

Poweshiek History Preservation Project

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Mari Duke

Speaker: Emily Pfitsch

Dates: ?

?

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Place: Grinnell, Iowa

Persons present: Mari Duke-I
Emily Pfitsch-S

First Interview

Duke: I think we might as well just get started at the beginning.

Pfitsch: Alright.

Duke: Tell me about the decision to come to Grinnell.

Pfitsch: This, uh, could be a long story and I'll try to make it short.

Duke: Tell me what year it starts.

Pfitsch: Okay, we were at Midland College in Fremont Nebraska for two years, that was right after we got married in 1946. John had a job at Midland as Coach of all sports. Football, basketball, tennis, track, golf, and boxing.

Duke: [laughter]

Pfitsch: And two years there, with some ups and downs, some good and bad, but pretty basic not great, good relationships with most of his athletes were veterans,

Duke: Oh, I bet, right after the war.

Pfitsch: Some of them were older than he.

Duke: Oh, I imagine, yeah.

Pfitsch: But, he had a master's degree, got a master's degree before the war. And the high school basketball coach told him that he had heard that there was a position at Grinnell College in Iowa. We'd never heard of Grinnell College, and so the guy told John it was a much better job than the one at Midland, or that it looked good, so he actually called Sam Stevens and said that he, no, he didn't call him, wrote him a letter, said that he was planning on being at the Drake Relays.

Duke: Sam Stevens was the president.

Pfitsch: The president at Grinnell, and could he come for an interview. Therefore, volunteering to come without being paid to come for an interview. And so he went home, never heard from Sam, never heard anything. The Drake Relays come and John never went to the Drake Relays.

Duke: Oh...

Pfitsch: And the Monday after the Drake Relays he went to his office and there was a telegram there which had arrived Friday, that somebody had put in his box, inviting him to come for an interview on Saturday. So he missed it, but I think he probably spent the extra money to telephone Sam Stevens, and said that he had missed the appointment and that he would be glad to come for an interview, which he did, drove over here. And he had a very good interview with people here, with Sam and other people, and at the end of his interview, Sam said, 'well I think we probably would offer you the job, but we've already offered it to somebody else.'

Duke: Oh no.

Pfitsch: 'so we'll let you know if...' so by Wednesday the next week Sam called him and said the guy had not accepted the job, and he was offering John \$3,500 a year,

Duke: Oh, that's pretty good.

Pfitsch: Which was his contract at Midlands for the next year was 27. So that was, but it didn't matter how much money it was. Anyway, that's how we came. That was the big decision. The big decision was getting the offer.

Duke: So how did you feel about it?

Pfitsch: Oh I was delighted. John was gonna be on coaching staff with four other coaches at Grinnell.

Duke: And what was he going to coach?

Pfitsch: He was hired as assistant football, head basketball and head tennis coach.

Duke: So half as many sports?

Pfitsch: Oh yes, and a much better situation.

Duke: And a better salary.

Pfitsch: Yeah. And Jack, our oldest son, was born a day before my 23rd birthday in April. And that was that spring.

Duke: And he already had the job? No, he didn't have the job yet.

Pfitsch: No, not when Jack was—

Duke: So you had a newborn baby, okay.

Pfitsch: Right, and so we were delighted with this new offer and new position.

Duke: Okay, so when you came to town did they have a house for you—

Pfitsch: No.

Duke: Or did you have to find your own living?

Pfitsch: At that time, Louie Felt was the treasurer of the College, wonderful guy who ended up being a great friend. You probably—

Duke: I remember meeting him, but they moved.

Pfitsch: Yeah, and he showed John the possible places for faculty, and there were some terrible, a couple of terrible apartments, and that was about it. And but there were these little prefab houses which you know very well. And Louie told him that they had all been assigned or rented by faculty that were already here.

Duke: Did the College own them?

Pfitsch: Yes.

Duke: Okay.

Pfitsch: But, well, I don't know how many of them they owned.

Duke: But they had some.

Pfitsch: Yeah. And the one on Spencer Street was occupied by a young faculty couple, and Louie said that that one was for sale, and that if John wanted to buy it they could move those people out. And so John said, 'well, okay', and he had very little, but he had, when he was in the army he didn't spend any money. And so he had saved a very small amount, but it was enough to help with the down payment.

Duke: For a down payment.

Pfitsch: And so he came back to Fremont and he said, 'guess what? I bought a house!'

Duke: So you came to town with a new baby, into a new house, and he has a new job, wow.

Pfitsch: Not only that, we had a, when, when we were married we had an old 1936 Chevrolet that John called the Brown Bomber, and it had collapsed on a trip from Lincoln Nebraska to Fremont after we had gone to a ball game or something at Lincoln, and it was not repairable, so we had bought a Woody Station Wagon.

Duke: Yeah, oh, those were cute, yes.

Pfitsch: So when we came to town with our Station Wagon, relatively new, I think we'd had it a year probably,

Duke: Oh, those were shiny. They were handsome.

Pfitsch: And had bought a house, everybody thought we were some kind of—

Duke: [laughter] Rich people?

Pfitsch: Rich people. Which, of course, we were barely on a shoestring, you know, but he had say, a little nest egg so that gave us the opportunity to get started.

Duke: Okay, so the year you came to town with your new house and your new baby and your new Station Wagon was what?

Pfitsch: 1948.

Duke: 1948, you came to town.

Pfitsch: Right.

Duke: Wow. [laughter] That's a long time ago.

Pfitsch: That's a long time ago.

Duke: Oh, we're gonna have lots of history to talk about.

Pfitsch: And I was 23. I was a child.

Duke: You were, you were, you were.

Pfitsch: With a four-month-old baby by the time we got here.

Duke: Yeah, oh, gee. Okay, so, what, you came in the summer?

Pfitsch: Yes.

Duke: And what did you find when you drove into town?

Pfitsch: Well, Grinnell, actually, the Midwest probably that summer was having a drought, and Fremont, Nebraska is a fairly prosperous kind of Nebraska town.

Duke: A farm town?

Pfitsch: Yeah, but it, you know, considerably bigger than Grinnell, and Midland was a very poor, struggling Lutheran college, but the town was definitely, you know, the,

Duke: Thriving.

Pfitsch: The thriving part of the combination. And I think during that summer maybe they even watered some of their lawns in Fremont.

Duke: Extravagant.

Pfitsch: But we came to Grinnell and everything was burned to a crisp. And the town was really old, except for the prefabs, which, I think there must've been, I don't know, six or eight of them in town.

Duke: Were they all out in that area along Spencer?

Pfitsch: No, there were just two there. The one that they [unintelligible]

Duke: That are still there.

Pfitsch: That are still there. Then there were some over where the parking lot is across from the, from the dormitories, uh, North Campus. The Mendozas lived there, and a few other, oh, and, then, also, very importantly, there were three prefabs on Spring Street.

Duke: Yeah, okay.

Pfitsch: And they're still there.

Duke: And they were new then?

Pfitsch: They were brand new, yes. Built right after the war.

Duke: So how far did the town extend?

Pfitsch: Uh, 11th Avenue, it's pretty hard for me to remember, but there were on Spencer Street north of 10th there were some older houses, and since then all those houses across the street were built.

Duke: Yeah, they look newer.

Pfitsch: Yeah. And so there were some houses there, and on 9th Avenue the house on the corner of 9th and Spring, where the Gilmores lived, you remember them?

Duke: Yep, yep, I know what house—

Pfitsch: That was, that had been a farmhouse, and until the prefabs were built, then there, of course, Grant Gale's house was there, on 10th and, on the corner of 10th, and a couple more of those houses, south of that house were there, that were older houses that had been there before the war.

Duke: Mhmm. You probably can look at that street and tell what was there.

Pfitsch: So anyway we ended up, after two years on Spencer Street, Connie was born in December,

Duke: When you lived there?

Pfitsch: Yeah. And she was born in December of our second year there, and Louie had, trying always to accommodate everybody, agreed to trade our Spencer Street house for the house on Spring Street, which had three bedrooms, and a very nice big backyard with an oak tree and raspberry bushes in the backyard, as opposed to the one that you might remember on Spencer, there was no yard at all.

Duke: So the College owned those houses on Spencer Street?

Pfitsch: Yeah, and on Spring Street. So, I guess it was in the summer of, that would have been '50, we moved to Spring Street.

Duke: You just traded even up?

Pfitsch: No. Oh no no.

Duke: Oh, no.

Pfitsch: We had, couple or three thousand dollars more. It's hard to remember because the, anyway, I've got it written down someplace but that's okay. But anyway, the year that we were on Spencer Street, the town was putting in curbs and gutters,

Duke: They hadn't had them before?

Pfitsch: Not in our part of town. And so the year we were on Spencer Street they put the curb and gutter, which we had to

Duke: Pay for.

Pfitsch: We had to help pay for. And then when we moved to Spring Street, they put the curb and gutter there, we had to curb and gutter that, then, by the time we moved to 9th Avenue, of course, that street didn't have any other houses except the Gilmour's. That was the only house on that street when we moved here, so that was the last one in the area, so we had to curb and gutter that one.

Duke: So you own a lot of curbs in this town, oh, that's funny, that's funny. Okay, well, back to what you found when you came to town.

Pfitsch: Okay, north of 11th Avenue was—

Duke: There wasn't anything.

Pfitsch: Was just cornfields.

Duke: Was Merrill Park there?

Pfitsch: Yes.

Duke: Okay, the park was there.

Pfitsch: The park was there. And [extended pause]

Duke: Well, that's okay, because, I, people can find that out in the other records.

Pfitsch: I really think Country Club Drive, I don't believe had houses on it.

Duke: Yeah. I'm mostly interested in your impressions rather than the actual, you know, that kind of stuff. Because that's a matter of records.

Pfitsch: Yeah. The town of Grinnell was, looked like all towns then that hadn't had much done to them at all during the war. And, as I said, the yards were all brown.

Duke: And, the houses needed paint, that kind of thing?

Pfitsch: What?

Duke: Did the houses, houses need paint, I mean, were they kind of run down or did they look—

Pfitsch: Uh, they hadn't been spiffed, up but they were, I don't know, just like every place in the United States was so it didn't look like a bad place.

Duke: You weren't disappointed in what you saw.

Pfitsch: No, the downtown, I remember Matthew's Drug Store was on the corner of, you remember, Fourth and Main, and Cunningham's was in its normal place, and of course it was a two story building then before it had a fire.

Duke: Oh, yeah.

Pfitsch: And the bank.

Duke: So both Cunningham's and Matthew's had several generations running?

Pfitsch: Uh, yeah, they were, Matthew's, they had been family, family drug stores as far as we knew. There were also grocery stores, the North Market, and somebody was talking about, there was a grocery store on Broad Street, and one on Fourth Avenue, and then McNally's Meat Market was on Main, where Bill's Jewelry is. It was, several steps up to this Meat Market, and, well, the town was, it's hard for me to remember.

Duke: Yeah, but there probably were enough stores that everything you needed was here at that time.

Pfitsch: Yeah.

Duke: I mean, in contrast to now where you don't have a lot of stores.

Pfitsch: I can't tell you as to whether JC Penny's was there, but I have a feeling maybe they weren't, because it seemed like the façade of JC Penny's was a little spiffy for the war years. I'm not sure, it might've been there.

Duke: Yeah.

Pfitsch: And other, old furniture store was there, where, let's see, what was the name of the furniture store?

Duke: Was that, was that with an M, um...

Pfitsch: Yeah, that was probably there when you came.

Duke: No, it wasn't but there was one in Mason City and there was one in Marshalltown. MacGregor's, was it MacGregor's?

Pfitsch: MacGregor's, yeah.

Duke: Yeah. There was one in those other two places, and so I had heard of it. No, it wasn't here when I came to town.

Pfitsch: And there was a café across from the furniture store, and I certainly should remember it but I don't.

Duke: Yeah. But there were clothing stores and dime stores,

Pfitsch: Preston's, Preston's Clothing was—

Duke: was that for men?

Pfitsch: Yeah. Was on the corner of Fourth and Main that was the building that Bob Musser, built bought and spiffed up, and next to that was Arnold's Shoe Store, and Margaret Arnold ran that store, and she was John Parrish's sister.

Duke: Oh, and he was the local doctor.

Pfitsch: Yes, he and Korfmacher, I think was here, maybe, and John Parrish was a pretty young doctor then, because, his father, I think it was O.F. Parrish had been the doctor here.

Duke: Here in Grinnell before him? Really? And where was his office?

Pfitsch: Uh, on the corner of Broad and Fifth where the gift shop kind of is

Duke: Oh, yeah, that brick building?

Pfitsch: Yeah, that was his office for a long time.

Duke: So was he your doctor? And did he—

Pfitsch: Fortunately.

Duke: He, he helped you birth Connie?

Pfitsch: Actually, it's interesting, because, okay let's see, yes. Connie was born in St. Francis Hospital before they combined with Community Hospital, and he was my doctor, and I, when Jack was born it was a difficult birth, and they had to use forceps and all that, which they don't do anymore. This was the olden days. And, so John Parrish had done X-Rays to see if Connie was going to have a better, easier birth, and he called me, see she was due I think the Fourth of January and she was born the 22nd of December, so we were expecting her in January. And he called me after looking at the X-Rays and said that he thought that it would be a very difficult birth, and we might do a Cesarean, which was very unusual in those days. And shortly after he called me I was, we were at the Apostle's playing Bridge, and I went to the bathroom and my water broke, so that was in the evening, and went to the hospital and Connie was born a few hours later.

Duke: Easily. Interesting, and then how long did you stay in the hospital after Connie was,

Pfitsch: John Parrish had me stay in eight days, over Christmas, because I had this two-year-old, actually, Jack was only 20 months old when Connie was born, and he said I needed a lot of rest, so, so, I just was very happily resting for eight days

Duke: And relieved because the baby came as easily as she did. Oh, that's great. Okay, let's go back to when you first came to town. Was it easy to meet people? Did you just meet people from the College, or from the town too, or how did that work?

Pfitsch: The College was very much a close, we met everybody, in fact there was the big, there were quite a few new faculty because it was right after the war.

Duke: Did the College, did the College have a big surge in population with guys coming back from the war, or?

Pfitsch: I expect so, I can't give you, but yes, I'm sure, because there were no men. But, it had been several years, you know, at the time when we got there, about five, it had been, three, four years. And I don't know about the population, but the faculty, there was a big new faculty reception at the President's house, which of course was Grinnell House, and so we met everybody, that was, literally, we met all the faculty, and the faculty all came through and shook our hands as, of all the new faculty. And anyway, it was very welcoming and they had all kinds of activities, social activities on the campus for all the faculty. It was jolly. And also, the students had parties all the time, and they always invited faculty to come as chaperones

Duke: Oh, interesting concept. I don't think they have chaperones anymore.

Pfitsch: And young faculty, new faculty were very popular by the students to come and—

Duke: To be the chaperones?

Pfitsch: Yeah, to be chaperones. So we had a very, I would say, welcoming situation by all, everybody seemed very warm, and we were invited to dinner at different faculty houses, not just athletics but other places as well.

Duke: You were really young. Were there other young people on the faculty too?

Pfitsch: [presumably nods yes]

Duke: Okay, so you weren't just pushed in with a bunch of older people?

Pfitsch: Yeah, actually the coaching staff was all new, except for the, the coaching situation was difficult, which I'm not going to go into. That was John's part of it. But the football coach got fired in the middle of the season because the students rebelled.

Duke: Really, the students rebelled?

Pfitsch: And that's another very long story, which I won't tell you. But John got to the basketball season and had a successful basketball season and got off to a good start. And of course that was our bread and butter, our life, you know. And so we had a very good, after the football season was over we had a very good introduction to living. The assistant, another assistant football coach was Hank Brown and he and his wife lived in the other prefab on Spencer Street, so we became like a family, and they had a daughter who was older than Jack, but Ann Brown and Jack grew up together.

Duke: So are there any people still around that came with you then?

Pfitsch: [presumably shakes head no]

Duke: People either moved out or—

Pfitsch: I'm not thinking of anybody. Ken Christinson wasn't here yet, I believe. Oh, uh, the Walls were here, Joe and Bea Wall. In fact, one of the, they lived in one of the prefabs down on Spring Street, and it was, they were, it was really tough on them because Joe, I don't know whether he had finished his PhD or not, but it was, he had been here maybe from '46 or '47, sort of like, we got the job at Midland, and when we came John's salary as coach was considerably higher than Joe's as a history professor which irritated everybody on the academic staff, of course. Oh, and maybe, John had his Master's degree and the basketball coach who recommended Grinnell College didn't have a Master's degree, that's the reason he told John about the job because he couldn't,

Duke: He wasn't qualified.

Pfitsch: The Master's degree was required at the College for, but coaches didn't have to have a PhD.

Duke: No. Well that's, that's interesting. I don't imagine that's the case anymore.

Pfitsch: [laughter] No. Except that I think that the athletic, there aren't very many PhDs in the athletic department.

Duke: Well what I really meant was that they're not paid more than the new history prof.

Pfitsch: [laughter] Oh my gosh no!

Duke: That's interesting. Okay, well, I thought this session what we should talk about was what you found when you came to town and what your impressions were. Is there anything else that you can think of that would be interesting or useful?

Pfitsch: Our, my life was so focused on little babies, you know, and kids, preschoolers, you know, so I wasn't really aware much of school systems and community stuff.

Duke: Right, I thought we could talk about that later because you know a lot about—what about, were there other mothers with young kids which you got, you kind of bonded with and you helped each other?

Pfitsch: We did a lot of, I knew some of the faculty members in addition to athletic people that had new babies, and we used to get together for coffee all the time, and I have pictures of Connie as this little baby and two or three other little ones that were her age and we, you know.

Duke: Well, I figured that was like the beginning of the Baby Boom, so I figured there must've been a lot of babies.

Pfitsch: Everybody was havin' babies, that's right. And when we moved to Spring Street, there were three, let's see, no, yeah, there was the Otchecks had a baby after Connie, the Smiths had a little boy that was the same age as Jack, and then the Brewers lived in another prefab and he was I think in history or something, and they had a little boy who was Jack's age. And so it was very much a child-centered neighborhood, and a big tragedy was in the early '50s when polio struck and there were some, that was when Joe Pinder got polio, and another, Ken Chase, who was in drama, his wife got polio and died.

Duke: An adult, as an adult?

Pfitsch: Yeah, she was, she lived, they lived backdoors, they lived on West Street backdoors from us, so, that was a very, very scary time.

Duke: Why don't we talk about that a lot later? 'Cause that, that's something, I guess, the other thing I wondered about was, was it easy to meet people that weren't associated with the College? Was there that divide when you came to town?

Pfitsch: Mostly, yeah, most of our friends were College people.

Duke: They were.

Pfitsch: Yeah. We knew the merchants downtown, and the merchants all knew we were very poor.

Duke: Mhmm, so, did that affect your trading with them, I mean, were they reluctant to give you credit?

Pfitsch: No, but they always knew if we bought something it would be on credit, you know,

Duke: And it was okay with them?

Pfitsch: Just had charge accounts, you know, everywhere, even, I don't remember that I charged my groceries as much as some of my friends did, but there were, there were people that had bigger families and hungrier people, that, faculty really had a hard time buying groceries, you know, and being able to pay for them.

Duke: So you felt poor relative to the rest of the people in town?

Pfitsch: What?

Duke: You felt poor relative to the rest of the people in town? You felt like the other people had a higher standard of living?

Pfitsch: Particularly, particularly, particularly relative to the business people. Because, you know, in the early '50s, the economy, because of the war, was getting, was quite stable as compared to before the war when we were in the Depression.

Duke: Right, coming out of the Depression. Well, what was here, was, like, GenTel here, no, Reinsurance? No?

Pfitsch: No.

Duke: No?

Pfitsch: And I don't—

Duke: Was there any industry or business or—?

Pfitsch: Mostly it was merchants downtown.

Duke: Okay, like, it was a service community for the College and for the Ag, things like that? Okay.

Pfitsch: Yeah, it was mostly just stores that, where people bought whatever you bought. You didn't go to Des Moines.

Duke: No. There was no interstate. Okay, so you think the reason your friends were primarily from the College had to do with your living standard, or do you think it had something to do with a split in the town?

Pfitsch: I would say that the split was definitely there. The town-gown relationships were not good.

Duke: They weren't?

Pfitsch: No.

Duke: And why?

Pfitsch: Well, I'm not sure. But there was a definite feeling of suspicion or something between the, which even when you came, town-gown relations weren't great.

Duke: Well I just notice over the years they changed. Sometimes they're great, sometimes they're strained. And it has sometimes to do with inside influences and sometimes outside influences.

Pfitsch: Well, uh,

Duke: But when you came, they were strained, in the late '40s.

Pfitsch: We had neighbors that were townspeople, the Smiths across the street, and the Ochecks, but we also had these prefabs that were all people, people, college faculty lived there, and then the Gilmours, yeah, the Gilmours must've been there very soon after we got there. Yeah, I'm not sure about that but they bought, they bought that house. And their daughters were more like Connie's age, so they probably moved in after we did, I don't know that. But the social life of the College faculty was active. And we, I'm trying to think if there had been any townspeople who we really got to know well enough to socialize with. And I don't believe they did, and when we start talking about the '50s, the mid-50s was when we got very well-acquainted with the country club people because they built a swimming pool, the pool, wasn't—

Duke: Oh, the pool, the pool.

Pfitsch: They built a swimming pool and they hired John as the pool manager, and most of his salary was a membership in the country club, and the fact that he could teach swimming.

Duke: Private lessons?

Pfitsch: And he could get paid, yeah, he was paid for teaching swimming, and that's the reason he taught most of the kids that age, they all say, 'oh yeah'

Duke: Yeah, I've heard them.

Pfitsch: 'Coach Pfitsch taught me to swim!' yep.

Duke: I've heard them. Okay, so I thought we would stop right here. But if you think of other stuff that you wish you'd told me about your first impressions, you know, what was going on when you first came to town, jot 'em down, and we'll start off with that next time, and then we'll move on. Thank you Emily!

Pfitsch: Well, thank you!

Duke: It was interesting.

Second Interview

Duke: I omitted to say during the last recording that I was talking to Emily Pfitsch about her, about the early years in Grinnell. The interviewer is Mari Duke. Okay, we left off around the '50s, early, like around 1950. And so I thought we'd pick up there. After you came to town and John was coaching how many teams?

Pfitsch: He was Assistant Football Coach and Head Basketball and Tennis Coach.

Duke: Okay, and, I think it'd be interesting for people to know about a wife's involvement with her husband's football teams, because I know that you had a big part in it, I mean, it wasn't your job but it was your job! Can you tell us a little about that?

Pfitsch: Oh, well, John was Assistant Football Coach to Hank Brown who had come at the same time John did as an Assistant Football Coach, then, as I mentioned, the Football Coach was fired the first semester that we were here and so Hank Brown became the Head Football Coach and John was still Assistant, and we were neighbors and very close friends of theirs and it was intense. Football was not as it still is not an easy sport to be successful in at Grinnell College, so that was intense and pretty tough. Of course Hank's wife Jeanette and I were the main fans of the team, personally I didn't have a lot to do with that team except I knew, we knew the players, not nearly as much as basketball.

Duke: Right, because he was head coach there.

Pfitsch: Uh, I could tell you about the basketball team. John had a measure of good success with basketball in those early years and was, I think we were second or third in the conference and had some very good players, and one interesting thing I think lots of people remember old Darby Gym, and in those days the students would pack Darby Gym on basketball nights.

Duke: Do you think it was because of the success they were having or just different days?

Pfitsch: I think it was different days. I think it was one of the things that really got the whole College—

Duke: Unified the College?

Pfitsch: Yeah. It may have helped to have a reasonably successful team. But another interesting thing about it was the, we had North and South Campus, and you know, girls were all on South Campus and men were on North Campus, and when they went to the basketball games the women all were supposed to sit on one side of Darby and the men were supposed to sit on the other side.

Duke: Really?

Pfitsch: Really! And of course we had cheerleaders and all that stuff. But an amusing thing would be that the Honor G was very much in evidence, and the football players and other sports that were Honor G members would be wearing their white sweaters with their Honor Gs to the basketball games. And if there were, one time, there was a guy that went and sat with his girlfriend on the wrong side of the gym, and the Honor G guys en masse went over and got him and took him over to the other side.

Duke: Was it a prank or were they serious?

Pfitsch: No, they were serious! You're not supposed to be over with the women, or with the girls. Women, yeah, we were girls. But looking back that seems very amusing to me.

Duke: [laughs] Yeah, I'm laughing!

Pfitsch: But not only that, in the south, in the, I hope I get my directions right. In the south end of Darby, which eventually was turned into computer offices and so forth, was where the faculty sat. And the faculty, as well as students, turned out en masse for basketball. And that whole end, the concrete bleachers were filled with faculty members, in fact, we got to be very good friends with, uh, if I can remember these wonderful peoples' names, but anyway, the old-timers there, that would come very loyally to the—

Duke: Well, so that was part of the cohesiveness of the faculty, was I mean, you talked about, last time, that they entertained each other and they had parties and things. Did they go to the football games like that too?

Pfitsch: Yes, I believe they did, although I don't remember that it was as intense and I'm just thinking back, you know, the old Ward Field that was track, around the football field and the old bleachers, and I am quite sure that there was a loyal, particularly the students, and of course at football we had Homecoming and we had Homecoming queen and all that type of ceremony which was just like college was supposed to be, and Grinnell was just like it's supposed to be.

Duke: So, did you personally get to know the guys on the team?

Pfitsch: Very much so. I knew, particularly, the guys on the basketball team. There were, during the winter there were times when there were tournaments during Christmas Break, which was shorter then.

Duke: Oh, it didn't go way into January?

Pfitsch: It didn't go way into January until the energy crisis.

Duke: Oh, oh! I even kinda, I remember that, yeah. And they never went back.

Pfitsch: No, it has been extended since then. But we would, right after Christmas there would be a tournament that the basketball tournaments would come back, I would say they probably came back to campus the day after Christmas. And I don't recall whether the dorms, I think that they—

Duke: You know, I kind of remember people sleeping in the gym, like cots in the gym.

Pfitsch: Yeah, but anyway sometimes there would be guys that would stay in our house in the basement of our little Spring Street house.

Duke: Okay.

Pfitsch: And then when we built our house later in the '50s, our other house, but...

Duke: And you fed them?

Pfitsch: Oh, I'm sure I did. And of course I knew them, they were our boys, you know.

Duke: And then you maintained relationships with them for years and years and years didn't you?

Pfitsch: Oh yes, oh yes indeed. Certainly did. In fact we had, in the '90s we had some reunions of those players that came back when the College would be, make a big fuss over these rich guys that came back and then they never would give any money.

Duke: Oh really, they'd come back and relive the old glory but they didn't give you any money? Oh, that's funny, that's funny. So was this involvement expected of coaches' wives, or was it just something you enjoyed?

Pfitsch: Oh I think, I think that I was not unusual, I guess anybody that knows John would have to say that he's a little unusual in everything that he did.

Duke: Being so gregarious, and inviting everybody over like he did. And you encouraged him?

Pfitsch: Oh, I didn't have to encourage him!

Duke: No, I know, but, how did, how did you feel?

Pfitsch: I never said no. No, it was, it was fun for me, and of course a mother in the early '50s with two little kids, it was a busy life.

Duke: How did the kids like it? Did they like it?

Pfitsch: Well, you know, they were, they were preschoolers and, let's see, they, oh, this is something interesting. The kids did not go to the basketball games.

Duke: The faculty children didn't go to the basketball games?

Pfitsch: You had to get a babysitter. Or I did, and the contrast with today's parents taking their kids everywhere with them, yes, I had to get a babysitter to go to the ball games, and I remember there was a little neighbor girl who was 10 years old and she babysat for 25 cents an hour, my two little kids.

Duke: Oh, that's interesting. The kids stayed home.

Pfitsch: The, I know when the kids got to be like 10 or 11 they would go to the games. But wouldn't necessarily sit with the parents, they'd be all the way around with their buddies.

Duke: With their own friends. Okay. We also thought maybe we could talk about the various divisions in town and one of the things I was thinking about was the churches. I know a lot of people have strong loyalties to different churches, and I'm wondering if it was like that back then and how much people mixed up with each other, whether the College people went to one church and the professional... that kind of thing.

Pfitsch: Well, there's one thing for sure, if you were answering a questionnaire or if new people would, you would meet somebody in town, it was very common to be asked what church you belong to, and it was assumed you belong to a church. And in my memory the Methodist and the Congregational church were the huge buildings downtown, and dominated the, as the Methodist church still does, and the Congregational church, the new one. We belonged to the Lutheran church in those days, and it was an, a way of identifying yourself, pretty much, what church you belonged to.

Duke: Was that the social group you belonged to, as well?

Pfitsch: What?

Duke: Was that the social group that you belonged to then as well, or not necessarily?

Pfitsch: Um, the College was the social group. There was, in fact it was interesting that the town-gown was divided by socially, I think, at least, I did not get acquainted with town people except for I did know some church people, and probably those were the main people I got acquainted with who weren't associated with the College. But the College had so many social events for faculty and it was a very cliquish, I would say,

Duke: Cohesive kind of group?

Pfitsch: And interesting, a lot of interesting people, and,

Duke: Well, at what point did you get to know townspeople?

Pfitsch: It was later on in the '50s when the country club built a pool, and at that time when John was hired to run the pool, and he was, his salary, he didn't have a salary, he was given a

membership to the country club as his, as his salary plus the fact that he was, he gave swimming lessons and charged for the swimming lessons.

Duke: Oh, okay. Was he the only one giving swimming lessons?

Pfitsch: Yes. And at that time was when we got very well-acquainted with country-club people. And John taught all the kids at the country club how to swim at the country club pool. And there were lots of members who joined, lots of people who joined the country club because of the pool, because there was no city pool.

Duke: There wasn't, okay. And when, when did they build the city pool?

Pfitsch: Because of the country club, the town passed a bond issue to build a swimming pool, and I don't know what date that was but—

Duke: But they saw how popular it was and—

Pfitsch: Well, yeah, they said, 'we're not gonna just let the country club have—

Duke: Okay, good, good.

Pfitsch: There was swimming in Arbor Lake.

Duke: Oh really?

Pfitsch: Yeah. But it had gotten a little polluted, and,

Duke: Yeah.

Pfitsch: But there was a bath house there, and—

Duke: When you came to town, the bath house was still there?

Pfitsch: It seemed like to me that when we came to town, that, that it had,

Duke: That was kind of the end of that?

Pfitsch: I think that probably was the reason for the country club swimming pool was, because they, I think they had a huge program back in the, you know in the '40s and earlier there, and it had—

Duke: Well, and I'm wondering if that had something to do with, you know, the polio epidemic and everything, that people didn't want to be swimming in untreated water?

Pfitsch: I really don't know. I think, I don't remember anything about polio until a little bit later in the '50s when Grinnell had a real epidemic with lots of people getting polio.

Duke: They did, they had a specific time when it was a real—

Pfitsch: Yes. Our kids had two close friends who got polio and, and we had a, one of this kids, Jo Chase was her name, the mother of one of these kids got polio and died, a neighbor of ours. It was a very scary time.

Duke: Yeah. And—

Pfitsch: And that had to be in the mid to, mid-50s.

Duke: Then, did you keep really, I mean, I've heard stories, like, kids weren't allowed to go to the movie theatre, like, late in the summers, as the summer wore on, they closed down pools and theatres, is that—please note that Emily's nodding.

Pfitsch: I am nodding. That's, yes, that is true and as a matter of fact, when I was a kid in Kansas, our nearest swimming pool was the capital, was Topeka, which was 30 miles away, which was a long way. But there were times when the swimming pool in Topeka was closed.

Duke: For the same reason?

Pfitsch: Yeah, because of polio.

Duke: And did they do that here in Grinnell, close the pools?

Pfitsch: Uh, no. I don't believe they did. That would've been the country club pool. Do you know when the polio vaccine was—

Duke: I'm thinking towards the late '50s, but

Pfitsch: Yeah, I am too.

Duke: I can't really remember exactly. Did they, did the town take any special steps, or it was just worry—

Pfitsch: It was just fear, it was just fear.

Duke: Okay.

Pfitsch: When my friend Jo Chase died, our doctor was John Parrish then, and he told us that he would not advise us to go to the church service. There was no idea of how polio was transmitted, they didn't know.

Duke: Did they do quarantines? Did they—

Pfitsch: I'm a little—

Duke: The reason I'm asking is I remember, even when, um, even like measles and chicken pox and stuff, they used to hang quarantine signs in Mason City—

Pfitsch: Scarlet fever, scarlet fever was when I, was a thing when, if your family had scarlet fever you sort of had self-quarantine, you just didn't go—

Duke: They didn't come up and put a sign on your door?

Pfitsch: Well, we were out in the country and—

Duke: Oh, right, right, so they wouldn't—

Pfitsch: But I remember we, as a family, I remember going to a polo game, can you imagine,

Duke: In Grinnell?

Pfitsch: No, back in Kansas when I was a kid.

Duke: On horses?

Pfitsch: On horses. We had friends who had ponies, and they had a polo field, and they were, they played polo. And around the cars we came up and parked all the way around the field, and we would go in our car and we were recovering from scarlet fever, which, the quarantine was for a long time, and we would purposely stay away from everybody, we would not park near anybody else because we were isolating ourselves.

Duke: Yeah. Okay, what, can you think of anything else about the early '50s that might be worth noting?

Pfitsch: Well I just remember my life was, my wife-and-mother, housekeeper life was focused on little kids.

Duke: On your family?

Pfitsch: And we had neighbors who had little kids, and we got them together and had play school, and we would sort of take care of each other's kids one day a week so—

Duke: Yeah, so you'd have a little bit of freedom. So your early time in Grinnell was focused on family and domestic things. I know at some point you went back to school and trained to be a teacher?

Pfitsch: Right. Actually, when my youngest, Bill, was in preschool, so he must have been 4,

Duke: So in the late '50s.

Pfitsch: That year I started auditing classes at the College. And at that time also I realized that when my kids were all in school I was not gonna stay home, I was gonna do something. And that was very contrary to the role of most women at that time.

Duke: In Grinnell, or just in general? Both. Yeah, I thought maybe.

Pfitsch: Certainly in Grinnell, and but I had, when I graduated from college I had no idea I would ever be a teacher.

Duke: Oh really?

Pfitsch: That was way low on my list, I mean, I didn't even think I—

Duke: What did you plan to do?

Pfitsch: Well I was an economics major, I thought I would go into business or do something. Probably be a secretary or something, in those days you didn't think about doing anything more grand than that, but I realized with the kids that my schedule should be similar to a school's schedule, because I was gonna be home when the kids were home in the summertime, so it occurred to me that that would be a logical thing for me to do and so in the early 60s we, John had a leave of absence and went to Panama where they spoke Spanish, so I had some Spanish going at the university, KU, and so I thought 'well I'll just learn some Spanish', or take some classes in Spanish, so I did start taking classes for credit in Spanish at the College.

Duke: Oh, here.

Pfitsch: Mhmm.

Duke: Did you also, not in Panama, you just—

Pfitsch: Oh yes.

Duke: You did, you took classes there too.

Pfitsch: I did and in fact I got involved in a USIS program in Panama City where I taught English to Spanish-speaking people. And I liked the whole idea of teaching language, and I was also taking Spanish at the same time, conversational Spanish there, so,

Duke: Did your children learn to speak Spanish?

Pfitsch: Well they, eventually they did, but—

Duke: Not when you were in Panama.

Pfitsch: We lived in the Canal Zone, where, it was just like living in Florida or someplace, but most of those people were totally disinterested and even, going to Panama City, even associating with anybody who wasn't—it was very definitely an us-and-them.

Duke: So your being involved with the, you said USAID?

Pfitsch: Yeah, USIS is what I'm saying, I don't, don't ask me what that stood for because it might have been something else.

Duke: Probably information services or something like that.

Pfitsch: Yeah.

Duke: Okay, and so then when you came back here you decided you'd be interested in teaching?

Pfitsch: I, oh yeah. I continued to study Spanish then, and, should I tell you about the, how Spanish, it was in the '60s when Sputnik went off, and the Russians started being a world—

Duke: Yeah, right, powers, right.

Pfitsch: And at that time the United States started realizing that we needed to have more science and math and foreign language.

Duke: And foreign language, okay.

Pfitsch: And at the time also, the Cubans, there were a lot of refugees that had come to Miami. Now, I don't know when, what exact, when that happened, late '50s or maybe early '60s.

Duke: Well, you know, the Bay of Pigs was like in '62, so there must have been refugees coming before then. I mean, there had to be.

Pfitsch: Right. So anyway, there was a program at the University of Iowa to train educated Cubans to become Spanish teachers, and—

Duke: Oh, at the University of Iowa?

Pfitsch: At the University of Iowa. And there was a man whose name was Vicente Rangel, who was a lawyer, and he was hired by Grinnell after his training at the University of Iowa. He was hired to teach Spanish at Grinnell High School, and instead of calling him Vicente Rangel [pronounced Vee-sent-ay Ran-hel] they called him Vincent Rangel

Duke: [laughter] Yeah, right, first language lesson! [laughter]

Pfitsch: And, but he started a program, first when he came there were two years of Spanish offered and by the time he left they were offering four. And so he had an overload, see I had had probably by that time about 15 hours of Spanish at Grinnell College, and so I got hired to teach

one class of third year Spanish. Which fit into his schedule. And so I bravely accepted the contract and I learned so much Spanish along with my third year students, it was a lot of fun for me and the kids were great.

Duke: And had you gotten a teaching certification?

Pfitsch: Yes. By that time I had also—

Duke: From Grinnell College?

Pfitsch: Yeah, also by that time I had my certification in education courses at the College.

Duke: And you spent other periods of time in Spanish-speaking countries too, didn't you?

Pfitsch: Yes, as the years went on. John and I spent two months in Ecuador in 1964, summer of 1964. And, I think that's right. Anyway, and that was the extent of my Spanish, of living in—

Duke: Of immersion, kind of, of immersion in the country.

Pfitsch: Until later, when we, I did, we did a lot of travelling.

Duke: Well, I'd like to spend a lot of time talking about the public schools and your activities and Spanish trips and things like that later.

Pfitsch: Okay.

Duke: Let's see. Well we've kind of done what I had checked down here. Um, okay, so early '50s, you said in '55 your youngest was born, and that's when your life changed. Was there any other cultural stuff before that that might be necessary, or that we should include?

Pfitsch: Well for my personal life, when, after Bill was born we decided we were going to build a house on, on 9th Avenue.

Duke: Oh, oh, that was after the third child.

Pfitsch: Right. And so we ended up spending a couple, we sold our house, and moved to an old house on West Street while we were building the house on 9th Avenue, then when Bill was two, in 1957, we moved into the house. So that was, the whole business of building a house was, along with the children—

Duke: How long did it take to build a house?

Pfitsch: Well, it was pretty much a year, although—

Duke: And did you have a local builder?

Pfitsch: Yeah, mmmm. Our neighbor Dale Snook was a contractor for Richardson and Phelps Lumber Company.

Duke: Were you one of the first houses on 9th Avenue? Or one of the last ones?

Pfitsch: Those houses were sort of all being built—

Duke: At the same time.

Pfitsch: Pretty much at the same time. And I can't remember the exact sequence, but, okay, our house was the last one to be finished there. And because we ended up with this great big backyard, because the houses had been built all around the—

Duke: And so you have that walkout basement which makes your house kind of bigger than a lot of the houses around there too.

Pfitsch: Well, yes, and there were some one-story, well, with basements, there were other houses.

Duke: There were other walk-out basements?

Pfitsch: No. With basement-basements. But our house was in this kind of a low place that everybody thought was a, a creek, where the whole north end of town drained into our backyard.

Duke: You do have a large area, I mean those houses do back up into a really large area.

Pfitsch: And so the yard was terraced in a way that the water was supposed to not, and it was, they did a pretty good job of detouring the water back to the neighbors behind us, which—

Duke: Did other faculty-people, were they building houses too?

Pfitsch: Okay, I'm trying to think of other people there, I'm sure there were, as a matter of fact, what were their names who built the house that Dr. Light ended up living in? They were faculty people, that didn't stay very long.

Duke: Was it, were there any difficulties getting mortgages or credit or anything? You said that faculty was considered poor.

Pfitsch: That's correct but because we had invested in a house when we first came to Grinnell we were building up some equity, which in our house on 9th Avenue I remember that the contract for that house was \$20,000, so, which was a lot of money. But, you know. It was barely doable.

Duke: Yeah, you were in good shape to do that. Okay, well, why don't we get together again and talk about the school system next time, is that okay? Talk about the school system and your activities in the school system.

Pfitsch: Okay. Alright. You're the boss!

Third Interview

Duke: Okay, this is Mari Duke talking to Emily Pfitsch once again. It's about December 10th 2014, and I think what we're going to do is talk about schools. I've asked Emily to tell us about her school experiences when she was a child, and kind of compare it to what she found with her children here in Grinnell.

Pfitsch: Okay, well, it'll be quite a contrast because I went to a country school.

Duke: A one-room school?

Pfitsch: A one-room school in Kansas. We lived about four miles from the, my little hometown called Overbrook, Kansas. We lived on a farm and we were a little more than a mile from the schoolhouse where we attended. There was a, one teacher, one room and one teacher, and I believe the largest number of students in the school when I went there was 14.

Duke: Okay, so was it the same teacher the entire time?

Pfitsch: No, no. we had a variety of teachers. Usually women, but we had for a while while I was in school we had a man teacher, and his name was Francis Calf, and he, if, I think that if I knew Francis Calf now I would say that quite a few of the students seemed to know a little bit more than Francis Calf did. He was a rather unimpressive human being, but he was at our school two years.

Duke: I expect, you know, Francis Calf seemed really old to me, but he probably was maybe 30, I don't know. But we had Ms. McKay, and we had couple of other teachers. Anyway, it was not the most exciting school but my sister and my brother and then my, I ended up, my youngest brother was five years younger than I. And by the time he was in school, he and I were the only ones. My older brother and sister had graduated.

Duke: How many years?

Pfitsch: I only went there 7 years because when I started the school I was the only one in first grade. And Frederick was in second grade. And so the teacher put me in the second grade to help Frederick, and Frederick and I went through all our grade school and then the four years of high school together in the same grade.

Duke: How did you get to school, did you walk?

Pfitsch: We walked. We were a half a mile from the corner, and so sometimes we would cut through the pasture when the weather was okay. And country school is quite different than the school that my children went to at Grinnell.

Duke: Did you think it was rigorous, not necessarily, huh?

Pfitsch: No it wasn't it was quite easy, and, but there's something about country school that's kind of interesting, because you're in the same small room with all the other students, so when you get to third grade you've already heard what the third graders did the year before, and so it gets to be not very challenging, but I don't ever remember that it was hard, but I do remember sometimes we would misbehave and the teacher would keep us after school. Oh, we also had outdoor toilets, there was no electricity or plumbing in the school. So there was a boys toilet in the back one corner in the schoolyard, and a girls on the other.

Duke: Where there an equal number of girls and boys?

Pfitsch: Uh, pretty much. I don't remember a big difference, and at recess and at noon we all got out and played, we played touch football, we played baseball...

Duke: Did you play capture the flag?

Pfitsch: I don't think so.

Duke: Oh, really, really?

Pfitsch: I don't think so. Because I heard about capture the flag. But we had fun.

Duke: You said sometimes you were naughty. What kinds of things did you do that were naughty?

Pfitsch: Well you know I really can't remember, I don't remember what we did that was naughty but I remember the teacher being really mad at us and keeping us after school.

Duke: [laughter] So it was a group problem.

Pfitsch: I think, and there were a lot of funny little things, happen, one day, one of our, one of the kids came to school obviously smelling like skunk, and the teacher said that this kid was gonna have to go home. He was sorry, he had encountered some, anyway,

Duke: Did you ever compare notes with people who went to country school around here? I'm wondering if it's very different.

Pfitsch: Not very much. Not very much but I have talked to people who went to country school here who had fabulous, they felt like they had a wonderful country school experience. And I didn't.

Duke: Do you supposed it all depended on who the teacher was?

Pfitsch: I think it all depended on who the teacher was, definitely. And also the district, who, you know, what teachers were available. This was, you know. My mother was a country school teacher before she was married, and my sister was a country school teacher. When my sister graduated from high school, she went to Baker College which is a liberal arts college, not,

Methodist; it's not far from where we lived, in Baldwin, Kansas. She went one year to that school and got a teachers certificate. And she was very young. Like me she only went seven years to school because she was put ahead one year, and so when she graduate-when she finished her one year in college she was probably 18.

Duke: Wow.

Pfitsch: And she had a lot of people, a lot of kids in her school, and there was one boy who was older than she was, because he had, he just couldn't pass.

Duke: Yeah well that's always in the novels, that the teacher's younger than some of the students. Well, did, how long did they have country schools around here in Grinnell? It seems to me it wasn't that long ago.

Pfitsch: That's what I'm thinking but I have no idea. The, how accurate that was, or you know.

Duke: You weren't aware of them when you came to town?

Pfitsch: No, um, the Grinnell schools, of course, we were in a town, so, they were all... Newburg had, they had a little school in the town of Newburg.

Duke: Did they have, was it all grades or just elementary?

Pfitsch: I'm not sure. But I do remember when we combined Newburg and Grinnell, that all the 6th graders went to Newburg, because my son Bill was in 6th grade, and he had a wonderful experience and a wonderful teacher, and all of the Grinnell 6th graders were bussed to Newburg.

Duke: So, when did the, had Grinnell and Newburg combined right about that time, or had it been—

Pfitsch: I think they combined after my kids were in school.

Duke: Okay, and when were your kids in school?

Pfitsch: Because—well, um, let's see, Bill was the youngest, and he graduated from high school in '73.

Duke: Okay, so in the '60s. Okay. And, so the older ones, late '50s, '60s?

Pfitsch: Yeah.

Duke: Okay, okay, and what was the school situation, there were, what three elementary schools? Describe, describe the school situation.

Pfitsch: Okay, when Jack started to, elementary school, Parker school was down where the fire station is now, which, then, Fareway Grocery Store ended up being the—

Duke: Right, right.

Pfitsch: And, and, uh, what was the name of the school over—

Duke: Cooper maybe?

Pfitsch: Cooper, was right by the College.

Duke: Right. Where that parking lot is now.

Pfitsch: And then Davis was also there.

Duke: So there were the three elementary schools.

Pfitsch: Cooper, Parker and Davis. And then Parker was the first one that was torn down.

Duke: Is that where Jack went?

Pfitsch: Yeah.

Duke: To Parker?

Pfitsch: Yeah. And Connie was only two years behind him. And by the time she started to school, um, Bailey Park was already built, so Jack was on the cutting edge, in fact I think, Parker was torn town, probably after his first year, and Bailey Park was in the process of being built.

Duke: Okay, so they didn't exist at the, together at the same time, when Bailey Park was built, then they got rid of Parker.

Pfitsch: Mhmm. Now, do you remember Cooper school?

Duke: Yeah, we lived across the street from it. Yeah. It was operating when we came to town, which was, um, in the early '70s, I don't—yeah.

Pfitsch: Yeah. So then, Fairview was, yeah.

Duke: Well, Fairview and Cooper operated at the same time, I mean, they were both—

Pfitsch: Cooper was not closed—

Duke: Mm-mm. I think—

Pfitsch: Before Fairview was—

Duke: I think it was just first and second grades, or I can't remember, it was limited, but, there were, there were kids there when—

Pfitsch: Well, Parker School was really an old, deteriorating, I mean, deteriorated school when Jack went there, I mean it was definitely on its way out.

Duke: Was it scary, I mean, were you worried about Jack's safety?

Pfitsch: Oh, I guess not really.

Duke: Maybe you should have been? [laughter]

Pfitsch: Probably [laughter]

Duke: Did any of your kids go to Davis?

Pfitsch: Um, Jack went there while Bailey Park was being built.

Duke: Oh, I see.

Pfitsch: They, they, and I, sorry to say I can't remember exactly how it was divided up—

Duke: Yeah, doesn't matter.

Pfitsch: But it was, uh, he was, he was there at least part of the year, but I think that maybe the first year that Bailey Park was ready to go was when Connie was in kindergarten.

Duke: And did the Parker teachers then move over to Bailey Park pretty much?

Pfitsch: Probably.

Duke: Yeah, yeah. How involved were you with the schools when they were there?

Pfitsch: Well, of course, there was the PTA and I, I seemed to always have my hands full with kids, and, other things going on with the College, and all the sports. [laughter]

Duke: Right, right.

Pfitsch: I was involved with, so I don't remember ever being an active PTA member, although I always went to the meetings, and, you know, did the, baked the cookies, that sort of thing.

Duke: They had bake sales, did they?

Pfitsch: Right, right. So—

Duke: How did you feel about the schools, the education your kids were getting in elementary and middle school?

Pfitsch: Um, there were good years and bad years, but in general, Jack was the one who seemed to have more, problem-or more, I, you know, some teachers that were a little difficult, but I just

heard some people talking about how awful some of the teachers were that their kids had, and I think we were pretty lucky, I think—

Duke: Oh, you mean, people are remembering that their teach, that their kids had bad teachers?

Pfitsch: Right, right, just terrible, terrible, terrible. And I think that that was more prevalent in Cooper School, and maybe Fairview also, than it was in Bailey Park. Or at least it was in my, my, my kids seemed to have pretty good—

Duke: Good experiences?

Pfitsch: Got along alright.

Duke: They would be, in, like self-contained classrooms? They would go and have one teacher who taught the same, taught them all the subjects?

Pfitsch: None of them were involved with middle school.

Duke: Yeah.

Pfitsch: Or maybe I'm forgetting, but I don't think Bill was in, I don't think they had a middle school when Bill was—

Duke: Didn't they have that junior high downtown?

Pfitsch: Junior High, yeah, they all went to Junior High. Downtown.

Duke: And the high school, was it in existence when your kids were in school?

Pfitsch: Uh, yes, Bill, uh, I think Jack went to, when he, I think the year that he started high school was the first year the high school was—

Duke: Oh really?

Pfitsch: He really sort of went to new schools—

Duke: He inaugurated all these new schools! Lucky him!

Pfitsch: All the way [laughter]

Duke: Oh, that's interesting. I wond—were all the schools just falling down at the same time and they had to start replacing them? Or—

Pfitsch: Well, it, we had a terrible time getting the first bond issue passed.

Duke: And that was for, for Bailey?

Pfitsch: For, for the high school.

Duke: Oh, for the high school.

Pfitsch: No, I don't remember a problem with the elementary schools, with the bond issue. I'm maybe wrong, but the high school, that was a real tough bond issue.

Duke: Did they put it up several times?

Pfitsch: Yes.

Duke: Did you get involved at all?

Pfitsch: Oh, we all did, yes.

Duke: What kinds of things did everybody have to do?

Pfitsch: Oh, mostly just, just, um, petition, and running around trying to influence people to vote positively, because things were in pretty bad shape.

Duke: Now was that before or after Grinnell-Newburg consolidated?

[protracted silence]

Duke: It doesn't matter.

Pfitsch: Yeah, I'm not sure.

Duke: And what were the reasons people didn't want to vote for it?

Pfitsch: Oh, it was taxpayers.

Duke: It was money, they didn't want to have to pay the money?

Pfitsch: Had a terrific taxpayer organization here that was infamous, and very very active.

Duke: Okay, okay. And what, Jack probably started high school, when, did you say?

Pfitsch: Okay, he graduated from high school in 1966.

Duke: Okay, so the early '60s is when they built the high school.

Pfitsch: Yeah, he graduated from Knox College in 1970, so there you are.

Duke: And then when did you start teaching in the schools?

Pfitsch: I started teaching, um, well I was just, well, um, Sputnik happened, as you might remember—

Duke: Okay, that was the late '50s, right?

Pfitsch: In the late '50s, and, there became a great push for science, math, and foreign languages. Those were the three things that benefitted from the Russians starting Sputnik, and I had started, I got my teacher's certificate, started getting my teacher's certificate, in the late '50s, and taking, and also took Spanish classes at the College.

Duke: Was, was there just the one Spanish teacher at the College, or were there several?

Pfitsch: Well, there were, well there were at least two, Betsy Noble was, was, and also Helena Percas.

Duke: She taught at the Colle-oh, okay. Okay, good.

Pfitsch: She was marvelous, she was terrific, and those two were the ones that I had. I don't think there were other Spanish teachers then. If there were, I didn't have them. But anyway, Betsy taught grammar and we learned how to conjugate verbs, and learned lists of vocabulary words, and we wrote, we knew how to translate, we learned how to translate English to Spanish written, but I don't recall ever hearing Betsy speak Spanish.

Duke: Oh, that's interesting.

Pfitsch: She was a very tough teacher, so you had to, had to learn how to conjugate those verbs [laughter]

Duke: [laughter]

Pfitsch: But, uh, Helena Percas spoke Spanish all the time in the classrooms, and she was—

Duke: She was a native speaker, right?

Pfitsch: She was beautiful, beautiful as well as a wonderful teacher, yeah, she was terrific. And Betsy was, well, in her way she was okay. [laughter]

Duke: Kind of an old-fashioned—

Pfitsch: Different, very different—

Duke: Book-learning—

Pfitsch: Focus, very different focus.

Duke: Yeah. Now, why were you interested in Spanish?

Pfitsch: Well, I had taken Spanish at the University of Kansas, I graduated from the University of Kansas, but I was an economics major. And, when we came, we were, John had a leave of absence so we went to Panama, and then he also had a, went to Ecuador for a couple months in the summer, and I, before we went to Panama I decided that, I really had liked Spanish at the

University, and I decided that when my kids all were in school I wasn't going to stay home, and I decided I needed to do something that had the same calendar—

Duke: Yeah, yeah.

Pfitsch: As the kids, so it was going to be teaching, and I liked Spanish and, uh, I decided that I would like teaching Spanish, and when I went to, when we were in Panama, I studied Spanish there at the, in Panama City at a program they had, and I also taught English as a second language, and I got intrigued with the whole idea of—

Duke: Language education?

Pfitsch: Of language acquisition, right. So, as I said, the University of Iowa had a program for Cuban, for well-educated Cuban refugees, and there was a gentleman who had been a lawyer in Cuba who went to the program the University of Iowa had for these educated people, who, 'course he never thought he was going to be a Spanish teacher, but, uh, Grinnell hired him from the program of the University of Iowa, and his name was Vicente Rangel, and in Grinnell he was called Vincent Wrangle.

Duke: Vincent Wrangle. Well, that's all we can handle. [laughter]

Pfitsch: But anyway, he was really quite a good, aggressive, Spanish teacher and he got hired away from Grinnell after, I think he must've been here about 3 or 4 years.

Duke: How old a person was he?

Pfitsch: Uh, I think he must've been in his thirties, maybe early forties.

Duke: Oh, okay, okay.

Pfitsch: Anyway, I was finishing up my degree at the College, and his program was very popular, and he had big classes, so I had, I was just getting my teachers' certificate, and there was an extra class that, he had an overload, so I found out about the job and applied for it, and one of the things that they have had difficulty at the high school is keeping foreign language teachers very long.

Duke: Why, I wonder?

Pfitsch: Because they come, and they, young people would come and then they would go.

Duke: Oh. [laughter]

Pfitsch: Get a job someplace else, and—

Duke: Okay.

Pfitsch: So I think they hired me because they thought I, they didn't think I'd be—

Duke: Be leaving [laughter]

Pfitsch: Yeah, anyway, the first year that I taught here I taught third year Spanish—

Duke: Wow.

Pfitsch: Because, anyway, that was the first year that they had third year. They had, first and second year had gotten big, big classes, and so I was hired to teach third year Spanish which was a lot of fun, but, anyway—

Duke: When was that, when was that, Emily?

Pfitsch: Okay, it was, that year, I believe that was '63, '64, and then he left, Vicente Rangel left, and so I got hired as a full-time teacher in 1964.

Duke: So then you were the only Spanish teacher?

Pfitsch: At that time—

Duke: When he left.

Pfitsch: At that time, the, the high school, the schools had developed so that the junior high now was in the, was downtown.

Duke: Downtown, right.

Pfitsch: And I taught, the first year I taught 9th grade and high school, I had to travel back and forth to the high school. And then we hired a 9th grade teacher at the junior high, and she had a full load at the junior high. 4 or 5 classes, I'm not sure, at the junior high.

Duke: Were there other foreign languages being taught, too?

Pfitsch: Yes. We had French and German both, also.

Duke: French and German, mhmm.

Pfitsch: And they were not as popular as Spanish, because Spanish was, even then, was recognized as—

Duke: More useful, as a language that might, might be useful.

Pfitsch: Be useful, and, although French, French was also very popular, they had big classes, we had big classes, and not such big classes in German, but my memory is that, yes, both French and German were only at the high school, so they only offered three years, because high school was 10th, 11th, and 12th, and 9th grade was at the junior high.

Duke: Were they still teaching Latin at that time?

Pfitsch: Yes, when Jack started, Jack had Ms. Karsten's his Latin teacher, and I think she was about ready to retire, and when she retired they didn't replace her.

Duke: They didn't have any more Latin. Interesting.

Pfitsch: But Connie did not take Latin, she said that, I believe they were just talking about that the other day—

Duke: Your kids were just talking?

Pfitsch: Yeah, and Connie did not take Latin even though I think it might've been offered. The reason, Connie said that she was afraid of Ms. Karstens.

Duke: [laughing] Yeah, well,

Pfitsch: And I'm not sure why. She was a rather—Ms. Karstens had a twin sister, and they both were single ladies—

Duke: And they both taught?

Pfitsch: Well, no, but when Ms. Karstens' twin sister visited, she looked exactly alike, Ms. Karstens [laughter] and they were old, well, in their 60s, I'm sure.

Duke: Well, it sounds like there was a lot of interest in foreign language in the '60s, around here, which is interesting.

Pfitsch: Right, and I don't know, but I think Sputnik might've had something to do with it—

Duke: You think all of—

Pfitsch: Definitely did about Spanish, it definitely did about Spanish, and I would think that, you know, it was foreign language that was stressed, not just one language.

Duke: Right. So the school system was very supportive of it as well, sounds like.

Pfitsch: Oh yeah, oh yeah, was. And we had a, we had a woman who was a Central College student who student-taught with me, and then she was hired at the junior high to teach Spanish, and she was from Mexico.

Duke: Oh.

Pfitsch: And she was, the community tried very hard to get her citizenship, but she was deported because she was only here on student, on a student visa. And I think the last year she taught she probably should have been—

Duke: She probably had stayed too long?

Pfitsch: She prob, yeah. She stayed too long. But the community worked very hard, to get her to—

Duke: And was that in the '60s too?

Pfitsch: Yes. Uh, I can't tell you exactly the year but I think it was probably in the late '60s.

Duke: They don't have three languages at the high school now, do they?

Pfitsch: No.

Duke: They just have French and Spanish?

Pfitsch: French and Spanish.

Duke: Uh huh.

Pfitsch: And I haven't been in touch with the people there, I really don't know how the program is going, but I'm assuming that it's very strong in Spanish, or popular in Spanish anyway.

Duke: Well, talk a little bit about your experiences teaching. Did you all have wonderful, hardworking students who did everything they were told and—

Pfitsch: [laughter] Well, I'll tell you, I really, I love teaching Spanish at the high school, particularly as things developed. I was learning, when I was teaching the upper levels I was learning right along with the students.

Duke: Sure.

Pfitsch: Which was lots of fun for me, and the students. One of the things that I remember—

[telephone rings]

Pfitsch: Oh...

Duke: Just a second, I'll see if I can figure out how to stop it. [picks up recording device]

Fourth Interview

Duke: Okay, there we go. We were talking about how much you liked teaching at the high school—

Pfitsch: Okay.

Duke: And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about the trips you took those students on to Spain. I think that's amazing that you did that.

Pfitsch: I could talk about that but first I want to say—

Duke: Oh, okay.

Pfitsch: That, uh, so many of the students that I had, in, Spanish classes, were kids of, friends of ours.

Duke: Oh, okay.

Pfitsch: And I was always, I threw out my teaching. I was so impressed, and amazed at how kind the students were to me.

Duke: Ah, ah, okay.

Pfitsch: You know, and, and, how, when I know they could've been giving me all kinds of trouble, and you know that through the years of teaching you know, kids, kids can be pretty mean—

Duke: They can be scary.

Pfitsch: — to their teachers.

Duke: Well, did they treat you differently than other teachers?

Pfitsch: I don't, I doubt it, but I always just felt so happy and rewarded that they, for the most part, I would end up with a, with what I thought was a good relationship with kids. Through some, you know, bumps and troubles, but for the most parts, I, when I see my students, we, we recall some good times, and mostly favorable. From my point of view—from my point of view.

Duke: Good, well, your point of view is probably accurate—

Pfitsch: [laughter]

Duke: If, if it were unpleasant you would have a different point of view.

Pfitsch: Well, it was, I, I really enjoyed it, teaching, yes I did. And then, and then, when Thelma Weimar was hired, she ended up teaching the upper levels, and I taught only first year for quite a few years, and part time because she really wanted a full-time job. And so, and those, those years when I was teaching only first year, I got fascinated with language acquisition, and how, and what a difference there is in students, some students pick it up really fast, and some students, very smart kids, had a terrible time.

Duke: Interesting.

Pfitsch: Well, particularly with the spoken language, and of course, we had a lot of tapes and that sort of thing, so they were exposed to, to, native speakers.

Duke: Right. And these are all the same age, it's not like, a three-year-old picks it up faster than a 15-year-old, it's, they were all 15.

Pfitsch: Right, right, and I did have some kids who had had experience with Spanish when they were kids, like, their parents would be on leave or something, and they, and, so you could tell how their pronunciation was much more authentic than—but I had students, ninth grade students who picked up from the tapes, picked up really good pronunciation from the beginning. It's a, it's, a lot of it I think is a hearing, and being able to actually hear—

Duke: Yeah, I was wondering if there's any relationship to music, like if musicians who can hear, you know, have more acute hearing can hear?

Pfitsch: Mhmm. I think it probably is.

Duke: Huh, huh.

Pfitsch: But it was, that was one of the things that entertained me, since just, teaching one level was fun.

Duke: You saw the beginning, you saw the beginning of their learning.

Pfitsch: And so then, you asked me another question?

Duke: About taking them on trips to Spain.

Pfitsch: Oh. Taking them on, the program was that we went every third year, because there were three languages, and one year French would go, and then the Germans would, the German teachers would take their kids, and, we, the first year that I went, I went by myself from Grinnell, and, the, teacher that I went with was a woman from Ames, and she had been on, she had been teaching for quite a while in Ames, and she had been there before, so I was very lucky that she knew the ropes and knew how the program went.

Duke: Yeah.

Pfitsch: And the program that we had, was that, students would go, we would go for two weeks and three weekends, and the first week that we were there, we would tour. We would, we had a bus trip, we would go, several different cities, not always the same one, same, same, trip—

Duke: It was an established program in Spain?

Pfitsch: Yes, it was an established program, and so, they, we clicked into what they had us do, with the schedule. And then we would have a family stay for a week, so the week that they had the family stay, the teachers had to be on call, always we had to have, students always had our phone number and knew where we were, but we had a lot of freedom that week, as long as the kids were getting along with their families, we were fine, and for the most part that was the way it went.

Duke: How many kids were there?

Pfitsch: I think I had as many as 25.

Duke: From Grinnell? Wow.

Pfitsch: From Grinnell, one year. And Thelma and I, after she started teaching, well, we both went.

Duke: Any parents go? Or just the—

Pfitsch: No. No.

Duke: Just the two of you were responsible for 25 teenagers?

Pfitsch: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Duke: Oh, how brave you are.

Pfitsch: Well, [laughs] the program was really good, I'd say, you know. They had a set of rules, and, the bus was already arranged, you know, the bus driver was somebody experienced. And, I think it really helped me a lot, I know it did, that the first year I went I went with another experienced teacher. No, it was fun. I looked forward to it always, and sort of had my fingers crossed that nothing terrible would happen.

Duke: Yeah, because I would think that teenagers could get in trouble in Europe. Did you ever have somebody get in trouble?

Pfitsch: One, not too long ago, I supposed, Susie Witt, who is certainly not a troublemaker—

Duke: Uh huh, no.

Pfitsch: But uh, she, we were chatting about old times, and she said, “Emily, I think you would be amazed at some of the things that we did, when we were in Spain.”

Duke: [laughter] Really?

Pfitsch: And I said, “Suzie, I wouldn’t be amazed.”

Duke: [laughter]

Pfitsch: I know that there were a lot of things I didn’t know about—

Duke: Yeah.

Pfitsch: But, but, we were, we were not that naïve, we knew that things were going on, and as long as nobody got into trouble, or, and the kids weren’t, I don’t know, having some really good reports from the students would also be interesting.

Duke: [laughter]

Pfitsch: If you want, if you want to delve into that! Whether they would admit things that happened, but of course one of the problems with going to Spain and Europe in general is the kids could buy alcohol at, at, just like buying pop, you know, anywhere, anytime. High school kids.

Duke: Right, right, and they knew that when they were going.

Pfitsch: Right, right, and I knew it, we knew it, and we did some coaching and we actually had quite a good training program before we went, giving a lot of, information about what was gonna go on and you know, what the kids could expect. And we talked about it very openly.

Duke: But you never had any big problem. The police were never involved?

Pfitsch: No. We never had, we never had the police. We had some, we had some uh, we had one, uh, woman that got accosted by a Catholic priest, as a matter of fact.

Duke: [gasps]

Pfitsch: I’m not going to get into that.

Duke: No, I’d imagine you’re not. [laughter]

Pfitsch: That was, I think that was really the worst experience we had.

Duke: And she was upset.

Pfitsch: She was, she was okay, but she was shocked, and very scared, and very upset.

Duke: Yeah, yeah. And how many, how many times did you take kids over?

Pfitsch: I'm not sure but I would say it was probably, I would say it was at least five times.

Duke: Uh huh, uh huh. Yeah.

Pfitsch: Yeah. Not sure.

Duke: Who paid for it?

Pfitsch: The kids had to pay their own way.

Duke: Okay.

Pfitsch: And it, especially in those days, it wasn't terribly expensive obviously because a lot of them could afford to go, and they had to, they had to pay their own.

Duke: Uh huh. There weren't any scholarships or anything like that?

Pfitsch: No. Too bad, people didn't have any.

Duke: Yeah. Yeah. Do you have any criticisms of the way things went at the high school, the support you got from the administration, or the attitude toward foreign languages or anything like that?

Pfitsch: No, I really don't have any criticisms, As a foreign language teacher maybe even more than other classes, the principal, the administration, didn't, they, you know, they would observe my classes once in a while, but they didn't know foreign language—

Duke: [laughter] They couldn't criticize you?

Pfitsch: And as long as the students were relatively successful, and not complaining too much, I guess.

Duke: You have any trouble with parents?

Pfitsch: Not really.

Duke: Good.

Pfitsch: Not really. 'Course, foreign language is an elective too, which is—

Duke: So they've chosen to be in your class.

Pfitsch: Right. And 'course some of them were there because their parents said "you have to take a foreign language."

Duke: Oh, right. Still.

Pfitsch: But in general, particularly the upper levels, were kids, wanted to take, wanted to take more Spanish and that's the reason they were in those classes. And I, I really enjoyed teaching the upper levels when I was in, as I said, I was learning right along with the kids.

Duke: Yeah, well, that's a good sign I think. And the relationship amongst all the teachers at the high school, that was pretty congenial?

Pfitsch: Pretty good, pretty good, yeah. The faculty lounge was always an interesting spot, and of course we went through the years when the faculty lounge was full of smoke, and, then no smoking and they had, smokers had to go to the furnace room to smoke their cigarettes.

Duke: [laughter] Right.

Pfitsch: And, but, it was, I don't remember, I didn't particularly have, since I was the only person teaching Spanish in the high school, and then when I went to the junior high I was the only one, there, and I didn't have difficulties with other teachers in my field.

Duke: You weren't in competition with anybody.

Pfitsch: No.

Duke: Yeah, okay. Well, is there anything else you want to say about schools and Grinnell, your kids' experience, your experience?

Pfitsch: For the most part I would say that my kids, my kids and I had positive experiences at school, and you know, there's so much controversy, or talk all the time about how the school-Grinnell schools are not up to snuff, and so forth. In my experience, the really smart kids, faculty brats as we sometimes used to call them, um, if a kid was motivated, and had good support from his family, they could get a very good education here, even though I don't believe that Grinnell is among the top schools in the state, probably. I don't know, I don't know anything about it at the moment, just probably is what I hear people talk about. So much of it depends on family, and the motivation of the students, as you know, you know, your kids did fine, at Grinnell High School, and—

Duke: Right, right, right, right, and there are a lot of supplemental things that are available, both at the school system and the College and in the town and stuff.

Pfitsch: And I guess right now they have a prob- more of a problem, with high school kids taking classes at the College, because they had a different, the high school—

Duke: Schedules, yeah.

Pfitsch: Schools, the public schools are on trimester, is that right?

Duke: I don't know the answer to that but I, I have heard that there's some scheduling problem.

Pfitsch: Yeah. I think it is much more difficult than it was when both—

Duke: Uh huh, when they had a similar schedule.

Pfitsch: Because there were a lot of kids who took classes at the College.

Duke: Right, and especially like in math—

Pfitsch: And back in, back in the earlier days, it was just faculty kids that could take classes at the College, and I think George Drake was the one that changed that.

Duke: Right, well I remember David Jordan and George kinda worked on that, I mean, that was something, I remember the two names that they were working on that, and that was a big thing.

Pfitsch: Was huge, huge, it was really wonderful. Because a lot of kids would get coll—

Duke: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that it might not still be—

Pfitsch: Well I just heard, uh, somebody talking about how difficult it is now for kids to take College classes because of the scheduling.

Duke: Huh, huh, that's too bad.

Pfitsch: And it was very easy for a while.

Duke: Mhmm.

Pfitsch: They could just, as long as they had the permission of the faculty at the College they could just—

Duke: Well I remember a lot of, um, math whizzes, you know, kids who were really good at math were taking advanced classes at the College.

Pfitsch: Mhmm.

Duke: That no one could expect a high school to offer.

Pfitsch: Right.

Duke: Okay, well, next time when we get together, let's talk about the College and all the alums that you know, and keep coming back. I think you better make notes. [laughter]

Pfitsch: Well, I'll try to do that. You remind me when we make the next appointment.

Duke: But let's do it after Christmas, okay?

Pfitsch: Alright. Great.