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Interviewer: Dolores Smith
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Lucille "Sid" Potts

Side One

This is Dolores Smith [DS] on March 28, 1992 interviewing Lucille (Sid) Potts [LP] for the Friends of Stewart Public Library Oral History Project: Grinnell during the Great Depression and World War II.

DS: Sid, the first thing I want to ask you, I called you Lucille when I introduced you, but everybody calls you Sid. How did that happen?

LP: My brother is six years younger than I am, and when he was a little boy he couldn't say "sister." He couldn't say "Lucille." And he started with "Sid." And I have gone by the name of Sid, even the teachers in school called me Sid. I know it's a short name for a man by the name of Sidney, but it— I really liked it, and when they say "Lucille," I wonder who they're talking about.

DS: Well, we know, but we prefer "Sid," too. So you have one brother. Tell me about your family.

LP: I was born in Grinnell, and I've lived in Grinnell practically all my life. My mother and father ran a railroad restaurant at Third Avenue and Park Street where the former Triple S Plumbing Company was. The trains would stop and at five o'clock and they would all come in for hamburger sandwiches, coffee and pie, and they would be there for twenty minutes. And then the brakeman would come and say, "All aboard," and they would get on the train and be on their way. My mother and father were divorced when I was six and my brother was a baby. And my mother took the restaurant over from then until I was—let's see, I think I was in high school—or had I started—I think I had started in the bank by that time—when my mother quit the restaurant. And we had lived in the same place at 603 Broad Street which is quite a change of neighborhood at this time of my life. But—

DS: You were born in that house, too?

LP: No, I was born on Park Street where part of the Mayflower Home is, and then my grandfather came to live with us, and he bought the home at 603 Broad Street. And I lived there until March 23rd, 1968, at 603 Broad.

DS: So you're well acquainted with that part of town.

LP: Yes, I am. And it's hard to realize that it's changed so with the Mayflower Home, which has had a remarkable improvement over the years.

DS: Well, when were you born, Sid?

LP: I was born at home, October 19, 1910.

DS: You were born at home.

LP: I think so. I've kind of forgot—I'm just sure I was, uh-huh.

DS: Your mother didn't tell you much about that.

LP: No.

DS: What was the house like? It was a modern house?

LP: Oh, yes, it was modern. But I was very small when we moved over to 603 Broad that my—and my grandfather lived with us for a few years until he passed away.

DS: Your grandfather—?

LP: Owned the house, and then he left it to my mother.

DS: What was his name?

LP: David Rowland. R-O-W-L-A-N-D.

DS: Sid, where did you go to grade school?

LP: Davis School. And we had a Principal, Lucy Davis who the school— The school was named after her.

DS: While she was still living?

LP: While she was still living, uh-huh—it was named—

DS: I didn't know that. And then you went to high school—

LP: Here in Grinnell. And then from high school I went to Quincy, Illinois, to business college. And came home at Christmas time, intending to go back to take the Civil Service examination to go to Washington, D.C., and I got sick with the flu. And Carl Child called me from, it was called the Citizens National Bank at that time, and asked me to come to the bank and be interviewed, and my mother told him I was too sick with the flu. And he said, "We'll send a taxi after her, and she won't even need to be interviewed, just have her step in my office." And it was snowing that day, and I was really sick with the flu, but he sort of insisted that I come up. So the taxi came up over the ground, clear up to our steps, and I was real bundled up, and I went up to the bank and stuck my head in the door of his office and he said, "If you're interested, you're hired, at sixty dollars a month." And I said, "I'm too sick to start." And he said, "You just take your time till you get well, but you can start at sixty dollars a month." And this was in Depression. It was around the first part of January, 1929, and money was very scarce, so I decided it would be best. My brother would be going to college

pretty soon and it would be best if I took a job and stayed with my mother. So that's how I started at the bank.

DS: Well, how did Carl know about you before?

LP: Well, I went to Sunday School, and Carl and his wife, Blanche, were involved in the church. And, I don't know, he had just known me since I was a little girl, So, I guess that's why.

DS: And he just thought you'd be good at the bank.

LP: Well, evidently.

DS: And he was right.

LP: Well, I don't know about that.

DS: This was 1929—

LP: Yes, and I started January 15th, after I got a little over the flu. But things were real rough at that time. Jobs were scarce, and I was very thankful to get a job, and I've been real happy to stay in Grinnell.

DS: So what did you do, then, at your first job?

LP: Oh, I was a bookkeeper, and it amazes me now how many are in the bookkeeping and in the bank, because there were three, three I think there were two or three tellers and three in the bookkeeping. There was about six or seven of us employed, including the officers, in the whole bank.

DS: And this was the Merchants—

LP: No, this was the Citizens National Bank. We had—they had recently moved over from the corner where Hammond's Jewelry Store is now.

DS: That's on—

LP: Broad Street and Fourth Avenue, or Main Street and Fourth Avenue, and when the Merchants National closed, the Citizens moved over to where the Brenton National Bank is now at Fourth and Broad.

DS: What was Carl Child's position at the bank?

LP: I think he was—I'm not sure, but I think he was Cashier, because George McMurray was the president at that time, and I think Carl was Cashier.

DS: Well, then, '29 was such an important year in banking, what happened with the crash in 1929 at that bank? [Ed. note: The stock market crash.]

LP: I remember, I think this was the year of the bank holiday?

DS: Um-huh.

[Ed. note: The bank holiday actually took place in March of 1933.]

LP: I remember that day very plainly. My mother was sick with the flu and I got— For some reason I got up very, very early that morning, and got the paper and

the headlines in the paper said, "Bank Holiday. All Banks Closed." And I remember, I got on my clothes, I didn't even wait for breakfast. I ran all the way from 603 Broad Street up to the bank, which is about three blocks, and they let me in the bank, and they said, "We won't open. We're closed." And this was, I tell you— We were all shocked, we didn't know what was going to happen. And I remember, I was dating my future husband, and we wanted to go to the show, and I broke open—he had no money—we couldn't write any checks. Nobody had any money, and I broke open my bank and I got out, I think I had about a dollar in change, and we went to the movie that night and had—we got in for ten cents apiece, and we stopped at Candyland, which is now where Cunningham's Drug is, and had two cokes for a nickel. And we were out— We didn't go to work for I forget how long we were closed. But the one thing that I remember fully, we were the first bank in Poweshiek County to be opened in the whole county to do business after the Bank Holiday

DS: Were people knocking on the doors trying to get in, or—? How did people react?

LP: Well, at first, the first day, I remember we stayed till noon—we didn't open the bank, but yes, there was, as I remember—it's rather hard for me to remember so many years back, but as I remember, people wanted change, and there were— We just could do no business. It really tied things up. I wish I could remember better.

DS: Well then, eventually were the people able to get to their bank accounts, or were they just lost then?

LP: Oh,no. Our bank opened up fully—full percent of the money in our bank was available to them when we, when it came the decree to open the banks. But all banks didn't open at that time, and some of them never did open.

DS: So people who had money in the Citizens National Bank did not lose money?

LP: Did not lose money. Not one cent.

DS: That's unusual.

LP: Yes, it is. And that spoke very well. Now I've kind of forgotten some of the other banks that— Some of them were closed permanently. Not in Grinnell, I don't think—I'm sure not. But we were the first— The thing that really impresses me, we were the first bank that opened.

DS: And you said that was how long after the closing? Six weeks or so?

LP: No, I can't, I just can't remember. I'd hate to quote it. It seemed like we were out a week or so.

DS: It was kind of a scarey time for people, wasn't it?

LP: Yes it was, I should say, and everybody had to gather up what little change they had—.See their money was tied up, and they had to get to buy groceries and things. People did take credit for things, or it would have tied everything up. But it was a scarey time.

DS: The grocery stores gave credit.?

LP: Yes. There was credit.

DS: There was a lot of faith there, wasn't there?

LP: Oh, I should say.

DS: It's hard to imagine that happening..

LP: Nowdays, but, it just showed it paid to live in Grinnell.

DS: Well now, during this time, your mother was, your mother and your father or just your mother was running—

LP: Just my mother, at that time. Um-huh, they were divorced when I was six years old, and see, this was in 1929 [Ed. note: 1933] so, no my mother had the restaurant still at that time.

DS: And it was beside the railroad track.

LP: Yes, beside the railroad tracks.

DS: Now, you mentioned the railroad people coming, but did other people come?

LP: Oh yes, and I never will forget— Charley, Chuck Manly's father lived within a couple of blocks of the bank and Mr. Manly stopped in for coffee and a little bit of breakfast about every morning on his way to work. And Homer Richardson, who used to have the lumber yard was a good customer, and Howard Tinnes which some of the people in Grinnell will still remember. Yes, she had a following. And the restaurant never closed. It was open twenty-four hours a day.

DS: Well, how long did she work every day?

LP: My mother worked from seven in the morning till seven at night, seven days a week. But I always looked forward to Friday night, because my brother and I would go to the restaurant and have a hamburger, and then she would take us to the movie, and that was our fun time.

DS: Did you ever work in the restaurant?

LP: Oh, I should say. And Jewel Rutherford Hawk would love to come down with me after school, and we helped through the supper hour, and Jewel loved to do that.

DS: Oh, so did you cook, or—?

LP: No, I was behind the counter and waited the tables. And we would have

the hamburgers all cooked and when the train came at five o'clock from Des Moines going to Chicago, uh, they would stop at five and the "All Aboard" signal would come at 5:20, so we'd have the hamburgers ready and pie and coffee, and that was mainly what everybody ordered because they had to get— And at state fair time we would just be simply swamped. They would just pile in there.

DS: So it was a pretty well-known place along the railraod.

LP: Well, it was called the Gem Cafe, and it was quite well known, I mean it kept us going.

DS: And how long did you say she continued?

LP: Let's see—until, I would say until about 1930, probably. And then, she gave it up, about 1930 or '31, I can't remember exactly.

DS: Well during those years she was so busy, she really did quite a job raising you two and having the restaurant.

LP: Yes, and when things got really rough—her sister lived in South Dakota—in North Dakota, and she and her husband had an insurance company there and they had one daughter— And things were so hard for my mother when my brother was young that he gave up his job and came down and lived with us. They came down and lived with us, and she graduated from high school, the daughter. Then they went back. They didn't go back to North Dakota, they went to the East, and they left, but they did help my mother through a very difficult time.

DS: Were there many single-parent families at that time?

LP: No, none that I remember. That didn't happen in those— And divorce was considered, well not considered the thing to do. But it was my father's fault and not my mother's, so— But it was hard for her to raise two.

DS: Oh, it would have been. She worked hard. The railroad, was very important to Grinnell at that time. Can you tell me any railroad stories?

LP: Well, not especially the railroad, but you see the Monroe Hotel was right catty-cornered across from my mother's restaurant, and there were numerous stories about the hotel, but I can't remember all of them. They used to tell the story about, this was before I was born, about the Underground Railroad that had the slaves and they hid them in the Monroe Hotel. And my mother had quite a bit of business from the hotel, traveling men would come over for their breakfast or their evening meal, because there wasn't any dining room at that time in the hotel. So, that was how she made a living, too. Because people didn't eat out in those days, the town people, like they do nowdays.

DS: I wondered about that.

LP: No

DS: If it had't been for the restaurant, you probably wouldn't have eaten out, either.

LP: No, I should say not, and I was trying to remember of other restaurants. There was the restaurant on Broad Street where, oh, about where Boeke's—Boeke's dentist—it was Phelps restaurant.

DS: Across from the park.

LP: Across from the park. And I remember that was about the only restaurant I can remember, and their daughter was about six years old, and the coffee, as they were making coffee, she was scalded and was killed, and it— As I was a child at that time, that made a great impression on me. But it was— I can't remember the name of the restaurant, but it was owned by Phelps, Clayton Phelps' father at that time.

DS: Was Central Park a big part of town?

LP: Oh, yes.

DS: What did they have going on there?

LP: Well, not really a lot going on, but it seemed to be, people would go and sit in the park not like they do. People don't do it nowdays for nothing. But you would go and sit in the park,. And I can't remember, I don't know as they had any playground equipment— I don't think at that time, none. But people would just go and kind of watch the children in the park.

DS: Was the gazebo there at that time? The one that's there now is a reproduction.

LP: Yes. I know. Yes, I think it was, but I've forgotten when it was torn down or any—

DS: Seems to me people talked about a cannon being in the park.

LP: Yes, there was a cannon in the park, but I'd forgotten about that, but there was. Because being with my mother in the restaurant, a lot of times I would just go over and sit in the park when we weren't— And always walked through the park, people did.

DS: Today you probably would have been considered a "latch key child" is that because you spent time at home without your mother being there?

LP: Oh, yes, lots of time, uh-huh.

DS: But in Grinnell it was no problem?

LP: No, no problem at all.

DS: Did you ever get to ride the train?

LP: Oh yes, I rode the train, even after I started in at the bank. The girls from

the bank on Lincoln's Birthday and Washington's birthday, Esther Hatcher and Hattie Johnson and I would get on the train at six o'clock in the morning and go to Des Moines, and on our vacation days, and then we would come back on the evening train. Yes, the train, the train was our mode of transportation.

DS: And it was pretty regular, wasn't it?

LP: Oh yes, I should say. And people would go into Chicago, That was the way, a lot of us didn't have any cars in those days.

DS: You didn't have—your family didn't have a car?

LP: No, we didn't.

DS: Tell me a little bit about the '30s then. How did the crash and the bank closing affect jobs in Grinnell and—

LP: Well, for instance, there's one thing I remember. When I started at the bank at sixty dollars a month, I thought that was a huge salary. And the first year, we got five dollars for Christmas. Now that would be in December, 1929. Well, in December, 1930, we didn't get anything for Christmas. Things were that bad. And you were just thankful that you had a job, and to make ends meet. And I remember my winter dress. It was a pink wool, and it was really quite a nice looking dress. And I paid $2.98 for my dress and I wore it—it was my good dress for two years. Now you couldn't even buy a pair of hose for $2.98.

DS: So other prices were comparable, too, was food—?

LP: Yes, yes they were. I can't remember what a loaf of bread cost, but it certainly wasn't very much. And hamburger was cheap for a pound of hamburger. And it's amazing to me that I still like hamburger after serving so many of them in my mother's restaurant, but it's still—a good grade of hamburger is still my favorite meat after all these years.

DS: You mentioned hamburger and pie. Who made the pie?

LP: The bakery made the pie. And it was delivered every morning. Different kinds of pie. It wasn't as good as homemade, but it was just the thing that everybody took for granted in those days.

DS: I'd like to get back to the bank again. The Citizens National Bank was at that time, in '29, in the Sullivan building, is that right?

LP: Yes.

DS: Okay. Then it changed from the Citizens National Bank to the Merchants National Bank?

LP: No. The Merchants National Bank had gone broke before the Citizens National Bank moved over into their building.

DS: I see. "Merchants National Bank" was on the front.

LP: Yes, yes, that's right. And then it ceased doing business, and the Citizens National Bank moved from Fourth Avenue and Main Street over to the Merchants National Bank on Fourth and Broad.

DS: Then when did the Brenton family become involved?

LP: In June, 1930, I think. In June, 1930, I'm sure that's the date. And I remember Carl Child took our small group of employees into the vault. This was on a Saturday morning, and he said, "I want you all to be here the next morning." That would be a Sunday. "Because," he said, "we're having a group of people come into the bank, and they will need help. And they—from now on we're changing from our bank into the Poweshiek County National Bank." I believe at that time— I've kind of forgotten. And I know, the— I always went to Sunday School and church in those days, and I remember, "Oh, I've got to miss church." But we got to the bank. It was on a Sunday, and we went in, and here were all these strange men. And I remember they had me add on the adding machine practically all day and we had sandwiches brought in, and we worked all day long. And the next day, the paper came out with a "special" announcing the change in the bank. It was a special edition of the *Herald Register*. I hope I'm right on all these dates. I'm just not sure, but it was in June, 1930.

DS: And who were the men, the strange men?

LP: The strange men were representatives of the Brenton family and Chuck Johnson, who recently passed away. And I've kind of forgotten who they were. But we were all sort of awed, because of these strange men. They were going to take over our bank. But it—they treated us very nice, and were wonderful to us. And they met, they had had meetings previously in a lawyer's office here in Grinnell, previous to the business transaction taking place. But of course, we didn't know any of this. This just happened from one day, and the next day the change took place. So, we were all sort of overcome by all this, because it was a decided change. But it all worked out very well. No one lost any money, and it went on just as usual.

DS: You mentioned the adding machine. What kind of a machine was it?

LP: It was a large machine on the floor. It had legs standing, different than they are nowdays. And I know I worked practically all day on the machine. I never will forget that.

DS: And you mentioned the bookkeeping that you were involved in. Was that done by hand or did you do it on a machine, or—?

LP: I'm trying to remember. I think we might have done—nothing like the machines they have nowdays, nothing, not at all. But, some of it was done, I believe,

by machine, and some of it was done by hand. I've sort of forgotten that. I can't remember. It's been so many years ago. And I know we put in long hours at the bank. We had lots of long hours, until it came to a time when the NRA came in, I believe it was the NRA, and then we would get some time off, like a morning a week, or something, because we had put in such long hours. I've kind of forgotten.

DS: Hmm. Were you paid for overtime?

LP: Oh, no. Overtime was— This was why they let us have some hours. No, we never got any overtime. That was a thing we never heard of.

DS: You were just glad to have the job.

LP: I was pleased to have a job, and I enjoyed my work very much. And the new owners of the bank were— We were sort of skeptical, you know, coming from the city, and they had come from Dallas Center and then they moved to Des Moines, and things like this. And we were skeptical, but they were really, they were very nice to us.

DS: One of those persons would have been Harold Brenton?

LP: Yes, he wasn't involved with us from day to day, but he was the head over all. And when we had directors' meetings, he was there, always.

DS: He had an uncle who was involved, too, didn't he?

LP: Yes, his name was Clyde Brenton. And I remember, soon after they took us over, uh, all of the employees and their banks at Dallas Center and Perry were invited to go to Dallas—Dallas Center to the country club—or, no, it was Perry, at the country club, and had all of the Brenton employees get together for a get-together. And that was something that was unusual for us. And we had closed the bank, and we went soon after that, on a Saturday.

DS: I think I remember that Harold Brenton, particularly was so interested in each employee at each bank. He knew their families and—

LP: And another thing about Mr. Brenton, he believed in promoting women, and that was unusual in those days. Nowdays it's the custom for women to get ahead, but in those days, he really promoted you, and he was interested in you. And even the boys, his sons, his three sons living, Bob, Buzz, and Bill, they carried on that tradition of being interested in you, which was sort of amazing for people from small towns, that people from the city would be so interested in you. And I have always given him credit for my promotions as I grew with the bank.

DS: He was also interested in Grinnell, wasn't he?

LP: Very interested, I should say, in promoting Grinnell, and the college, which was a good thing.

DS: So it wasn't just like an outside firm taking over.

LP: No, no, not at all.

DS: Was Mr. Child kept on then, as—

LP: Yes, he was. And it used to amaze me, the people that came back to Grinnell and wanted to know the history of Grinnell, they always went to Carl Child. He knew their families way back and was interested in talking about that. And now it seems like when they come back they ask Anna Ramsey or me about the old people [chuckle].

DS: What was the downtown area of Grinnell like? Was it a pretty active place or the hub of town?

LP: Well, I can't remember. I do remember, your groceries were delivered, and in the wintertime, they delivered them in sleighs, in the, I remember that distinctly. And I also remember that we used to, children don't do it nowdays because we don't have the snow, but we would go over to Main, to West Street, where [Highway] 146 is, and have your sleigh. And then the farmer would come along in his, with his horses, and you'd hitch your sleigh onto that and you could ride out of town a little ways, and then it was surely cold walking back. That's something I remember. But as the hub of Grinnell, I just can't remember too much. It has all changed so much since then, for all the better.

DS: For the better?

LP: Oh, my goodness, I should say. Our buildings look nice, and Grinnell—it amazes me how well Grinnell has progressed for a small town, because they always talk about some of the small towns in Iowa going by the wayside, but Grinnell really has kept up.

DS: But it was—were stores closed during the '30s, or did they stay open?

LP: I think some closed, yes, and never did open again. I can't remember exactly, but at that time, Moyles' Grocery Store, which was located right in the north part of our bank building, was a very important grocery store. And Dawley's grocery store on Commercial Street, close to the alley on Commercial Street was a place where you went for one cent candy.

Side Two

DS: You mentioned Candyland. Can you tell me about that?

LP: Oh, Candyland was the place to be. It was a wonderful candy kitche., The

candy was all home-made. It was owned by Pete and Ted Staffanou. They were Greeks. And it was just a place where everybody went. They married two nurses that were sisters. The brothers married sisters. And they were very influential at our hospital, the wives were. And this candy was out of this world. And it was known for "Candyland,"which is a concoction of vanilla ice cream with chocolate and marshmallow syrup with salted peanuts, and that has gone through for generations to generations. And I know that people who lived in Grinnell long years ago still come back and go into Cunningham's and ask for a "Candyland," which they still furnish.

DS: But it came from the name of the store.

LP: Of the to—yes.

DS: Did they make their fudge on marble slabs? Do I remember that?

LP: I don't remember, but it was all home-made. And they worked hard. And candy now is expensive, if you buy a box of Russell Stovers' or some of the Whitman'., But it was very cheap at that time, but at our prices of other things, it was probably in comparison. But it was quite a treat for us to go and be able to buy candy.

DS: You mentioned that they were Greek. Were there many different ethnic groups in town?

LP: There were very, very few. They were the only Greeks that I remember, and then Ikey Bucksbaum and his wife, Bessie, started a store in Grinnell. And we had a Negro family, Renfro family, that was simply a delightful family. But they all— No, Grinnell did not have any, very seldom, had ethnic groups.

DS: You lived in the Fourth Ward?

LP: Yes.

DS: Fourth Ward, south of the tracks. [Ed. note: Rock Island Railroad tracks]

LP: Yes, and it was not supposed to be a desirable neighborhood, it was—but a lot of families in those days, the McNally's, Lyman Case, Virgil Jones, a lot of the families, we all lived down there. But it was not as desirable as—people—but to me it was fine. We had a nice neighborhood, in my estimation. And across the street from our house was the Christian Church where the Mayflower is now. It was a small church. And it was well-attended, but of course all that's changed now, with the Mayflower. But it didn't bother me to live south of the tracks. There was more of a distinction in those days. They said, "Well, do you live south of the tracks or north of the tracks?" And we all had good friends down there, and it didn't make any difference to me.

DS: But you were aware of that feeling.

LP: Oh, yes, uh-huh. I remember there was a college professor's wife, I won't

name any names, but she thought there was quite a distinction. And we would just laugh about it.

DS: Umm. Was there a feeling among town people toward the country people, or how did town and rural people get along?

LP: Why, I think they got along all right. I never noticed any— I think Grinnell is a closer town now. We're much closer with the college. And, there's a feeling of—I think better now than there ever has been.

DS: So at that time there was a—

LP: Well, I think that the— I think there was a feeling that—there wasn't the closeness. Now that's the best way I can put it. But—because now I think we all work together better than in those times—but you must remember, that was Depression, and things— Whenever there was a drive it was very difficult. There weren't drives like there are nowdays and things like—people just couldn't afford it. You just were good if you could stay our of debt.

DS: Did many Grinnell children go, or students go to Grinnell College?

LP: College was not— A lot of them didn't have college education. A lot—some of us went to business college. Some—the majority, I would say at that time—started in working, at that time. But a few—some of them went to college. And it was a wonderful opportunity. But I didn't feel like— My family couldn't afford a college; business college was all I could get. They didn't have the grants and the scholarships in those days. If they had, it would have made it possible for a lot more of us to have gone than now, which is a wonderful thing now. It gives the opportunity to people to go, but in those days, things were so tough, if you could just get along and make a living and not get in debt. Debt was different in those days. You didn't want to be in debt, like with the credit cards now.

DS: Yeah. Can you tell me about some of the businesses that were in Grinnell, that offered, that provided jobs for people during the '30s. What—was there a glove factory?

LP: Yes, there was a glove factory and a washing machine factory, at—where the Elks building is now. And that employed—we were quite well-known for the washing machine and the glove factory. I was trying to think of other businesses.

DS: What about the Spaulding Company?

LP: Yes, now that was when I was a little tiny girl that I remember the Spaulding Company. And they started with buggies, and then they went into the Spaulding automobile, and that's broke, that's why they went broke. In fact, I was—two of my best friends were Miriam Spaulding and Betty Spaulding in those days. We

graduated in the same class in school.

DS: And the Spaulding family did go broke, then?

LP: Well, yes, the,the automobile didn't make a success.

DS: Did they continue to live in Grinnell?

LP: Yes, they continued, and the girls graduated from high school and then both went on to college.

DS: The washing machines. How long did that last?

LP: I can't remember. But I know some friends of mine worked in the office there later—that was—I was a little girl, but some, they were, they were older women, and they were friends of mine.

DS: What was the name of the washing machine?

LP: I can't remember. I think it was Grinnell Washing Machine Company, but I can't remember.

DS: Well, then tell me a little bit about when you were married.

LP: I had a home wedding, and it was at 603 Broad Street. And I just had two friends. It was Esther Hatcher from the bank and Jewel Rutherford Hawk were the only two friends. It was just a small home wedding. And things were still— This was in 1937, in September 15th, 1937. And one thing that was interesting. Dick at that time was employed by Mr. Lannom, in the glove factory. And we had to save $2,000 before we could get married. He was making $125 a month and traveling for the glove factory. And he had a car furnished, his meals furnished on the road. And he had no expenses, so he could save money. And my brother was in college at that time, so I couldn't save very much money. But we gathered this $2,000, and we had to prove that we had this before we could get married. Now we thought that that was quite unfair at the time.

DS: You had to prove to whom?

LP: To Mr. Lannom, because he was Dick's boss. But it turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to us. Because when Dick was supposed to be inducted in the service, they found that he had a pituitary tumor at the base of the brain, and he was classified a 4-F. So he had to get—he had to go— When they rejected him in Des Moines, he had to go to a doctor the next day, and get gas coupons to go to Iowa City for deep X-ray treatments. And those X-ray treatments— He drove back and forth every day, because the war was on, and housing, in the hospital, was simply impossible to stay. And we used up $1,500 of that money right away. So it proved to me the best thing that ever happened to us, so we didn't have to go in debt.

DS: Hmm. Now you mentioned the gas coupons, were you allowed more to

make these medical trips?

LP: Yes, but you had to get them from the doctor, and the doctor provided them for us, for Dick to go.

DS: Now, this was in '41 or '42, or—

LP: Oh, I have forgotten, exactly. I've forgotten the date.

DS: But you were married in '37

LP: '37, um-huh.

DS: And it was still really pretty much a depression.

LP: Yes, it was. Because when we went on our honeymoon, we went to South Dakota to visit a relative. And that was— We even got— We—I only took, I took a Friday and a Monday away from the bank, because you were scared to take any days off for fear you might get fired. Things were so rough in those days.

DS: Were there lots of young people in Grinnell at that time?

LP: Yes, quite a few, yes, and we made our own good times.

DS: You mentioned going to the movies. Where was the theater?

LP: We had two theaters, but the theater that we all enjoyed so much was at the Colonial Theater, and that was at the corner of, where Davidson's and the office supply company is now.

DS: That's at Fifth and Main. [Ed. note: SW corner]

LP: Fifth and Main, and it was, it had two floors. And the second floor was called "nigger heaven." And they wouldn't use that term nowdays—you may want to— And we got traveling shows that came through. And, oh, were you lucky to get to go to one of those, I had forgotten. But I remember, we had a family by the name of Reynolds family that had, I think, four or five daughters. And one of the daughters was a member of this traveling troupe. And we were always so pleased when she came back to Grinnell, and everybody made an attempt to go to the Colonial Theater. And we couldn't afford the seats on the first floor, so we went to the second floor, the balcony. And that was a big event, to go, and if you happened to have a date, and they asked you to go, you were really thrilled to pieces.

DS: Hm. Now the Reynolds family, this Reynolds girl, was she a singer?

LP: She was an actress. These were traveling stage shows. And the girls went to school here. I've kind of forgotten. I believe they—I'm not sure that they had a— Their parents were dead, and they were— I think a Dr. Evans, who had a medical practice here in Grinnell was their guardian, some way. It's been so long ago, I have forgotten. But they did go to high school here in Grinnell.

DS: Well, beside these traveling shows, were there regular movies?

LP: Yes, we had movies, and they were the, they were not speaking movies. They— The first movie I went to, the words were placed on the screen. And there was a piano player, in sort of the pit of the movie. And it was run, it was owned by the Mart family, George Mart, who is now deceased, Margarite Mart's husband. His name was Bill Mart, and they had the first movie stu—theater here in Grinnell. And it was located on Fourth Avenue where the Chamber of Commerce is now. That was the first movie that I can remember. And the pianist was Velma Reynolds. And whenever anything was exciting, she would pound the piano, and it was, it was quite a treat for us in those days, to go to the movie.

DS: What other things did you do for entertainment? I was wondering particularly about Arbor Lake. Was that something that—

LP: Oh, Arbor Lake was tremendous. We would have lots of picnics down there. And that was really the place to go. We had a bathhouse. You'd go down there and you could change your clothes in the bathhouse. And on Sundays there was a motorboat, you could take a motorboat ride. It seemed to me like it was twenty-five cents. And it was only on Sundays, and you could ride. And oh, it was—oh, the beach was full. It was, it was the place to go.

DS: Now was this during the '30s or—?

LP: Yes, it was during the '30s. And there was a dance pavillion over the bathhouse, and they would have— I've kind of forgotten whether it was a—I think it was a small band on Saturday nights. I've kind of forgotten.

DS: But did you go there to dance?

LP: Yes, some, um-hum,

DS: And you did go there to swim?

LP: Yes. That was earlier, when I was younger. But we did go to the dances later. And I had the motorboat ride when we could scrape up the money. But, it was really the hub of activity there. It was really wonderful for us.

DS: Were there any other parks in town?

LP: Except the Central Park, I can't remember of any others at that time. How fortunate we are now to have so much.

DS: We've talked about the Depression a little, but I'd like to know how World War II changed Grinnell.

LP: Well, the only thing I can remember—I can't remember very much about it. But as my mother was in the restaurant at that time, and the soldier boys— I know we made an effort whenever we knew that a troop train was going through, we'd go down and wave, always. And there was always a group down at the station to wave.

And we knew that the troop train was coming through before, but they didn't, they didn't stop. They just went right through. But they'd open the windows in the train and they'd wave out to us, and some of us would try and throw a candy bar or something, if we could. And another thing I can remember distinctly. I joined—I wasn't too old—and I joined a knitting club. And I never could knit or sew. And I made some socks, and whoever got those socks I feel sorry for him, because they were yards too long in the foot. But that's one thing we remember.

DS: Those socks you probably knitted for World War I?

LP: Yes, it was in World War I. I get kind of confused with dates, I've lived so long, I can't remember. [laugh]

DS: Well, World War II started in 1941, December of 1941, and I wonder if you remember that day, December 7th, 1941?

LP: The day that the Armistice was signed?

DS: No, the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed.

LP: Oh, Pearl Harbor. Yes, I certainly do. I had, Dick and I had been in church, and my mother was not well. And when we came home from church she said, "Turn the radio on." I believe, I think we had tele—we had television at that time. No, no television? It was radio, radio, then. And we, we were simply shocked to pieces. And that was about, after church, so that would have been, the first I had heard about it was about 12:30 on a Sunday, after church. And I remember how shocked everybody was, and what a difference in the young boys. A lot of them had to give up their jobs and go.

DS: And that's when Dick found out that he had this problem.

LP: Yes, yes, that's true. Because that's when he was rejected.

DS: I wonder how it affected the whole town of Grinnell. A lot of men went, then?

LP: Oh yes, and then women went to work more at that time, but—

DS: There was still the glove factory here, then?

LP: I think so, I kind of—yes, oh yes, uh huh. That's right.

DS: So—

LP: And I can't remember when the washing machine factory closed.

DS: But then rationing is what came in with World War II.

LP: Yes, that's right.

DS: Beside gasoline rationing, what else?

LP: Well, hosiery. You—I know, if you had a pair of nylons, you couldn't—Hosiery was rationed, and I'm trying to think of other things that were rationed. I

can't— you had sugar and butter. Course most of us used oley [sic] in that time. Oley margerine, and it was so much different than now. I know my mother used to get this white looking stuff and get these little brown beads and crush these little beads to make it look like butter. That was oley margerine in those days. We never heard of butter in those days except when farmers made it by them—you know. It was, it was quite a luxury.

DS: Oh, I thought probably you were used to butter from the farm.

LP: No, I never lived on a farm and I never had butter. It was always oley margerine, and then she had to mix it up herself. You couldn't buy it in the package, like you do now.

DS: That was because the farmers were against that.

LP: Well, I've kind of forgotten, but we didn't have that. But there was a lot of things that were rationed in those days. But the thing I guess—I guess I might have been rather vain, because I remember the hosiery. You couldn't get hosiery.

DS: Sid, you mentioned that you went to church regularly. Was it a big part of your life?

LP: Oh yes, it's always been a part of my life. And I have been a member of the—used to be Congregational now the United Church of Christ—oh, since I was about five years old. I've always attended. In fact, I was a Sunday School teacher for a number of years, and the church has always been a part of my family. When the Christian Church was across the street, when I was just about two or three years old, I attended the Christian Church, until they disbanded. And then I joined the Congregational Church and have been a member ever since.

DS: Were there other faiths? There was a Catholic Church.

LP: Yes.

DS: Did the Catholics and the Protestants get along pretty well?

LP: Yes, I think so. I think there was never any trouble or anything, but I think we're all—I think nowadays everybody is closer, in many ways, than in those days. We all just seem to blend in together better than in those days. People are more broad-minded, and we've intermingled, and have different ideas. I think we were a little more narrow-minded than we are now. Now your best friends are different religions, and it doesn't make a bit of difference. It's what you are nowdays, than in those days. You were more narrow-minded. Even I was a lot more narrow-minded, I think.

DS: Did the churches do anything to help the people who were really poor?

LP: That I can't remember. I don't, I don't remember of ever, of ever helping things, helping. Not like they do now. Not like with MICA, and the Second Mile, and

things like that. I can't remember, in those days. I don't think that they did as much. They might have. They might have, and I not been aware of it.

DS: Now you mentioned Dick's medical problem. When you were sick, where did you go for medical help? Who was your doctor in Grinnell? Or were you ever sick?

LP: It doesn't seem to me like I was ever sick. Dr. O. F. Parish was the first doctor that I really— I, I was pretty healthy. So, Dr. O. F. Parish, and then to John Parish, and I—

DS: Did your mother have home remedies that she would use for—

LP: Yes. Oh, yes, I should say. My brother had croup very often, and I remember, she would always put skunk oil and another oil on his chest. And it would smell up the entire house. But, we had home remedies. And another thing that I distinctly remember, when my brother was in Davis School, and I think he was in second grade, and he was sitting in the last row in the classroom, and he was doing very poorly in school. And the teacher called my mother, and she said, "I just don't think that Donald is doing a bit good." She said, "Maybe you should have his eyes tested." And so that was unusual. People didn't go to the optometrist in those days. So mother took him to the optometrist, and lo and behold, the poor kid couldn't even see, he was so—his eyes were so bad. So they put him, they gave him—he had a prescription for glasses, and put him in the third row. And from then on he didn't have any trouble. So, no, we didn't go to doctors or have your eyes tested and go to the dentist like you do now. But in later years we both had our teeth straightened by a dentist, and that was a very painful procedure which now is not painful at all. Things have really improved so much since then. But you just didn't go to the doctor with the first little pain or ache. Your mother took care of it.

DS: Did you have the childhood diseases, measles, mumps?

LP: I had measles, and I had chicken pox. Mumps I don't remember. My brother had mumps very bad. But not—I know we had a—I remember the flu epidemic, which was terrible in those days, and I remember several of our neighbors died from it. Now that was just when I was just a tiny child, but that influenced me a lot. And it was awful. I forgot how many people died in Grinnell. It was a terrible epidemic.

DS: That would have been maybe in the teens.

LP: Yes, I think so.That probably would have been in 1916 or 1917, because I would be about six years old or seven years old at that time. But it made a big impression, because everything was—you didn't go to anyplace. Everybody stayed

close to home, because you were so afraid of getting it, and it was just awful. Young people died as well as older people.

DS: Do you remember the polio epidemic later?

LP: Yes, I do, I remember. I remember I had a very good friend, Janet Mitchell, which—just a little girl. And they didn't know what was wrong, and they rushed her to Blank Memorial Hospital—I think it was called Blank, or Methodist, in those days—and she was up there for a number of months. I distinctly remember that, because she was a good friend of mine. She was just a little girl at that time.

DS: And you were older.

LP: Yes, in fact, I was at their house the day that they discovered that, and that was quite a scare for everybody.

DS: Sid, you've been known for giving pennies to children when they came into the bank. When did you start doing that?

LP: Oh, I think I started when I started at the bank, well, probably not when I started at the bank, because money was so scarce. But it was such a nice feeling, and I just loved to do it, because we always got new pennies. But my ambition was on—which I would have liked to have done, and then I never accomplished, would to have been, to have given silver dollars on Christmas Eve to every child that came in the bank. But I didn't do it, and I'm sorry, I just didn't—like I guess I couldn't afford it. But it—and some of them have remembered that for years. And I remember Dr. Roudabush's son, Chris, when he got—when he was just a little tyke, he came in the bank, and he was the cutest thing, and I—here he is, married and I think a senior in college. But you get acquainted with children that way, and it's carried through for years.

DS: Well, a shiny penny was just as big as a silver dollar.

LP: Oh, oh, I know at that time it was, but now it wouldn't mean very much. But I made a lot of friends. Maybe I paid for their friendship, I don't know [chuckle], but I made a lot of friends that way that have carried through, and have remembered me by that. But it was fun, anyway.

DS: Well, you knew a lot of people in the community.

LP: Yes, I did. Oh, it was wonderful, and especially when you opened new accounts, you got acquainted with newcomers. And those friendships carried through. Now when I go downtown, there's a lot of— I go down and I don't even know a lot of people. It's changed so. But it was—we were a very close-knit group at the bank at that time. There was Max, and Fred Wolfe, and Mary Doris Donohoe, Thelma Hanssen, Marge Halstead, Wilma Schmidtz, Mabel Madill, Doris Lowry. [Ed.

note: Could be referring to the 1950s.] We were a very close group of friends, and that carried through, because we stayed at our jobs. Depression—and we kept our jobs for years. It was very seldom that we hired a new employee, because we all kept our jobs so long, and worked. And we worked hard.

DS: Can you tell me about War Bonds during World War II? Did people buy many of those?

LP: Yes, there was War Bond rallies, but I have really forgotten a lot.

DS: And how did people feel about the federal bank insurance?

LP: I think that was a good feeling, a very good feeling, because of the bank failures in the past, pardon me, in the past. And this way people knew that their money was insured, and it gave confidence to the community and to everyone. I think it was a very, a very good thing.

DS: What kind of a limit was there for insurance?

LP: You know, I've forgotten.

DS: I was wondering if it was ten thousand dollars or more than that, but you don't know.

LP: I'm ashamed to say that I've forgotten.

DS: Do you remember much about radio? Did you listen to the radio a lot?

LP: Oh yes. Radio was the thing to do in those days. "Amos and Andy," and oh, different programs. Radio, it was a thrill to listen to radio. We had our favorite programs, and who would ever think that television would come in, in those days?

DS: Radio was so important?

LP: Oh yes.

DS: Did you have a Victrola?

LP: No, we didn't have a Victrola. But I remember, I had a special date one night, and we rented a Victrola. So with some records, so that we could dance in the living room. And that was a treat to even rent the Victrola. But we never had one.

DS: But there were records available.

LP: Oh yes, there were records available then, uh-huh.

DS: You graduated from high school in 1928, you said.

LP: That's right.

DS: Were the schools and the families cooperating at that time?

LP: I don't think as much as they do now, because they have different activities now. You see, we had no place—we had no swimming pool, we had no— Young people play golf nowdays— There was no—there might have been a country club, I've forgotten, but there's so many activities. They didn't have Little League Baseball,

and all the activities, swimming meets, for children. And we did have basketball in eighth grade, I remember, but you just played between the grades. You didn't have with other towns like they do now. There's so many more opportunities now that you get to meet other people and you get to— And we couldn't dance in our senior, our senior banquet, there was no dancing at all, it was prohibited.

DS: Why was that?

LP: They just didn't, they didn't have things like that at school. And there were, I remember, I remember the big thing was always the football game between Newton and Grinnell on Thanksgiving. And you would go to that football game whether it was twenty below zero, because the rivalry was still, that was a—

Side Three

DS: —support the high school?

LP: Yes, they did. They supported the— And we had basketball games between towns, but as for inter— This was just the boys' basketball. You didn't have— And the girls' basketball was contained within the classes of Grinnell, just between classes. But—and then we had declamatory contests. Now that I remember because I participated, and I know we first went to Montezuma. There were three of us. One was humorous, and serious, and I forget the other, but there were three of us that went with the drama coach. And we went to Montezuma. And we all three won at Montezuma, and then we went to Brooklyn, and as I remember we all three lost at Brooklyn. But that was, that was quite an important thing in those days, the declamatory contests. And let's see, I was trying to think of— But there wasn't the association between—like there is now, I think, between like, oh your activities that you have at school when they put on the various plays and things. We might have had some. I remember we put on a town—we had dancers and a chorus line, but nothing like, nothing like they do now. Like our Community Theater, that was, that was—we'd never heard of anything like that, which is such an improvement nowdays.

DS: Well, during the '30s, people your age really had to work and—

LP: We worked very hard.

DS: And even high school students, I suppose, worked.

LP: Yes, uh-huh, that's right.

DS: Can you tell me what a typical Saturday night would be in Grinnell?

LP: The typical Saturday night was: You parked your car, if the family had a car, on a Saturday night you would go up and do a lot of your shopping and sit in your car and watch the people go by. And I remember, the farmers would come in and be in the grocery store, and sometimes they would get to visiting, the grocery stores closed at ten o'clock, and they'd get to visiting. So that at ten o'clock the people, the proprietors, wanted to close the store, and they still kept on visiting. But you would just come uptown and do some of your shopping, and the streets would be full with parked cars watching people go by, and then go into Candyland and maybe get a dish of ice cream or a coke.

DS: So you met all your friends downtown.

LP: Yes, uh-huh.

DS: And what was a typical—were you going to say something else?

LP: Well, and you might have gone to a movie. But I remember that some of the grocery owners got so disgusted, because the farmers, they'd only come into town maybe once a week, on Saturday night. And they'd want to get to visiting, and they couldn't close their stores at ten.

DS: What was a typical Sunday like, then?

LP: Well, I know my mother—there was a movie. It wasn't till later days that the movies on Sunday. But my mother, I remember someone called me for a date when I was in high school, and wanted to take me to the movie on Sunday. And my mother absolutely forbade, forbade me to go. We went to Sunday School and we went to church, and we came home and had our dinn—this was after my mother was out of the restaurant—and came home and had dinner, and oh, you might have gone for a walk, or sat on your porch or something. But I was not allowed to go to a movie on Sunday. It was not until after I was out of high school that I was sort of my own boss that I could do that. But that was—and people—you weren't considered very nice if you went to a Sunday movie.

DS: And no stores were open, of course, on a Sunday.

LP: No, I can't remember of anything, except the candy kitchen, Candyland was open on Sunday, I think from noon on, something, not in the morning as I remember. Yes, because you could go in there.

DS: What about alcoholic beverages. Did your family use those at all?

LP: Now in my mother's restaurant, she could sell "near beer," and it just smelled terrible. It wasn't, it was—and I can't remember of, I suppose there were people that sold alco—you know that sold liquor as a "bootlegger" they called them in those days. But I can't remember right now of anybody I knew that did. But I know

they did, because I remember the police called my mother one night about, I think it was one o'clock. And the man who was the night man at the restaurant was dead drunk. And my mother had to get up and get dressed. And my brother was about four years old at that time, I think. And he was staying with an aunt at Okoboji. And we had to get dressed and she had to take me, because she couldn't leave me alone, and we went over. And she had to work the restaurant from one o'clock on, and I slept in a straight, hardwood chair the rest of the night. So there were, there was liquor around, but my mother did not sell it at the restaurant. And evidently a bootlegger had come in, and the night man had—consequently he got fired.

DS: He wasn't reliable.

LP: No.

DS: So, it was somewhat of a problem, but—

LP: Well, I don't remember of it as being too much of a problem, but I know from hearing around there were bootleggers that sold it outside the law. I know that, and I don't know who they were.

DS: Do you know of any homeless people in Grinnell in those days?

LP: No, I can't remember. Things were kind of tough for everybody, and I can't remember of any homeless, like they stress nowdays, the homeless people, and the people that are doing without, I can't. Probably there were, but they were proud people in those days, and everybody was in about the same situation. Money wasn't like it is now. You didn't take vacations like you do now. There was no planes, you didn't get on a plane and go places.

DS: Did your mother ever have a vacation from the restaurant?

LP: Oh, not that I, not that I remember.

DS: Did you have relatives in town?

LP: Well, when my aunt and uncle came with their daughter, and she graduated from high school in Grinnell, and then when they left, no, I didn't, except, and then when my grandfather lived with us, or rather, we lived with him, it was his home.

DS: But you didn't have a large, extended family around?

LP: No, not at all, no.

DS: Tell me a little bit about the hospitals in Grinnell.

LP: I remember there was a hospital across from the college quadrangle, a wooden, a big wooden building at that time.

DS: That would have been when you were a little girl?

LP: Yes, when I was a tiny girl. I just remember it. I was never in it or anything.

But people didn't go to the hospital in those days. A lot of them had their babies at home, and people didn't go to the hospital like if they— You didn't go to a doctor or to a hospital until practically you were ready to die in those days.

DS: Did the doctors come to your home?

LP: Oh yes, they came to your home. You could call, and they would come to your home. And my brother was born in our home in Broad Street.

DS: Do you remember that?

LP: Yes, I do, because he had a broken leg and a broken arm. And I remember that I was a little tiny girl.

DS: Did someone come to help your mother then, to stay with you, or was that when your—?

LP: Well, my father was there at that time, but I think she did have some woman come in at that time. But then he left soon after that, I think, and it—maybe six or eight months or something after, when he was just a tiny baby.

DS: Do you remember any disasters, natural or—that hit Grinnell?

LP: Well, there were two fires, two bad fires. We had a—known as Norris Garage, where I think it's called the State Street Bar. And that was a— People stored their cars there, and it was known as the biggest garage in— I remember it burned. And there were apartments up over it at the time. That was a big fire in Grinnell. And I can't remember too much, except that the tornado that they had, when it hurt the motel south of town, and that was in more recent years. I can't remember much else than that. And the flu epidemic, as I quoted before, that was a serious thing, but I was really too young to re— But I know a lot of people died in Grinnell. But I can't remember much else.

DS: This was probably later, but I wondered about the controversy over the trees in Grinnell.

LP: Oh, there was— Everybody was heartsick at the time. Oh, how we hated— Grinnell was beautiful. The trees on Broad Street met in the center and formed an arch, and I guess we weren't looking to the future, but it was a heartbreaking thing when they cut those trees down. But now you—It's all been forgotten and everything, but a lot of people were very—they were against it. But you've got to progress, and you've got to make future.

DS: Now, where are we talking about?

LP: On Broad Street, I'm talking about, they, when they cut the trees down.

DS: Right downtown.

LP: Right downtown, and up on Broad Street.

DS: And they widened the street?

LP: Yes. And another thing, with our church. A lot of the old members hated to have the old Congregational Church torn down. That was— There was quite a bit of controversy over that. But it was, it was a beautiful church, but it should have been torn down, and it was just for the future. But there was a feeling at that time.

DS: That was called the Old Stone Church?

LP: Yes, uh-huh, and it was a beautiful, but it was—you just have to look to the future, and forget some of those things. It's for the best.

I've always been told that I should have been on the Chamber of Commerce, because I'm such a booster for Grinnell. And when my husband died, and also when I retired from the bank, people would ask me, do you want to go, are you going to California, where I have some relatives, are you going to Arizona, or are you going to Florida? And I said, "No, I'm not going anyplace. I'm going to stay right here in Grinnell."

DS: Because you love it.

LP: Because I love it. [doorbell ringing] Oh, there's Betty.