Frank: Yeah. When you said you put a quilt down and slept on the porch, who made that quilt?

Mary Ellen: Oh I have no idea. All I know is that it was red. I don't remember where it came from. Something that was in the family I guess. You didn't cover up that's for sure because it was too hot. But my mom wouldn't let my sister and I sleep out on the ground. Well the bugs would've ate you up.

Frank: What about your grandparents?

Mary Ellen: Well, the ancestors before 1854 they came from Allegheny County, which is Pittsburgh. They came down the Ohio, and up the Mississippi to Keokuk. And then they came overland into Mahaska County for a year. And then they came into Poweshiek County because I have a thing, not a plat but a thing I got framed somewhere that I am a descendent of one Henry Inman who was a resident in 1854 in Poweshiek County. The Genealogy Society of Iowa or something put it out and my

daughter got it and so they have been around here for a long time, and they were in Deep River and they're buried in Montezuma.

Frank: Were they farmers?

Mary Ellen: Yeah, yeah I think so. Then my grandpa, and I don't know, his name was Ulysses S. Grant and then he had a brother named Sherman, so you know... there were 13 of them, two sets of twins. And you know they were Northerners. And he was born in 1864. And I'm not sure I think Sherman may have been a year or two younger. And then Henry and Harriet, she was Harriet Reid and he was Henry Inman and they got married back there sometime 1840 or something I don't know. And then grandpa was born 1864. My grandma on my mom's side was born in 1860 in Marine City, Michigan. They came from Germany. From Bonn, that's probably the port they sailed from. But where they come from I don't know, but I'm guessing they were from northern Germany because I have pictures of my grandma and my aunt Annie and they're real dark they kind of don't really look oriental but they have real dark skin and I just kind of thought they might have come from northern Germany but I don't know. Anyway, Aunt Annie, I wondered why my aunts kind of didn't treat her so good. That was my grandma's sister. My daughter's working in genealogy 25 or 30 years ago and aunt Annie happened to be a maid or a worker in a railroad, where the railroad men hung over in What Cheer, Iowa. And she did more than being a maid because she had two children Harold and Frances. Harold was adopted in Cedar Rapids and Frances, she was adopted too but she ended up in California. Well she wrote to my aunt, my mom didn't have the letter... if she had, I have known more, and I could have kept track of her. But anyway that's what Aunt Annie did. Well she was really good at embroidering and knitting and crochet and all that and then she come to stay with grandma, and then Aunt Mary and Aunt Edna, they would have to change the living room around and put the two beds in there and that's where my aunt and grandma slept. Then they put the living room off in another room. And I always thought, I wondered, they were kind of cruel to her, and I thought you know, did she really do all this, course you know, nobody's telling me and so that's how we found out. And so when Judy found all that out my mom was still alive and well yeah, we pieced it all together, I don't think mom exactly told us. We knew what she did.

Frank: She did her own kind of cheer in What Cheer.

Mary Ellen: Yeah, she did. Well she probably worked as a maid too, I don't know. She was a pretty woman and then she got married years later. I don't know exactly when. She was pretty old when she died. My grandma was 83, er no, 82, she died in '43. So it was quite an interesting family. Not everybody has one that has a prostitute in the family.

Frank: You know, I bet more of them did than would tell you about.

Mary Ellen: Yeah, yeah and on my husband's side he had an uncle Martin that got shot in a poker game down in Texas and was killed, and then he had an Uncle Jim who was

named after, he was in the House up in Des Moines when the Democrats took over in the late 20s when Al Smith was pretty, the Democrats were kind of running Iowa then, I don't know what they're doing now but they're keeping the weasel from doing a lot. If it hadn't been for him I'd be paying for another atomic... another Plattville, that they built north of Denver and public service we paid for the dumb thing all those years and then they never ever fired it up and used it. Then they dismantled it. And then the idiots were building that so they decided they'd use atomic stuff and they'll just get gas on over on the northern slope and I thought what are they going to do when that comes off that's radioactive. And what do I know, I only went to high school and just know what I've read. But don't those people know, who got degrees from yeah whatever university, don't they know they're gonna put that out in the air? Well then, they finally decided, by God that 's by golly what would happen so that didn't go anywhere. But all that money they wasted. And I thought good God. And now they're having trouble in Ohio with this fracking well they got to study it because they think that's what's causing earthquakes. I thought you idiots call Golden, Colorado, they'll tell you that's what's causing it, cause it was happening at the arsenal in Denver in 1967, 68, well wait a minute my granddaughter's going to be 45 and August 9 is the biggest one we ever had and she'll be 45 tomorrow, so 45 years ago tomorrow was the biggest one we ever had because Shell Oil Company was doing this crap down in the ground at the arsenal and it was causing earthquakes. And well they got to study it, and I thought, good God, if I knew who to contact, I tell ya, call Golden, Colorado, they got a record of it, they knew what was going on.

Frank: They ought to by now.

Mary Ellen: Geez, I thought, they want to pay for another one, well the Democrats balked, but if they take control of the Senate in Des Moines we're going to have a mess in Iowa.

Frank: Talking about prostitutes, which you brought it up...

Mary Ellen: Yeah, I did, that's OK.

Frank: What do you remember about the Monroe Hotel?

Mary Ellen: Well, I don't know, they always talked about it, I think they had a few ladies down there. And I remember later on, on the side, it would be Park Street, they'd put apartments in there, and people lived in them because a couple of my schoolteachers had apartments there, because they could just walk over. Miss Hyack and Miss Hatcher lived there, and then there was somebody named Garner, who had a drug store in New Sharon, and they lived in there, and I don't know if there was four apartments or just three, but there was rumors. I think there was some hanky panky going on but of course at that time I was only a kid, but it was quite a place. Had the silver dollars in the floor, I don't know where those went. They tore it down, but it was quite a place. It was pretty nice, and that's where the bus depot was. We didn't go in there too much, we didn't have any reason to. I guess a lot of people did go there and eat. They had a

waitresses, and we had a few loose ladies as waitresses around town. If you want to use the term loosely, there was a few wild women around.

We did have a big all school thing at the Elks, and I was class of '42, so I was sitting down at this end and all the other classes up to '49 were up here, and my gosh I never saw so many old men, all bent over. They didn't drink their milk, they were all stooped, and you better drink your milk. And I can't get down and look up at their faces and see who they are .

Frank: You're still looking down on them, eh?

Mary Ellen: Yeah, I'm still looking down, who are all these old men? And course, I remember when they were all young kids, well they didn't know who I was either. And Arnold Bucksbaum came, now there's an interesting story. Arnold's dad was Ike and his mother I think was Josephine. And they had the Star Clothing. Arnold went to Ames to school, and then he left and went over to Collins. Arnold has a patent on the door of the Radar Range, and every time you buy one, he gets some money. And I asked him, I said well, where is your brother? He was a year after me. And he said, well he died. He was an OB/GYN in California, I think. But he died in 07. His name was Paul. I couldn't remember his name but I looked him up and Arnold, he looked about the same. And he had two wives die, and this is his third wife. But I knew who he was and he wanted to know who I was and I told him. Yeah, he remembered the name. But isn't that something? And then we have, what's his name, with the computer chip.

Laurel: Noyce

Mary Ellen: Noyce, yeah. So we got a computer chip and a microwave door come out of that college, well he didn't go to college here, Bob did. Well, he lent a lot of money to the college. And then his wife, she got a big settlement. She died, Betsy died, and then he had a second wife, I think she might still be living. And he had a granddaughter going here to college. Oh I met her, 7, 8, 10 years ago. She was from back east someplace, Bob's granddaughter. We'd go to these Tuesday night suppers down at the college, or down at Davis school when the college kids came and that's who she said she was. Yeah, he did a lot of good for the town. His dad was a preacher at the UCC Church. Well, we do have a few more famous people. There's Harry Hopkins.

Frank: Yeah, Harry Hopkins.

Mary Ellen: And Ada. And they lived here, and of course, he was Roosevelt's right hand man. Hallie Flannigan. She was, she lived right across the alley from my folks when they lived up there in '44 and Harry Hopkins and Mary adopted a daughter, and I think Hallie had a daughter, and his daughter was there during the summer, their adopted daughter. And then there was some other people. And you know, we did not have a swimming pool. We had this lake, which wasn't so polluted as it is now, and

Harry Hopkins of Grinnell, we didn't have a pool, we didn't have a lot of things, no, with the Republican city fathers, no we didn't get it, we coulda had it, so we used the college twenty-yard, that's where we learned to swim, a little white building that was way before your time. It was fun, we learned to swim. And I still have my little swimmer's pin. I'm 87 and I probably got it when I was, maybe 75 years I've had it. I saved it. I was in Campfire, I got my Trailseekers, and Firemakers, but I never got my Torchbearer. I have a little Firemaker wooden pin, and I've saved it. My kids said what are you going to do with it, and I said well, I earned it, I'm not going to throw it away.

Frank: We had at the museum a thing about so long, about so wide, banner, beadwork. And it's been displayed at the museum for years as Indian beadwork. And there was also sort of a necklace thing, in beadwork.

Mary Ellen: Well, we used to get beads over at Tama when we were in Campfire, and we got old cheese boxes from McNally's, and we'd put the threads over the little nails and then we had the needle and we made our headbands. And that was, well, Esther Steiner is 96 years old and lives down at the Mayflower and she was my Campfire Guardian in, was it, 1937, I think 37 when I joined. There was a bunch of us, and she was our leader.

Well the Campfire Cabin was out here on the curve, well, you go out on 6th and you go around the curve and then up and around and back in. And that land is just like it was, well I don't know where the trees came from, but Wilma Raybur was a lawyer and she was active in the, she graduated in 1911. She was queen of the Drake Relays and she wasn't very pretty, but she was a woman law student, and she got it, and well, maybe there weren't that many women going to school then, but anyway, she was a nice lady and she had that sewed up really tight, they weren't going to get that away from the Campfire Girls. Well, Campfire just dissolved I guess, I don't know, they're into Scouts now. And so I think, that, oh, that men's group of hunters, a senior moment, I'm not losing my mind, oh what is it, they have a bunch and they meet at the Eagles and they have a big fish fry or something, but anyway, they got it now. But used to be when you'd drive out there you knew when they were camping, they had the flag, and they had a cabin out there. And an old cookstove, we cooked on it, and then we slept on the porch, you didn't have sleeping bags in those days. There was cots there. We were older when we went in high school. Course Miss Hatcher, she was the commercial teacher, and she didn't have to do anything. We baked bread. What, we used four pounds of butter in five days. I don't know what we were doing, I can remember there were five or six of us. They had an old Victrola. Do you know what a Victrola is?

Laurel: Yes, I do. We have one at the museum.

Mary Ellen: Well, those old records, I mean they must have dated way back before the twenties. Where they came from. We'd play them. They had a fireplace. I don't even know if it's still there anymore. I think they might have put water in it, I don't know. But it

was different. And then they used to play softball, in the park where the, well where the Memorial Building is there. And we had, slow pitch they called it, but it was softball. And there was a great big kitten ball, kittenball is what we called it. And they'd play, I don't know, different teams around town, and they'd play every night, well not on the weekends, during the summer. And some of them worked at the Glove Factory, they were cutters and they were on the team. They'd just shut down, come over and play, and then they'd go back. But that's the way it was, and people there along on Fourth Ave., there was chains, because people hooked their horses there, and there was places to, well, you hitched your horse there, and of course they'd park there and you had to step over the chain to get down to the other park. When we'd go over from the high school, we always had to go over the chains.

Frank: Do you remember the band shell in the park?

Mary Ellen: Yeah, it was there, it had, on each side was the dough boys, they called it, made in cement from World War I. It was OK, but they didn't take care of it, so they tore it down. There was a rest room there. I think they got designs on the Memorial Building but there's enough of us old codgers in town, that we're not going to let them tear it down. And they're working on getting grants. Boswell told them there was grants they could get to fix up the Veterans' Building. See they tore up the floors in the basement, and they didn't need to. There was hardly any asbestos down there. But they want to get rid of it and I think they want to put in an old fountain. Well this Clark, give 'em a fountain about 1911 or 1912 and it was up in the corner. I can remember when it was up in the corner. And then they moved it down to the middle of the park. They did not take care of it, it was dirty grey. It was supposed to be white. The birds got into the park where you drink and pooped, all it was was a pooping station for the birds. That's what it was. And they want to build another fountain? Well who's going to take care of it? You can just bet the birds will be pooping in it and I'm not going to drink where the birds poop. And the kids climbed all over it. And nobody knows who took a ball peen hammer or whatever they took to it, somebody wrecked that thing and got rid of it, but there's nobody left around who knows anything about it, or if they do, mum's the word. They didn't take care of the original one, what makes you think, well they don't take care of the Memorial Building, well of course, the veterans don't want it torn down, or maybe it's the old ladies in the auxiliary. I'm the president of the VFW and I belong to the Legion, but I can't do it alone. But this Ron Davis has got involved. He's got petitions out so maybe, maybe we can get it. So the city don't sneak in with a wrecking, whatever. We gotta protect it.

Frank: What questions haven't we asked because we need to wrap up?

Laurel: I know.

Mary Ellen: Well, I hope you've learned something.

Laurel: What do you think was the best thing that was invented in your lifetime?

Mary Ellen: Oh my goodness, would it be sliced bread? I remember my grandmother, you had to slice your own. I remember when sliced bread came in. No that wouldn't be it, I don't know. There's so many things. Just like my mom always said, you'll see so many changes in the next 10 years, but I was born in '25, and after the war, look at all the changes. They're still killing people, I don't believe in that at all. I think they spend too much money on armaments and the United States has got to be behind it all, because they're the largest seller of armaments in the world. And whether they're directly selling them or some little pipsqueak country is buying and reselling them, we are responsible. For every person that's killed in one of these wars, the United States has blood on their hands and it's not a nice thing to be proud of. But if you ever opened your mouth and said anything about it, why you're a traitor. And I though I may open my mouth and say something because I would say, pardon me, did you have anybody die in the war? My mom had a brother in World War I, my grandmother was the first gold star mother in Poweshiek County. Course we were only in thirteen months, well, I'm not sure. My dad, he went in in August of 1918 or July of '18 and was out in August of '19. He was on the North Carolina battleship but he never got overseas during the war when they were actually fighting. He wasn't eligible for the VFW, just the American Legion. He was a fifty year member. I don't know the eligibility now, I don't know what it would be, because we were in so damn many wars. If there's a war, somebody, the United States is poking their nose in. And that money is spent on armaments and then Romney wants to increase the, I mean, who are we gonna fight? The Chinese don't have boats to get over here. Oh, the Russians are coming, no they're not. I just knew from reading articles in the papers in Iowa, I'm sitting here in Iowa, I'm a high school graduate, and I knew that the Russians had I don't know how many divisions up on the Chinese border to keep the hordes out. Plus, another article way back on page whatever, they'd been selling their gold. Well how in the heck were they gonna have a war if they're doing all that and their soldiers were deserting and I can figure this out, and I'm not being paid to do it. But then you read about these nitwits that Romney's got advising him, they were the same ones that got us into two wars that we charged, I can't believe you can charge a war. Borrow the money from China?

Frank: Americans can do it. We've been charging things...

Mary Ellen: Yeah, I can remember that. If you didn't have cash to pay for it, you didn't buy it. They looked down on you. Oh, you charged it? You didn't pay for it? I can remember that. Course, I'm 87.