Interviewee: Laura Wieman
Interviewer: Lois Meacham
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Laura Wieman

Side One

Lois Meacham [LM]: I'd like to ask you a few questions and, if you don't mind telling me, how old were you in 1929?

Laura Wieman [LW]: I was sixteen.

LM: Sixteen. Very good. And where were you living?

LW: In this house, in Grinnell, 1510 East Street.

LM: 1510 East Street. Did you have indoor plumbing?

LW: Yes.

LM: And electricity?

LW: Yeah.

LM: How was your home heated?

LW: By a coal furnace that had to be stoked by hand, and that was not an easy proposition.

LM: Did your father carry out the clinkers ?

LW: They weren't clinkers, they were just ashes. David probably carried them out.

LM: Yes. Who were the members of your family at that time?

LW: Ok. There were my father and my mother, David and I were the oldest in the family, Mary, Margaret, Jane, Laura, Connie.

LM: What were the roles and responsibilities of individual family members at that time? Did you have little chores that—

LW: Yeah, we had chores. I know I cleaned upstairs every Saturday, and Margaret often got Sunday dinner. Jane was a good housecleaner. Mary—I don't remember—she was a good cook too. David did all kinds of things like sweeping, carrying out, and shoveling. There were times when some of us were away. I can't be exactly sure which dates. David worked in Chicago briefly.

LM: Well, we're talking about '29 on up through the Depression kind of thing.

LW: And Margaret was away studying for part of that time, at Oberlin, and working at Cornell College in Mount Vernon. Mary was away teaching one year. Jane was away taking some nursing training for part of that time—so they were in and out.

LM: Who were your family's friends?

LW: Oh boy—

LM: What areas did they come from? From the college? You might tell about your father just a little bit.

LW: Well, father was teaching at the college and, by 1929, he was doing the alumni work. He did come here as teacher of organ and music theory from Oberlin College in 1901, and was gone for a few years and came back in 1909, and has been here ever since. Mother came up here to college in 1900 from Keokuk, Iowa, and she met father as a teacher. And they were married her senior year. Father was a member of what was called Poweshiek Club (you're sitting in the Poweshiek chair) and that was a group of men, townsmen, who went every other week and gave papers. It was always very interesting. And mother belonged to Entre Nous Club, which was a book review club, and they gave dinners once a month for their husbands. Mother always said she was invited because my father was such good company and they wanted him in, but I think that was being too modest. Father's name was Henry William Matlack, and mother was Merta Rebecca Johnson Matlack, and their closest friends all through those years were the Frisbies—Margaret and Lowrie Frisbie. Now they had both gone to college here, and he was the editor of the *Grinnell Herald* at that time. And they played bridge at least twice a week at night. And they often had dinner together. And they didn't have any children until later. They had a son who was just a little older than Connie. So, they were their closest friends. And other close friends were through the clubs that they belonged to. Mother used to talk every day to Margaret Frisbie and, later, she talked every day to Irma Spaulding. Father didn't have such close cronies, but lots of good friends. And they played bridge quite a bit with Fred and Faye Bauman. They played some with the Morrisons.

LM: At that time, where did you do most of your shopping for food?

LW: Well, I can remember Moyles Grocery the best. And, I expect it was at Moyles Grocery. That was on Broad Street, right about where the addition to the bank is. And we bought our meat from Howard Hughes—well, something Hughes—at the North Market. And, in those days, we had grocery delivery three times a day. It came early in the morning, but you tried to get your order in by eight

o'clock. And, if you didn't like what you got that time, you sold it back and they came at eleven and picked that up, and brought you something else. And then, they would come again in the afternoon if you needed them. In those days, we also had two mail deliveries every day to the door. And ice came by cart—

LM: Where did you buy most of your clothing? Or did you make most of your clothing?

LW: Well, we made a lot of clothes. And Mary was a very good seamstress, Mother was a good seamstress. Once in a while she'd hire a woman to come in and sew for a while. I turned out to be pretty good at sewing, and I did a lot of the family mending. I said I never learned to cook because I had three older sisters, but I certainly did learn to iron and to sew, or to mend. And we— there was McMurray's Dry Good Store over on that corner where— What is on that corner?

LM: Abstract office.

LW: Over on Fourth? And that had wonderful goods, and it smelled so good to walk in there. That was when they still had the little gunny— Things went by trolley with the money in them up to this top desk. And then there was a store in the middle of the block on Broad street called Brintnall's, and we did a lot of shopping there. That later became Sangster's. We even sent away sometimes. There was a funny deal for awhile you could get. It was a dress all cut out, with all the difficult trimming parts done, and all the extra stuff with it. And you just put those parts together. And so we'd buy those sort of dresses. That was kind of fun. We didn't have as many ready-mades as we might.

LM: How did you get around? Did you have a car?

LW: We had a car later. When I was a child, we didn't have cars. And all the older kids had bicycles and Mother and Dad both rode bicycles. And I never had a bicycle because, by that time, we had our first Ford. And we used that for transportation. I can remember in the summertime we'd go down to Arbor Lake and swim at least twice a day. We'd all pile into the car, and then on Sunday we'd stop and get ice at the creamery and bring it home and make ice-cream. So the car was very useful. But, before that, we'd used bicycles.

LM: Did you garden?

LW: Oh, did we garden! I think that's one reason father bought this big place. It had six lots. We had huge gardens because he had this big family to feed and he bought the place, built the place, in 1902. It had two rows of orchard trees. We had lots of apples, we had peaches, and we had cherries, we had pears, we had grapes. So we had a lot of fruit from the place.

LM: Did you also put out potatoes and that sort of thing?

LW: Oh yeah. Everything. Lots of corn, lots of potatoes, lots of beets, and green beans, and peas—

LM: Who did the most work in the garden?

LW: Father. Father and David. And he'd go out every night and hose the gardens, as he called it, with a sprinkler. And, during one period, when the *Saturday Evening Post* came on Thursday—it always had a really good serial with it—and whoever shelled the peas first could have the paper first and read the serial on Thursday morning. It would take a pack of peas to feed the family.

LM: Oh wow, I expect. What kind of food preparation activities were different family members involved in? I mean, did you each have, like you were saying, shelling the peas?

LW: Well, we always had a good meal at noon, and we'd have supper at night. And, she did the cooking. Later on, when the older girls were up to cooking, they helped with that. I can't remember doing much in helping with cooking in the kitchen. Except, of course, with dishes. I was very good at that. And—

LM: Did you do a lot of canning?

LW: Oh yeah. We did lots of canning. In the summertime, it was peaches, peaches, peaches, and cherries, cherries, cherries. We didn't can vegetables. We dried corn, I remember, one year—that was during the First World War—and applesauce, ketchup.

LM: Did your family eat out ever?

LW: It was a great treat. I can remember going downtown for Christmas shopping, and we ate lunch or dinner, at the Bluebird. And that was a real treat. No, we didn't go out much. And I can't remember eating at other people's houses much. The Frisbies often came over here. It was almost always oyster stew.

LM: Were any of you involved in sports those days?

LW: No.

LM: Like fishing, or golf—

LW: Well, when we went away from here we'd fish. In the summertime, when we'd generally try to get away to a lake, I remember fishing with my dad a lot. Other kinds of organized sports, no. One year the folks did a join a country club though. And Dad did have a set of golf clubs, but I don't think it went very far. I can remember going down to the campus and trying to bat a ball with a very heavy tennis racket. We all swam. We were good swimmers. We all learned to swim very

well. And we swam at Clear Lake, and down the Mississippi River at Keokuk, where even we were.

LM: What did you do about health care? What was available in Grinnell?

LW: Well, there were regular doctors. Dr. Harris was our family doctor. And Dr. Evans was a little later our family doctor. Dr. Sommers was the doctor when my father was ill. We didn't get sick so much. I can remember an osteopath in town. I can remember one time my grandmother was visiting here—his name was Dr. Hibbets—and he came out to treat her, and he treated her on the dining room table. And I had a cold so he treated me, and I thought it was a miraculous cure because the cold was gone the next day. But I can remember going very early to the dentist. When I was a child, at all the schools there was a dental chair in the nurse's room. And the dentist would come around and give us all examinations—every year—and he pulled them out if you needed some help. So we went to the dentist regularly. Cleaned our teeth regularly. That was just routine.

LM: Where did all of you go to school?

LW: Cooper. Down here. And David went to an old grammar school down just south of the Methodist church. And then, when the new junior high was built, that's where we all went in sixth grade. We all graduated from high school. We didn't all graduate from college, but we all graduated from high school.

LM: What role did the library play in your home?

LW: We started going to the library when we were just children. We had a summer reading program, and I suppose we started that in grade school. And I was so interested that I gave a little history of Stewart Library to my club and told about the summer reading program, and [chuckling] a little later, I found one of the prize books that I had picked up from that. They gave us a book at the end of the summer for completing our required things. Mine was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It's a nice little book.

LM: Was the library significant during the Depression as an entertainment source, since I'm sure things were a little tight for really entertaining?

LW: I can't remember that at all. I don't think it was established or set up to do that kind of thing. And I think it was just simply a lending library except for the children's program which was downstairs where the present library is, but not nearly as attractive. I painted a mural for that one that summer.

LM: What do remember about Grinnell from the '20s and the '30s? The physical Grinnell?

LW: Well, it was only a two mile square at that time, and you could get anywhere in just a few minutes. And, of course, it looked very different because there were so many fewer houses. I can remember that when a house was built over on the corner of Elm and Tenth—I supervised that as about an eight year old. I can't remember another house being built in Grinnell until after the war. It was a long period. Grinnell had an early Depression in the early twenties. So, we were used to kind of hard times. From then on there had been extremely high land rates right after the First World War, and then the Depression, and that affected a town like Grinnell very seriously. And some of our biggest businesses went down at that point. So, by the time 1929 came and the big crash and the bank holidays, it was just another episode.

LM: By 1934, how had the circumstances of your family changed?

LW: Very drastically. By that time my grandmother, my mother's mother, had come to live with us because her husband had died and there was no place for her to live on her own. She had no income whatsoever. And my father became ill in the winter of '35 when I was a senior in college. And he could not ever work again after that. And, so, it was a hard, hard time. Margaret was working, Mary was working. David was not working except periodically. Connie was still in school. Jane was as well in school, or else, by that time she may have been living in Des Moines working. So it was a hard time. I can't tell you any more than that.

LM: Your income was cut—

LW: Well, yeah [chuckling] and how! My father, as a full professor, had a salary of thirty-five hundred dollars a year. For one year. After that, they had to cut back by ten percent to keep the college open. And students were coming to college on barter at that point, not always, but sometimes.

LM: But did this make a difference in the number of clothes you had, and shoes—

LW: Oh yeah. I can remember, since I had three older sisters I very often wore out their clothes. I remember wearing out a certain type of coat that I inherited at three different editions. I can't remember having a new coat for myself until I was in, probably, high school. And, as far as clothing is concerned, I don't have very many recollections. There was one period when some relative of my mother's in Chicago who had daughters began sending us boxes of very beautiful clothes. And we loved that, and I got some nice things out of that, but it was always a matter to my mother of accepting charity, and she didn't like that very well. And perhaps she said something about it, because the boxes stopped—but, it was that kind of time. We

wore things out. We really wore them out. And we always had our shoes half soled and loose heels, but those were the days of leather shoes and there was always a busy shoe repairman.

LM: How were holidays and special occasions celebrated during those years?

LW: We had a good time at the holidays. Fourth of July was a great time because it was Margaret's birthday, we even put up a flagpole for her one year. We had great fireworks displays and we put up a paper balloon—it was kept aloft by a mass of kerosene-soaked excelsior in the bottom—and, of course, they were terribly dangerous but we did them. And we'd have the night fireworks displays: the pinwheels, the roman candles, and skyrockets and that type of stuff. And in the morning we'd have— I got so that I could shoot off a pretty good size firecracker. But, we loved that. My mother said that, as a child, her mother would bribe all of her fireworks away from her before the day was very far along, but they let us play with them. And Thanksgiving was a great time for a big feast, with company probably. And Christmas was a great holiday—it always had been—and when Connie was born on Christmas day that made it all the more important. So we enjoyed the holidays—and our birthdays were always celebrated.

LM: To what churches and voluntary organizations did your family belong?

LW: We went to the Congregational Church. And my father played the organ and had the choir—not always every year, but frequently. And Mother was in a women's group at the church. We went to college functions, we went to lots of concerts, and we went to big alumni and faculty picnics at the college. Mother was also a member of the Board of the Poweshiek County—what did they call that? It was preceding the kind of welfare systems we have today. It was a local volunteer group that supervised a certain fund of money. It was a very important part of our lives because she was very regular—I think she was secretary for a while—and those meetings would come up probably twice a month. And that was important. We were— Jane and I at least—had a chance to be in Girl Scouts and Campfire. I don't remember the older girls doing that. I don't suppose it was here then. And I can remember taking some music lessons. Those were the sorts of things we did.

LM: What did your family do in their free time?

LW: Ahh—great readers, played games, we had our tree house. And we could go out there and cook. David had a dugout and his friends would come over and play in the dugout. We had a bag swing across the yard. Played croquet, put the tubs out in the back yard and soaked in those on hot days. Played a lot of games; played a lot of card games.

LM: What reading material did you have besides the library books?

LW: I mentioned the magazines that came in—the *Saturday Evening Post* was an important paper in those days. We had the *St. Nicholaus* magazine for kids. David had the *Youths' Companion.* I had a little thing called the *Children's Magazine,* another one called *Little Folks*. We had magazines. Other magazines came in—women's magazines. The S*aturday Review* came in very early. *Literary Digest* came in before that. There was a lot of reading. Dad was reviewing books for the alumni magazines—we got a lot of books that way.. We always had new books for Christmas—always. Then we gave each other books.

LM: How often did you listen to the radio and what did you listen to?

LW: Oh boy! When we got the first radio dad fixed it up so that we could hear it both upstairs and downstairs. We listened to all the favorite evening programs. There was one called *The Three Doctors* that came out of Chicago at about four o'clock in the afternoon. We listened to that. It was marvelous to listen to symphony orchestras at last. Before that, we'd only heard music on the Victrola. There weren't the news programs that there are now. I'm sure there was news and weather reports but I don't remember that. We just listened to what was going on.

LM: Like—a lot?

LW: Yes, we listened a lot. Oh, and I'll tell you another thing that was terribly important was when the station at WOI opened in Ames. That we listened to every morning—that wake up program.

LM: And you did mention that you had a Victrola so you had lots of records?

LW: We had a piano. Mother played beautifully. And one of the clubs that they belonged to put on a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta at least twice. And a lot of the rehearsals would be right here, and they carried that whole crew up and performed it at Camp Dodge during the First World War. So there was music going on. Mother taught some piano, so there was kids coming in for lessons; I had lessons, not here, but away.

LM: Did you go to the movies very much?

LW: Oh yes. We went to the movies. That was our favorite kind of entertainment. It was ten cents for kids in those days. And so we saw all the movies. I don't know how we afforded it, but we did.

LM: Even though your circumstances weren't as affluent as they had been?

LW: Yeah. I don't remember that any of us had any chance to pick up any side money. Babysitting wasn't quite as common as it is now, although Jane did do some babysitting and I can remember doing it once or twice. And in the

summertime, Dad would be able to hire his daughters to come down and fold and stuff all the mailing that he had to do at the college, because he did a lot of the student recruitment at that point. We got thirty-five cents per hour. And we loved that money.

LM: What was your Saturday evening routine?

LW: I can't remember anything special, except in the fall, when we had college football games. Everybody could invite someone home for supper—and we had baked beans, cole slaw, pumpkin pie, and steamed brown bread. That was Saturday night, when there was a football game. So I can't remember the rest of it.

LM: You didn't go downtown every Saturday night?

LW: Nah. Not until we were teenagers—we could go on our own—it wasn't a family affair.

LM: No, but, as teenagers you did go down—

LW: Yeah, we did go down. Uh huh.

LM: What was your Sunday routine?

LW: If Dad was having the choir, we always had to get up and rush off to choir. I sang in the choir, Mary sang in the choir, sometimes Jane did. And Margaret would stay home and get Sunday dinner, and we'd go to church. If Dad didn't have the choir, it wasn't so important. Oh well, I'll tell you what was important. All through the college year, we went to vespers every Sunday afternoon at Herrick chapel—that was a beautiful service. And Dad played the organ, and they had the men's choir and the women's choir march in. It was all very impressive. So we went to the chapel every Sunday afternoon, went to vespers.

LM: Now you already explained that your father was connected with the college and that your mother did volunteer work, more or less. So, that's pretty much how you got your money to live on, through your father's salary?

LW: Since he had been an instructor in organ, and he had lots of pupils who were out playing organs in churches in the state, his summer job was to run around all over the state tuning and taking care of organs. So that was extra money that we fit in—and David usually went with him on those trips. I guess that was the only way we'd get any income. We didn't sell any garden produce. I can't remember anything else except what the girls began to earn.

LM: How would you compare your standard of living during the Depression to others living in the town?

LW: It was sort of interesting. I can remember at one time feeling that, for one year, we were more affluent than anyone else because we had a regular salary. But

that lasted a very brief period. And, we were all in the same boat after that—scrounging along, making due with whatever we could.

LM:But you always had enough to eat?

LW: Yeah. We baked our own bread in those days. Always had.

LM: Now when your family members were employed elsewhere, were they members of unions ever?

LW: I think that David only joined the union perhaps once when he was back here living here in Grinnell. He would do construction work or whatever that he could get. And, I think he joined the union when he was a glove cutter down at the Morrison-Ricker Factory. When he was called into the Second World War—he only stayed in there, I suppose, only a year—and then he was over age at that point. And he was allowed to come out and work. And he did glove cutting. He also worked at he Post Office. I think he joined a union then. My father belonged to the American Guild of Organists, but that was more of an honor than a union.

LM: Did you have any sense of what was going on with the farmers then, during the Depression? The Farmers Holiday, and all that about killing the baby pigs?

LW: You couldn't help but know that. It was always in the news and, while we weren't directly involved with that, we knew what was happening. And when I was talking about the barter at the college—that was sort of interesting because I can remember one time some students came down here from St. Ansgar and brought a load of onions to pay part of their tuition. And one summer, David raised beets—a lot of beets—and sold them to the college. And—this is just by the way but—when he was delivering those beets to the college, they had to go down a ramp that was alongside the quadrangle. And it was at that point that this person named Frank Cooper was working Saturdays for us—and I went with him to go down to deliver these beets. And as they went down this ramp, Cooper grabbed a raw egg that was along the side and, [laughing] to get rid of it he had to eat it—and he turned into Gary Cooper later on. But this was just an incident, and it was just funny.

LM: Were there people in Grinnell employed by the PWA?

LW: Oh sure—it had to be done, to keep the thing going.

LM: I'm wondering about your attitude towards those people, did you resent that they were getting more money?

LW: Oh no, no resentment whatever as far as I can recall, and that business about just leaning on their shovels always annoyed me. I didn't feel that that was true.

LM: What were some of the public works projects in Grinnell?

LW: Well, one of the things that delighted my mother the most was that we, for once, had a director of recreation in Grinnell. And that was part of the WPA program and Mother became involved in this very closely because, after my father died in 1936, she had to have work because there was this family to keep going. And her pension from the college or the Carnegie foundation was twenty-five dollars a month. And so she went to work as a supervisor of housekeeping aides to the WPA. So, that meant that she was out of the house eight hours a day on her job. And, on that job, she worked with these women, trying to teach them nutrition, and clothing, and how to make something out of nothing in the way of recreation stuff for their kids and so on. So she was very much involved with all that and—

LM: Did she receive a salary?

LW: Yes, she had a salary for that. And we always had a car through all those years, and sometimes she had to drive out of town to go supervise other units. But, the recreation program was the thing that I remember most distinctly. Now as far as the kinds of work that they did building camps and parks and so on, that didn't touch us as closely cause there was nothing here. But going back beyond that, before that, Merrill Park I can remember as a whole community project when everybody went out and worked that day to start building that park. And a man named Jesse Fellows was the director of it. And he was a very good person for that. And that was an all day affair that everybody chipped in to build a park. So that was pre-WPA. As far as WPA work around Grinnell, I don't know. There were already a dance hall, and dressing rooms, and a pavillion down at the lake, so they didn't have to do anything for Arbor Lake. I can't remember anything else.

LM: In what ways did your family try to solve the economic problems during the Depression?

LW: Well, Dad went out and tuned organs. Jane did a little baby-sitting. Margaret got a job. David took whatever he could get.

LM: Now, when you say that Margaret got a job, did she send money home too?

LW: She tried to but, jumping ahead a little, when I got out of college it was 1935. I had taken—had wanted to go to Ames to study home economics to become a journalist. That was not possible because we could go to college very cheaply by staying at home. And so I took all the art courses that I might transfer into the program I wanted at Ames. I ended up taking a major in art at Grinnell College, with a minor in education so that I could get a teaching certificate. But I didn't have

a job for the first two years that I was out of college. And, at that point Margaret was working and she would write to me and slip in a dollar, which was big money in those days, when I was away from home. And, in the summertime, beginning in 1934, Mother—and she took Connie with her—went up to Michigan, and she had a job at a girl's camp up on Crystal Lake up near Frankfort, Michigan which is up near Lake Michigan. And that earned Connie's tuition, so they had their room and board out of that. And then the three summers following that, I was the one who did that because my father was ill. And so, we would have that. And, when I came out of college the first year, I stayed at home in the fall, and then in the winter I did manage to get up to Ames and take some graduate work. And the following summer I went to camp. And that fall I went home with the camp director to a place in southern Michigan where I had a job. She wrangled a job for me as assistant to the house mother in a women's dormitory at a little Baptist college in Hillsdale, Michigan and then I had room and board out of that. That's the year that Margaret would send me a dollar and it was big money.

Side Two

LM: Do you remember any disasters, either economic or natural, that affected either you or your family? Were there any storms that—?

LW: Well the day the banks closed was pretty disastrous for everybody. We all had little savings accounts—I remember we would belong to the Christmas clubs—ten cents a week to save up for Christmas presents. And so, we lost a little money in that. However, Mother always used to relate that Louis Phelps was the treasurer of the college at that point and she said he never missed a payroll. She didn't know how he found the money, but he never missed a payroll. And so, we would have whatever we were earning—whatever Dad was earning for those periods. So, the bank failure didn't strike us as too serious—we didn't lose out a lot by that. The biggest— I can't remember any natural disasters of any kind. The biggest personal disaster was a fire to this house, which happened when I was up at Ames and I didn't know about it until I came home for Spring vacation. But that fire was rather disastrous because it burned from the attic—it came from the chimney in the attic—and burned down. But the water damage was the heavy part. You know, it came down all through the house and,while they tried to cover up the hole, I think they just couldn't because there was a big rain storm. And my father was helpless at that time, he was an invalid. So, mother had to supervise all the reconstruction that

came on later. It took a long time. And she came out all right. Her insurance paid enough to reconstruct everything that had to be reconstructed. That was a time and a half.

LM: How did the churches help families in need during the Depression? Were there any homeless people do you think?

LW: Well, there was certainly terribly poor people. I was taking a class at the college with Mrs. Conard, Mrs. Henry Conard. It was called sociology. And we were to do some field work. And I remember interviewing a man who belonged to the railroad union. And I was given a home to visit down in the south part of Grinnell and I was appalled when I walked in. There was absolutely no furniture except a bed, the kids were playing on the floor with lumps of coal, and I was so naive that I asked the woman if she went to PTA meetings at Davis school. It would be just impossible because people just—well she—you couldn't do it. And I can remember walking up to that house, and up a wooden steps through sort of a muddy yard, and just being appalled at what I saw. Just had no conception that that was true in Grinnell. And—

LM: There really was a difference between the way you were living and the way other people were living—

LW: Oh yes. Well, they probably had come off a farm with nothing at all. And there were always in that period, those early days—since we lived only a block from the railroad—there were often tramps. Now those would not be more frequent perhaps during that period, but we would see that. And as far as the rest of the poverty in Grinnell—yes, it was certainly there. And Mother would get in touch with that because she and Mary both worked with Mrs. Conard down at the Uncle Sam's Club—and those were some of the very poorest people.

LM: But she must have run into them somewhat in her days on the welfare program?

LW: Oh yes. We would know the kind of families that were in the most desperate conditions—but I can't remember their names right now.

LM: What were the attitudes of town people and rural people toward each other?

LW: Well, there was a kind of mutual respect, but there was not a closeness in any sense. I can't remember any people coming into these groups that I've talked about from the farms. One of the first people that might have belonged to a men's club in town would have been Mr. Blakely, who lived just south of town and raised sheep. Now he seemed to belong to things.

LM: Well he was a director of one of the banks, wasn't he?

LW: Yes, I guess he was. And then we had members of the church who were certainly from the country.

LM: There was no antagonism?

LW: No antagonism. We didn't get to know them because they didn't come into school until we met them in junior high or high school really. By the time the country schools began to close that began to change.

LM: What were the attitudes of town people and college people toward each other?

LW: I can't really say so much about that because I was from the college. There was always a breach, as there still is, and I expect that it's true in every town where there's a college. And, I went to Cooper school, which may have helped because it was so close to the college. Because I remember we had practice teachers from the college all the time. There was a woman who used to come over and teach us music and so on. So there was that connection—and the college students were the ones who ran the Uncle Sam's Club.

LM: Wasn't there some animosity by the townspeople towards the college because of the tax situation?

LW: I don't remember ever hearing that in those days. I've heard it since. I hear it a lot now—about that and Mayflower both.

LM: There weren't really a lot of other religious faiths in Grinnell in those days, or different ethnic and racial backgrounds to speak of?

LW: There were some differences. The Methodist church, the Congregational church, the Baptist church which stood where Dr. Bauman's office is now. Very important churches. The Catholic church I remember being built, and it had been in a very small, wooden building, south part of town, near Davis School. And those were the important churches—they were all clustered around downtown. Later, these smaller sects began to grow. I can remember hearing some very interesting revival meetings at the little church down on—well, right near you, just north of Cooper School on Tenth and Elm Street. There were tent meetings when revivals would come in.

LM: Did the Chatauqua come to Grinnell?

LW: The Chatauqua came, and the tent shows came. Those were always fun. The circus came—that was always a great day. Yes, we had all that. There was a lot really going on. I used to be really smug about my town. I thought that we were a

very fortunate town, that we had some early social work, early hospital, and other sorts of things that were more forward than other towns had had.

LM: There were two hospitals in Grinnell, which was quite something for a town of this size.

LW: And the year that I was born, 1913, there was a little hospital here—that one right south of your family home on Elm Street. I wasn't born there, but Ruth Peck was and I was really impressed because of that. But you go back to what did people do about the poor and needy in town. I can remember that, one Christmas program at the Congregational Church, a men's class would always stand up and very proudly announce, "We are giving a ton of coal." And, so, there was that kind of giving, and we always had food drives at those things.

LM: I remember the harvest days at church where you'd bring a can of something, and that was given to the poor.

LW: We learned to that sort of thing through our Camp Fire Girls and so forth.

LM: Did your family use alcoholic beverages?

LW: That's very interesting—

LM: Routinely, on festive occasions, seldom, or not at all?

LW: Ok. I grew up during Prohibition. And I can remember when I was down in Keokuk one time, visiting—we were all down there visiting my aunt and uncle and my grandparents were all around there—and I was shocked because my parents drank near-beer. And, then I was further shocked when my father was ill, that these staid college professors were bringing him little gifts of liquor. And, by that time, repeal had come. So no, we didn't have liquor. Mother made brandied fruit—now where she got her alcohol I don't know. It was not part of our lives.

LM: And it was no problem in your life at all. How did people feel in those days about the honesty of elected officials?

LW: Well, there had been terrible scandals before our day. There had been Boss Tweed and this, that, and the other. We didn't think that Harding was a very honest man. And there had been the Teapot Dome scandals. There had been lots of bad political things before nowadays.

LM: But, during the Depression, do you think that people thought that there was a lot of dishonesty going on and so on?

LW: I think that people expected some kind of shenanigans. Suspected it.

LM: Do you think nationally, statewise, or locally?

LW: I think that there might be a suspicion sometimes that, "Why is that particular person getting WPA money when so and so isn't." We always felt that there must be some ways to manage these things.

LM: These questions have to do with education. I pretty much know the answer but, what sort of educational training took place within your family?

LW: We all went to college. Jane and David didn't graduate. Mother didn't graduate because she got married and Connie didn't graduate because she got married. So we all had very rare opportunities. And college— School was easy for everybody but Jane and David. They struggled.

LM: And your family did place great importance on formal education?

LW: Yeah, Margaret turned out to be Phi Beta Kappa. Margaret took a masters degree, I took a masters degree.

LM: Did expectations differ for boys and girls? I would assume not.

LW: I don't think so at that point. I mean, if we could make a living, it didn't matter if we were boys or girls.

LM: And you already answered what levels of schooling your family members achieved. How was this affected by the Depression though? I mean, did it take you longer to get through school?

LW: It didn't take me any longer. Jane dropped about her junior year, and I don't know when David dropped. My father had come to the college, to Grinnell, with a whatever they gave at the school of music at Oberlin; but he then went on and studied and took a degree at Grinnell as of the class of 1902. So he finished that. So, it was important to keep on it. Mother, until the day she died, was still trying to get her diploma at the college, [laughing] but she never did get it.

LM: What unusual skills and abilities did family members possess?

LW: Well, as I said, both Mother and Father were musicians. Very bright, both of them. Read a lot. Clever. What was the question?

LM: The skills and abilities of family members.

LW: OK, OK. Mary played the violin. Margaret, we always felt, was not musical. But she enjoyed music.

LM: She could write though—

LW: She could write. Mary was an expert seamstress and she studied dress design at a school in Chicago, and studied with a woman who did custom dressmaking and learned all the finest kinds of detailing. So there was that skill. Jane was an excellent cook, and made use of that. Connie is a very good artist, and has

used it in many kinds of ways. I was an art teacher. I don't consider myself an artist, but I'm a very good craftsman, and I love to teach. I can do lots of things.

LM: And you weave well.

LW: And I weave. Connie weaves. Mother weaved. Mother was always interested in weaving, having watched her Swedish grandmother, who emigrated here, at her loom in the country-house that they lived north of Keokuk.

LM: By what criteria, financial, educational, occupational, or social, did the family measure success?

LW: I don't think— I don't quite know how to answer that. We had to make a living was the first thing. I think scholastic honor was important. Any kind of achievement of that sort was important. Anything that we did that got recognition was important, but we weren't really pushed very hard to do any of those things. None of us became musicians because Dad's theory was: we were offered an opportunity but if we were going to be musicians we were going to be, and if we weren't, there's no point in pushing.

LM: You've already mentioned how your family members were involved in community affairs and charitable activities. What were their attitudes towards politics, political parties. Did they participate?

LW: We were born Republican, because that's just what we were. This is a very Republican community, and my brother voted Republican until he died because his grandfather had voted Republican—my mother's father. We became Democrats during the Depression, and my first vote was for Franklin Roosevelt as a presidential candidate. So, we became very liberal later on. It was partly influenced by an interest in social problems. You couldn't help but become a little more liberal from that point of view. And, well, that's enough of that. I think that everyone in our family voted Democrat by the time we were adults except David.

LM: Now this is a little bit about World War II here. What was your reaction when the United States entered World War II?

LW: I had a very hard time, I was teaching school over in Illinois at this point, and I was living with a family over in Galesburg, Illinois. And this woman was very cynical about Roosevelt, and I used to stand up for Roosevelt that he was never going to start us into a war, and, of course he did. And so I had to back down on that. I did not live with her at that point and I was glad I didn't. I had grown up to be a pacifist because I had a very good civics teacher when I was in high school, and we were disarming at that point, and I thought that this was going to go on forever and we were never going to war again—but we did. In a great big way.

LM: So this was not what you had wanted?

LW: No. I don't think that any of us had wanted it. And you get caught up in a fervor after a while, because you're all doing whatever you can for the war. Saving grease, saving tin cans, knitting, whatever. Rolling bandages. And, by that time, I was teaching in another town in Illinois and I was taking care of the Junior Red Cross in the high school—and, of course, that got me kind of involved. And I would go up to a veteran's hospital up near Hines, Illinois where there were German prisoners cleaning the wards and so on, and I tried to take some craft skills up there. So we would get involved, you couldn't help it. And I don't think I was super patriotic. My brother went into service briefly. Nobody else did. I suggested to mother, "Should I go into the WAC?" And she said, "You're doing just as good a service by teaching school." So I didn't go into the WAC. And that was as close as it touched us, except for the fact that the college had no men in it, and the Officer Training Corps came here—which involved us with a lot of other guys.

LM: Then World War II did not disrupt your family particularly?

LW: Not really. Our two closest relatives were men cousins, and none of them served. The closest it came to us was when Connie married a man who was already in service. And that, of course, was a very tense time waiting for him to come back whole. And that was as close as it came to us.

LM: What was the community feeling during WW II? Were they supportive, did they have programs to promote the—

LW: Well there were bond sales all the time. And I can remember to this day that: "Buy, buy, buy bonds" was what you said everywhere you went. And so we bought bonds—you almost were forced to.

LM: Was there grease collection, tin can collection?

LW: Yeah, there was grease collection. I wasn't living at home at this time, I was away teaching school, but I know that that was true. And, of course, rationing. We were all caught up in that, and the difficulties of that.

LM: Did you have a car at this time?

LW: I didn't have a car, but the family did And when my grandmother died in 1943, we wanted to take her ashes to Keokuk—which meant gas—and a family friend wrangled some gas for us.

LM: Were you aware that there were migrant workers in Grinnell during the World War II time?

LW: Not particularly. I think that some of them came in probably to help with the corn picking,the big harvests. But I can't remember— Going back a little bit

when you were asking about the ethnic people in Grinnell, and the other kinds of people that we might have known—they were not very frequent, but there were a few people with foreign heritages on the campus. And that was always very interesting. And there were two or three families of Black people in Grinnell who went to school with us. So they finally left so there were no Black people living here in that capacity until the college began to hire, and other people in Grinnell began to hire—but there was that much diversity. And there were some ethnic feeling, there really was. I remember that I had a very good friend who was a Catholic, and this was new to me to know anyone who was a Catholic. And as far as Jewish people were concerned, there were only some Christian Jews in Grinnell—the Steiners, that I knew about, and one storekeeper. Yet there would be little funny feelings about, "Well, they're German," or, "He's an Italian." Things of that sort would be said.

LM: Was there enough sense of antagonism to those people with German names in the community?

LW: I'm sure there had been in the first World War, but I was too young to recognize that. But the people that I met later on said that they were affronted when they came through—they were German—seeing a sign, "English only spoken here," on the depot downtown. Because there was that feeling here. And I remember the little German Lutheran church over on Elm Street painted their tower red, white, and blue. Things of that sort. And there was a family down here on the corner that we—you know—"He's a German, he's a pro-German." So there was that kind of stuff going on.

LM: Were there people in the community who were pro-German?

LW: We thought so when we were kids. We didn't know. I suppose there were, but then—

LM: How do you think the Depression affected you and your family?

LW: Well, sure slowed things down. I don't think it really hurt us—it probably strengthened us in some ways. I certainly know that, as long as I have lived, I still have the feeling of having to make everything last as long as possible—make everything do as long as possible, saving stuff because it might be useful. And appalled at the way that other people have been able to spend their money which I think is extravagant. And that's all a carry-over from having so little income.

LM: Do you think that you'd be different if you hadn't experienced the Depression?

LW: Well, I wouldn't have been so different because of that as I would have been if I had been an only child in the family where I could have gone to college where I wanted to. But that's another matter completely. I don't think so.

LM: That doesn't really have anything to do with the Depression—it's just the number of people in your family.

LW: I just think— Would I have had a different education if there hadn't been a Depression? And I'm not sure I would have had. I think I probably would have still stayed at home and gone to college. We were very proud of the college—we thought that this was a very superior college from the very beginning.

LM: And how did World War II affect you and your family?

LW: Well, I already mentioned that David went into service for a while, which was a hardship for Mother because she had to have somebody to stoke the furnace and to take care of the mechanical parts, and the hard work around a place of this size. And the fact that Connie's husband was always in a dangerous position out in the ocean on that little boat, and when her two close friends were in that predicament. I don't think that it affected us much more—except privations of one kind or another—not being able to travel easily.

LM: Well, that's the end of the, more or less, formal questions. Do you have any memories, particular memories, of those days that you'd like to share with us?

LW: There was something running through my mind a few minutes ago that I can't quite get back. I don't think so.

LM: But, you must find it nice to be living in this house again, after having been raised in this house?

LW: Yeah. That was quite accidental.

LM: And all these memories are triggered by what's around you constantly, I would think.

LW: Could be. Also, the fact that I lived here with my husband—so there was a different feeling about the house—has maybe superseded that. I don't think— I always liked this house. I always wanted to come back and visit, but I never thought much about coming back here to live except for the fact that when Mother, in her older years, could no longer earn any money for herself. Although she tried to by weaving or teaching weaving, or whatever—making bread, or whatever. She did earn enough to make a social security check, a very little one, but at least that was some help. It came about by the fact that my husband and I said she should be getting the benefit of the value of this house while she lived, because she was so poor. And so, at that point, we proposed to take it on annuity; but Margaret and

Paul Kiesel wanted to do that, so they did it. And, at a point when they wanted to be relieved of this, we bought it from them. And so, when my husband, who was away teaching, was finally ready to retire, he said, "Well, let's just go back to Grinnell." So we did. So there we are.

LM: Perhaps you should tell us a little bit about your husband, so that we have that on the record.

LW: Well, OK, my husband was Henry Nelson Wieman, and he, by chance—no, not by chance—he was the father of Connie's husband, Robert Wieman. And we had met in this living room when they came to their wedding. And it was some years after that that I realized that he was interested in me as a person. So we were married in 1948. At that time, I had been teaching public school for all those years, and he was retiring, at that point, from the University of Chicago Divinity School where he had taught for twenty years. When we were married, he was living out in the desert in California where his sisters had homesteaded and built a house. They were teaching in Los Angeles, and he thought that his professional career was over, and that we'd just live out in the desert. Well, that was not true. Within a few months, he was teaching at the University of Oregon when a man had died over Christmas vacation. We were married in September. After that, he taught in Houston, he came and taught for a year in Grinnell, and after that he went to Southern Illinois University in Carbondale and stayed there ten years. It was from there that we moved back to Grinnell. And so, he had a long, long career. He died in his ninety-first year. So he had had a long career. He loved this place because it gave him a chance to do a lot of heavy exercise. He had to have heavy exercise. So he'd go out and chop wood, and clear out the grove, and do various strenuous things. So it was a nice place for us.

LM: What is your most precious memory of those early days when you lived here? Just the family and—

LW: Just because we were a nice big family—and, pretty much, a friendly family. Within us there were some differences to be sure, but I was proud of my family, proud of my house, proud of my town, my college.

LM: You remember, then, when the elm trees were all here.

LW: Oh yeah. Of course, when this place, when Grinnell was built, there wasn't a tree in town. And that's common knowledge, I think. The trees were down along the creek down below us. And, on this particular place, there were no trees except the orchard trees. So, we had to watch all those grow. And Father planted a lot of poplars which grew up to be big trees, and there's still one of those way up in

the grove. And then, we planted a lot of evergreens also. So, we always cut our own Christmas tree out of the yard for a number of years. And he was very much interested in botany and horticulture. He and Mr. Conard would go botanizing down by the Skunk River and bring back a lot of wildflowers. And I have those wildflowers still today to enjoy. Some of them have died out, but not all. And Mother was appreciative of those things. As a girl, as a high school girl, in Keokuk, she had had an herbarium, so she was interested in plants, and she was interested in nutrition. She took a course with Mr. Conard during the First World War about making food go farther, because there was a shortage of flour and sugar, of course. And so, we weren't nutritional cranks, but we had some interesting experiments. In those days we'd send a huge grocery order to Sears-Roebuck.

LM: A grocery order to Sears-Roebuck? Tell me about that. I hadn't—

LW: We'd get these huge, big things of peanut-butter.

LM: I didn't know you could order your groceries.

LW: We got a lot of groceries from Sears in those days. I don't know how many years that went on. And I can remember having a bag of flour, or sugar perhaps, up in the closet upstairs because it was so big you had to hide it. So we put it somewhere. And, for a while we raised our own eggs—chickens and eggs. And, of course, milk was delivered raw in those days by neighbors or whomever. What tipped me off on that?

LM: Well you were just talking about things—

LW: Well, I can't get it back. [laughing] I remember one summer, we went up to Clear Lake and I was just a kid—and I probably heard about this—but the man across the street, Gabe Wells, took care of our garden. And he was supposed to pick the produce, and put it on the train, and send it to us up at Clear Lake, which he did for a few times. The garden was important. We raised melons, strawberries, asparagus—

LM: You had grapes, I remember.

LW: Grapes, grapes, grapes. I still have some nice grapes out there. They're the vines that were brought here from the Kiesel house when that was being vacated for Mayflower. Margaret had brought up a lot of stuff from that place.

LM: Well, I'd like to thank you very much for sharing with us.

LW: I'm sure I've left things out, I don't know what.

LM: Well, if you think of things later, maybe we could do another one.

LW: I would like to remark that this house cost $3500 when it was built. And we still have the contracts for it. And, I haven't any idea what it's worth now, but it's

not $3500. I bought it very cheaply. I bought it for about eighteen thousand. That was in nineteen-fifty something. But when I see the prices houses go for today in Grinnell, I can hardly believe it. Old houses go for over a hundred thousand dollars. I just shake. It's a different world now.