Interviewee: Margaret Arnold

Interviewer: Betty Moffett

Date of Interview: February 25, 1992

Transcriber: Jennifer Pustz

Margaret Arnold
Side One

Betty Moffett [BM]: I'll be talking to Margaret Arnold. This is February the 25th, 1992. We'll be making this recording for Friends of Stewart Library oral history project about Grinnell during the Depression and World War II or during the '30s and '40s.

Margaret Arnold [MA]: I thought you might be interested in some of these records.

BM: I would be, I certainly would.

MA: I don't know what questions that you would like.

BM: I think that we can just talk and you can tell me about your, about your family. Tell me about how you came here and you were telling me that–

MA: Well, my father was a doctor here and they lived in this house to begin with because they could close off the den. And in those days, they had this downstairs bedroom with the telephone right beside it. And then they could close Ithis door, the sliding door between here and the dining room and here, and then his patients would come to the door and he'd take them in there.

BM: So he used this for an office?

MA: Uh-huh. And then they decided to– They didn't like this anymore. And they bought a house over on Park Street and it was just a box. I hated it.

BM: And what–about what year would that have been when you moved?

MA: Nineteen thirty-six was when we bought the house I believe.

BM: Yeah. You bought this house again and moved back here in 1936.

MA: Well, they were over on Park Street and I was married. And then I bought this, this back.

BM: I see.

MA: For thirty-six hundred dollars. [laughter] And they sold it for fifty-five.

BM: Oh. My goodness!

MA: No, twenty-eight hundred is what we paid for it, yeah.

BM: So the price had gone down amazingly from, was that a result of the–

MA: It was the Depression.

BM: It was the Depression.

MA: And that was a bad Depression.

BM: What do you remember– Do you have vivid memories about the Depression and how the Depression affected the town and–

MA: Sure I do. Yeah. Because we bought the store, you see, in 1936, that would be. And nobody had any money. We finally sold stock, formed a corporation and sold stock in it. And then sold it to different ones. And my mother and father had a millionaire that lived in Osage, Iowa, had all kinds of money and I found out about it. So I approached him and said I would like to buy that shoe store. Well, they finally decided, yes, that they'd loan me enough money. But, if anything ever happened with this millionaire, that's when we bought the–that's when we bought the house, I'm sorry, not the store, that if I didn't pay it back, he'd take everything I ever owned or inherited. And that's the only reason I got the money and that was during the Depression.

BM: Did you like him?

MA: [laughter]

BM: No?

MA: But they had all kinds of money. He was an officer in Pillsbury, in Minneapolis. And he and–no, and his wife and my mother were schoolmates here in college, and my father graduated from college.

BM: So your mother went to Grinnell College and your father went to Grinnell and you did, I know.

MA: Yeah, I wanted to get off and teach school because I wanted to be on my own. I didn't want anybody telling me what to do. I was terrible.

BM: Why do you think that was true? Where do you think that came from, your independence?

MA: I think it was the way you were brought up in those days. My two brothers demanded everything. And I thought we were poor and struggling and I wouldn't ask for anything. So, my younger brother had a car when he was in college over here. And he wanted a white sweater that I remember was fifty dollars and kept harping at them until they gave it to him. And I vowed and

declared that I would not do that. If they didn't want me to give it, have it, I would not have it. And so, I got– Oh, the only way I could get away from home was to go to school. So I decided that if I got a job– Betty Blagg was here at the time in the college. And she was in Ames in a department, physiology department. And so I went up and helped her in the summertime. And then I thought, "My word, I don't have to go to college four and a half years. I have enough practice teaching and enough credits, for having gone up there one semester, that one summer session." So that I had more than enough credits to graduate. So in the middle of the year, I didn't need to go to college anymore. And a girl that I had met and entertained in my home here– in fact she was here the day I was married, at my wedding over on Park Street–and she and her aunt were teaching school in Flint, Michigan. The aunt was a supervisor and she was a grade school teacher. So, on the spur of the moment I called them and I said, "Well, I don't need to go to college anymore. I have more than enough credits and my grades are good enough, but they won't give me my diploma." She said, "Why?" "Because I haven't walked across the platform, and I wouldn't, the college wouldn't."

BM: Did they ever?

MA: I had to resign from Michigan, Flint, Michigan. I had to resign two weeks early in the summertime and come back here and walk across the platform because Professor Nollen, Dean Nollen would not grant me that certificate, that degree. And it cost me two months wage.

BM: Oh no!

MA: Yes, it's true.

BM: But you got that diploma.

MA: Uh-huh. I got it. I went up, so I never did go the four years here. Oh, and I, in order to get away from home, I wanted to take a course in chemistry, because I hadn't had chemistry. So I talked them into letting me go to summer school to take chemistry. And they let me, down at the University of Iowa, work in that chem laboratory as a beginning freshman with no supervision until I did a semester's work in that six weeks in chemistry.

BM: Did you enjoy it? Or were you scared?

MA: I was scared. Now, why I wanted a degree in chemistry, I don't know, but that's the only thing I didn't have. I had all the sciences. And my brother was a Phi Beta Kappa from here. And after we had taken our freshmen exams and what not, why, Miss Reed, that was dean of women, called me over, and she said, we will expect you to be a Phi Beta, and I looked at her and I said, "No you're talking about my brother. My brother."

BM: Which brother was this?

MA: John. The one that turned out to be the doctor. [laughter] I said you're not talking about me. I was never smart. But I said my brother always was.

BM: Did you feel discrimination?

MA: Oh, it was terrible, discriminating in those days. My father being a doctor, I was the one that had to get up at night and many times my mother went with him when he had a– It was mud, muddy roads or anything like that, she'd go with him because she was so afraid that he wouldn't get there. And so she would wake me, never the boys, and I'd have to go into their bedroom and sleep in their bed and answer the telephone and the doorbell. All night, every night that they were gone. The boys never once had to. Same thing at the dinner table. If my father was eating dinner and phone rang, I had to get up, leave my meal, take the message, give it to him, take his message and repeat it over the phone. None of the family ever had to get up from the table.

BM: Goodness.

MA: Well, that was the way it was in those–it just was.

BM: Yeah, right. Did your family encourage you to go to school? Or was that your–

MA: Of course, I had to work a lot of angles to get it. And my brothers were very well dressed. And they said "Why don't you go with some of the girls that are over in the Quad?" Well, I hated to say, "Because I don't have a dime in my pocket." And they'd say, the girls would say, that I knew over there, they'd say, "Come on over to the dorm and we'll go down to get a candyland or something." I didn't have a dime, I couldn't go.

BM: Down to Cunningham's?

MA: I couldn't go, didn't have a dime.

BM: Do you think that that made you more determined than ever?

MA: I think it made me tough. It really did. And because my brother went off to Harvard in Rush Medical, and–no, Johns Hopkins, yeah, Johns Hopkins, Harvard. And then he was in the navy and was an officer. And my other little brother was so good-looking and so full of pep and he played football.

BM: That's the one with the picture upstairs?

MA: Uh-huh. And he was a salesman from way back and he was a typical salesman. He could talk anybody out of anything and always did. So, he'd come home and look beautiful, white sweater. I couldn't even have a blouse, but that's the way it was. So I think it made me tough. It really did, because, well, girls weren't very important those days. My father was prominent and he was a doctor and my mother belonged to a lot of clubs. So I'd leave, I had a lot of labs having gone through a pre-med course in three and a half years here. So you know I had a lot of labs and I'd leave the lab and go home and there'd be a note on the kitchen table, prepare this and this and this and this for dinner. The boys got an allowance, had money in their pocket, I didn't. And they wouldn't let me go out and work any place because I was too valuable at home. And my mother taught Sunday school and so rather than go to church–she wanted to go to church–so I stayed

home, made the beds, cleaned the bathrooms, both of them, upstairs and down, and got the Sunday dinner and did the dishes.

BM: This was in the house on Park Street.

MA: Right. Where Dennys live now. So, but that's what it was in those days.

BM: Did you feel singled out, or did you think that all girls did that same kind of thing?

MA: I knew not all of them did, because I had some very good friends in college, but I couldn't spend any time with them, and they'd say, "Oh, come on down and meet us after lab and we'll go down and get a Candyland." And I would not never admit that I didn't have any money. And they wouldn't let me go out and do anything outside the home, for money. So there I was. Now, people wouldn't believe that in this day. But that was true.

BM: After you graduated from college, then what did you do?

MA: Well, I had a– This one girl I went to summer school with, I helped Betty Blagg in the science department in Ames and got my practice teaching there, so at the end of three and a half years I had more than enough credits to graduate. So I had to call this friend of mine who was teaching school in Flint, Michigan and her, let's see, her aunt was a supervisor. And they said, this was on Friday night, and I had more than enough credits to graduate at the middle of the year, and she said, "Do you have enough credits for a college degree?" and I said, "Yes, but they won't, they won't give me a degree until I walk across the platform, because I went to President Nollen and he said, 'No, we won't.' So, " I said, "If you'll take me on that–" "Why," she said, "you can have the job. We're desperate. School starts Monday morning and we have no teacher in the fourth grade." And I said, "Fourth grade?" So that was on Friday night that I got the job and I was in Flint, Michigan, the next Monday morning teaching at eight o'clock.

BM: Had you ever been to Flint before?

MA: Never. Never traveled except to– I did go to Montana and back by myself with the first money I earned. And I went by myself on the train, and my folks just about, well, I came home with this great big long ticket. They said, where are you going? And I said, I'm going to the West Coast and back. They said, you can't go, girls don't travel alone.

BM: Was this after you had graduated from college or before?

MA: I graduated that, uh-huh. I said, this one does. I was eighteen! They all looked at me and said you can't go. I was on the train the next morning. And I got home just in time, at the end of the summer, to start teaching school, of course. So, that's when I went to Flint, Michigan. The Chevy factory was there, the Fisher Body Company was there. They were so overcrowded in Flint at that particular time. And I didn't know where the school house was, in the middle of the year–in the middle of the city, And they said, well, you'll have to take a street car. I said, I've never been on a street car. Well, I finally made it over to the school house. And my supervisor took pity on me, and she said, "I live at the same place you do," which was an old abandoned

school house, or, well, it had a three stories high, or two stories high and had a switchboard that they made over into a rooming house for teachers. So, I got to live in there and I shared a room with this roommate that I had met in Ames and her aunt and went to teach school the next morning. And when I had walked into that school, not having ridden on a street car, not having been in a city, not even Des Moines, by myself, and I walked into that room, there were thirty seats in the room, I had sixty kids.

BM: What did you do?

MA: So, I went down to the supervisor, I mean–

BM: Sixty kids!

MA: I said, "I don't have enough seats for these kids." She says, "I know. Flint is in a depression, there are no taxes, no money for taxes. We have no supplies, we have no textbooks, we have no pencils, we have no erasers, no blackboards." I said, "What do you do? How do you teach school?" "Well, that's what you're getting paid for." "Oh, that's right, I forgot."

BM: What did you do with those sixty children? [laughter]

MA: What did I do besides stand up there with my mouth open?

BM: Fourth graders.

MA: Well, I had one homeroom in third grade, and then I had two divisions in fourth grade, fifth grade and sixth grade. And the smallest class I had was thirty-six and the biggest I had was fifty. Thirty seats in the room.

BM: Did they stand up?

MA: They had to sit on some, and some of the kids were so big they couldn't get in the sides because Flint was in the depressed time there. And this one teacher came in, and she said, "Where's your classbook?" I said, "I don't have one." "Don't you have the names of the students in your third grade?" "No." "Don't you have a classbook?" "No." "Do you have any pencils?" "No, unless I bring some myself." Well, she turned and walked out, that's all. And if there was any disciplinary problems of any kind– I've got this one boy, I knew he was sick and I put him out in the hall, because he was disrupting the whole class, he was running around the room, you know. He just couldn't sit still he was shivering like this. I knew there was something the matter with him, I hadn't had a chance to send a note home to his mother, and he was running around the middle and I thought, what do you do in a case like this. Well, I finally found a piece of chalk and I was up writing on the blackboard, and I thought, there's nothing, they can't recite anything, we have no textbooks, we have no paper, we have no, well, I did find one piece of chalk, so I wrote that and made a beaver dam in chalk. And I said, "Now, how do you suppose those little beavers ever get along? Where do they find their trees? How do they cut them down? What kind of teeth do they have?" And I went on and I taught that whole two and a half, two and a half years, yeah, without an eraser.

BM: I can't imagine. I really can't imagine. The children didn't have books?

MA: No books. They couldn't afford them. You couldn't keep them after school and you couldn't send them to the principal. Absolutely not!

BM: Were they interested in what you had to– Did the stories, the beavers appeal to them? Did they–

MA: Well, they loved it, even the supervisor from one of the other schools, there were twenty eight grade schools in the city of Flint, Michigan. And I decided, well, these kids have to know something. So I bought two cages of guinea pigs. And for every class we fed the guinea pigs, I taught them nutrition, what they eat. Well, the mayor's son was so cute. And he sat in the front seat, and he wasn't big enough. All the rest of the kids were so big, they couldn't sit in the seats. So they were perched on the window sill. He couldn't learn anything, but he was a beautiful drawer. So I gave him, gave him a piece of paper and he would illustrate things, whatever I'd ask him to do. Another boy came in and he was, oh, he had the mental capacity of about a fourth year, fourth grader, so he couldn't sit still. So I put him up in my desk, in front of the whole class. I had a lot of pencils, and I opened the drawer, the pencil drawer, and every day I whispered to him, "Will you put these pencils in line?" Every day. And the students got so used to seeing him and he didn't disturb the room. He didn't get up and run around. And the supervisor came in one day, and she said, "What's going on?" I said–I had this illustration of the beaver dam written on the board–and I said, "Well, I'm trying to explain to them why the beavers could put a dam across the stream that is running full blast like that and it will hold." "Never heard of anything so silly in my life," [she said]. And turn them off and on. [sic] That's all the help you ever got.

BM: People were not particularly encouraging, were they?

MA: No. So I was there all that year, and they had nine months of school, ten months of school. And so in the end, I went back. That was in the middle of the year and there were ten months of school. So, I called the college and said, "I can't be there for graduation because school's not out for another week yet." "Well, you can't have your diploma," Professor Nollen [said]. I said, "I have to have it. I'm going back to teach next year, I have a job." Well, in the meantime, I never did get it, but the school was so desperate for teachers, they let me come back and there no questions were asked. So, I just went back just as though I had all the paraphernalia in the world. Never admitted I didn't have and nobody asked me.

BM: Did you enjoy teaching there, or was it–

MA: I loved the kids. And they were all so– All the teachers, other teachers were all surprised. And they said, "We never hear you hollering at your kids. Well, what do you do?" Well, I said, "Next time you have a few minutes come in and see my guinea pigs." [laughter] Well, do you know, that was such a popular experiment because we developed scurvy in a couple of the guinea pigs and the others were healthy because we– Everything the children should eat is what I fed the guinea pigs. And everything that they shouldn't eat is what I fed to the control pigs. And they really, by the end of the semester, developed scurvy. And all the teachers, in fact, the

superintendent of the schools, found out about it, and he said, "I want you to take that experiment around to all the schools in Flint, Michigan." I said, "I'm being paid to teach school here." It was the mayor of the city of Flint who said, "You take it around. It's valuable."

BM: And that was his son who was in your class who drew the pictures.

MA: Cute little guy.

BM: So how long did you stay there in Flint?

MA: Well, that was– There was ten months of school so I was there the first semester, which would be five months and then I went back the next year and stayed the whole year. It was quite a long time, really.

BM: And then did you come back to Grinnell? After that?

MA: Well, I had graduated.

BM: But did you come back to this town? After that?

MA: Uh-huh. To pick up my ticket to go out West. [laughter] From then on, I was gone.

BM: When did you come back?

MA: At the end of that summer. And I had saved up enough money so I could go to the West Coast and back. I've never been anywhere, so with that first money that I earned I bought a round-trip ticket to Seattle and back and I came home that first day, I had only been home from teaching that day, and I hauled out this great big long ticket. And they said, "Where are you going?" And I said, "I'm going to California. I'm going to Seattle, in fact." My father said, "You can't travel alone." I said, "Yes, I can. Here's the money that I saved and here's the ticket and I'm leaving in the morning." I never had a good rapport with my father from that time on. No, never. Well, he had, he'd given all to the boys. He didn't give me my education. However, it didn't cost me full. It didn't cost me that much to go to college here because he was one of the first soldiers that had been in the First World War and it was a Noyce scholarship. And all three of us got the Noyce scholarship because there was nobody old enough except us to get them. So it didn't cost them anything to send me through school. I might as well have taken advantage of that last semester but I didn't. I was on my way. That wasn't unusual for girls in those days.

BM: To travel? Or–

MA: Oh, yes, terribly unusual to travel. Oh, but they couldn't keep me because I was of age. And I never did get–from my father from that day– That was the end of that.

BM: So you taught school in Flint for a whole, for one semester and then a whole year? And then what happened after that?

MA: Well, then I came back to get married.

BM: I see.

MA: Because my sweetie had been waiting long enough while I had been tarrying all over the country. So then we got married and started the shoe store down here on Fourth Avenue.

BM: And that was in 1936? When you started the shoe store and bought this house, is that right?

MA: Well, John in the meantime was not married, and I was. And I had furniture and he had a house, because we lived in a little house out on Fourth Avenue. And he was a doctor and there wasn't anybody to answer his door or his telephone and we didn't have any money. So he said, "If you'll come–" And he bought that big house right down here on Broad Street. He had the house and I had the furniture. So we moved all my furniture into his house, and he says, "You can keep house for me." What a mistake that was because he was footloose and fancy free. And he had a grand piano and he had a record player. I had the furniture. He had the ping pong table, he, in the basement, he had something else up on the sleeping porch, a slot-machine eventually and what not. So I got–

Side Two

MA: Uh-huh. And in the meantime, I had to go to the hospital and have a hysterectomy. And so he was up working in the shoe store in Osage and this store was for sale. The man had gone broke. And he wanted the shoe store so badly. So he went out and sold stock and–

BM: And this was during the Depression, is that right?

MA: Um-hum.

BM: Well, clearly you found people, you must have been quite a good salesperson.

MA: Even Mr. Lannom that had the glove factory here and everything. And I said, "We'll start that shoe store. And I want to sell stock in it to these different people, and then we'll run the shoe store and pay them all back eventually, but we'll have a shoe store." He said, "Well, it's one way when you don't have any money." And I said, "Well, we don't have any money." But my husband wanted a shoe store. He'd been in a shoe store in Osage working. And his father had been in a shoe store, had owned his own store here in Grinnell over on, yeah, across from the library there. And he went broke, but I was always an optimist. "So," I said, "well, if you can run a shoe store, I think I can sell stock in a company." So we did. We sold stock in Arnold's Shoes in 1936. And I got Sharp Lannom, one of them, to put some money in, and I got Mr. Lannom to put some money in. And, I can't remember, but anyway there was enough so that we could buy the inventory and rent the building, and the building was for rent and I knew that because Ross Shoe Store had been in there and he went broke. So we got it at a reasonable rent. And I knew we could pay that much rent. And so, here was the lawyer, Tomasek, and somebody else [pause], the Jewish fellow here in town, clothier, and he was bidding against me. And I was due in the hospital for a hysterectomy and I was– And so this one lawyer, Tomasek, bid so much and this

Jewish fellow would counter and they went back and forth, back and forth. Well, by that time, I was determined to get the store. I said, "Outbid him." And we did, and we got the store. Well, then I had, we hadn't sold enough stock in it so I had to go out and sell the stock.

BM: Did many people you asked say they could not buy stock because they didn't have any money?

MA: My family wouldn't put a dime in it really. Then I got Sharp Lannom to put some money in it and I got G. S. Lannom. Do you know him?

BM: I know of him.

MA: Tough guy if there ever was one. And I talked him into it. And my brother Charles put some money in, and this millionaire friend of my mother's that lived in Osage, that I knew, put some more in. And it was just that last thousand dollars that I needed. And this millionaire that had all of his various bills, that was a friend of my mother's, he said, "I'll lend you that thousand dollars that you need, but if you don't pay it back, I'll take everything you ever own." I said, "That's a deal."

BM: Were you frightened? Was that frightening? Or were you still determined?

MA: I thought, "That guy is going to outdo me of a thousand dollars." So I got the last thousand dollars. And I paid every single one of them back, plus whatever their stock was worth plus interest.

BM: How did you ever keep, how did you ever begin the store and keep it running in those years? Could people afford to buy shoes? Could you afford to–

MA: We could hardly afford to buy them let alone have them. Well, about that time, and we worked like beavers. We were up at seven in the morning and we worked until midnight every Saturday night, and in the meantime, I'm taking care of getting meals at home and raising my daughter. I don't know how I ever did it, but I did it.

BM: I don't either.

MA: I really don't, but it all worked out fine. And after the store got started and everything seemed to be going and we were paying it back, it was about that time, when my husband found somebody else. And so, he just said he didn't want to be married to me anymore. I said, "Get out." I threw his shoes at him. I said, "You go to your folks today, now. Don't ever come back." I didn't know what I was going to do. Well, I knew he wasn't going to stop me. And I found out later he did have a girl in Chicago that he was going to see and I knew the money was disappearing out of the cash register. I thought, I put too much into it to let it go now. So I followed him to Chicago one day and he met this girl. I'm sorry to say I shouldn't tell who was with him. But, and I never have, which is all right. But anyway, he came back. In the meantime, I went to Mr. Lannom, and I said, "He's running around and I will not put up with it, no matter what. He's not going to wreck this store by taking the money out of it." He said, "Is that what

he’s doing?" I said, "Yes. He has a girl in Chicago and he goes every weekend and I’m not about to put up with it any longer." He said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "Take me to Montezuma." He said, "What?" I said, "Take me to Montezuma." So, we went to Montezuma the next morning. I was granted a divorce. I came back, I said, "Pack up your things. Head down the alley. I don’t ever want to see you again." My daughter was, what, five years old. And in those days, to be, to be, to be divorced was the same as waving, waving a red flag. Neither my mother or my father would speak to me. They met me on the street one day, and I went over to the car to say hello to my mother. He came over, prominent doctor, he said, "I’d just as soon not be seen talking to you." I thought, "Fine." I went ahead anyway and, so my husband had left, and I had all these people to pay back. And I said, "Well, there’s nothing else to do but do it." So I did it. And I got the store paid for, raised my daughter, got my debts paid, got everybody paid back with interest. And that store went for, what, fifty-three years. I never had a vacation. I hardly had enough to meet my expenses on because I had to pay for the shoes first, you know, in order to have a living at all. And the first day I opened the store, I sold shoe laces and polish until you couldn’t see straight. And I heard so many of them say, "What she look like, anyway? She’s been divorced."

BM: Were they buying those things to see you? Was that what they were doing?

MA: Curiosity. People weren’t divorced in those days. What kind of a, what kind of a creature was I? And they wouldn’t speak to me on the street. And all the ruffians in town. I couldn’t afford a car. My father was driving a Packard, My father and mother were well-to-do. Never offered help of any kind anywhere along the line, which was all right with me, because then I could do as I please. So that worked out fine. And so I would walk home, keeping the store open until midnight on Saturday nights, and then I’d walk home. And they’d park across the street as I was crossing and I’d have to go around the cars. I never said a word. I just went around. Well, finally, I got a bicycle, and I rode the bicycle back and forth, with my father driving a Packard. My little brother, he was such a rounder himself. And he thought it was fine. He says, "Go to it, whatever you want to do, go to it." And I said, "How come you’re speaking to me?" He says, "I’ve been a rounder myself." And I said, "Well, I haven’t been around!" [laughter] Well, yeah, I’m sorry, I haven’t had time. I never had enough energy or enough money or anything to be anything but just with my nose to the grindstone. Well, it wouldn’t– And after my husband left and we were divorced, of course, that was, that was not done in those days, I didn’t dare go to church or Sunday School. And I talked to my folks just when I thought nobody was looking because I didn’t want to embarrass them. And so I raised my daughter by myself.

BM: Did she come with you to the store?

MA: Yes, she had to. She did. And, of course, I don’t know, but there was, I suppose that is one reason that we are as close as we are, is because people ignored me and my daughter was married and didn’t stay married and here was this little girl. And my daughter and her husband, came one January 31st, thirty below zero, rang my doorbell, my granddaughter was in a clothes basket. They said, "We don’t want her anymore, you can have her." I said, "Fine, I’ll take her." And I’ve had her since then. And she’s forty years old now.

BM: And so she’s like you.

MA: And so I raised her. And worked at the store. And this house, my mother and father lived here and I knew what this house was. It had a coal furnace in it, so I had to shovel coal, which I did. And they all said, "Why are you going to live in that dump?" I said, "Because I can afford it. It's the only thing I can afford and I'm going to have a home of my own or else." So, my daughter and my granddaughter and I moved in. And I worked at the store and my, well, by that time, my daughter was running around. I knew she'd never stay put anywhere. She just wasn't that kind. So she got married real young and they just simply left and so I had my granddaughter and the store already paid for and I was divorced. [laughter] What could be worse in those days? And I kept right on working at the store. And got the store all paid off, got everybody all paid off, even the one that was in Pillsbury's mill. The millionaire, I paid him back every dime. I paid everybody back every dime that they had, plus interest. And oh the day, I got all that paid back with interest, and it was mine. And this house, my folks sold this house for fifty-five hundred dollars, and moved over to the one on Park Street. And this house was starting to run down by that time and it was on sale for thirty-five hundred dollars. And I went to my brother John who was practicing medicine–was already through Harvard and Johns Hopkins, and operating in town here as a doctor. I went down to him and I said, "You're going to loan me the twenty-eight hundred dollars to buy that house." And I got the money. I bought this house, moved in, and I've been here ever since. Now it's sixty years or so. And he said, "You'll have to shovel coal." I said, "I can do that." Then he said, "It isn't insulated." I said, "I'll do that eventually. "Well," he said, "the sleeping porch just has screens on it." I said, "I'll take care of that in time." So, my daughter and my granddaughter and I moved in. And I've been here ever since.

BM: That's a wonderful story. It's a really wonderful story.

MA: Well, it's absolutely true. Every bit of it is true. And eventually, I said, "Why did you never go to church.?" Was it– To tell you the truth, I never had any leisure to go to church. I never did. And I said, when my mother could have helped me, she– I was on my way someplace, she was, father was in the post office and she was in the car, and I went over to talk to her. And he came over from the postoffice and said, "We'd just as soon not be seen talking to you." "So," I said, "from that time on, that was all right." Whatever they wanted, but I never, I hardly ever was seen with them. But, I know I was right, so it didn't make any difference. I just went on my way. And now my brother is over here every Sunday morning playing with my cats. My sister-in-law is very nice to me. And my father and mother decided eventually that I wasn't such a bad character. But I never said a thing to any of them, I thought, no, time will tell and I won't need to, and it has.

BM: How did you ever get through those first years when you, you didn't have very much money, the community didn't have very much money. How, how in the world did you do that?

MA: Just a day at a time. You couldn't do any–you just couldn't do anything else but that. And I was so determined that I was going to stick it out no matter what.

BM: Do you feel finally support from the community?

MA: Uh, not for a long time, but I stuck, I just stuck at it. And I was very nice to everybody and I gave all kinds of service and I remembered names. And if they called me on Sunday morning to

go down and buy a pair of shoes, I'd do it. I worked until one o'clock that morning. But I built on that. And if I told them that something was right, the shoe fit, they got to believing me. And they said, "Well, we like this one." I said, "It doesn't fit." "Well, it feels good and I want it." "No, I can't sell it to you." And years later, and this was when I was still in business, not too long ago, I sold a pair of shoes to this one lady down at the Mayflower, and I told her what size it was and how it fit and everything. And she called me on the phone and she said, "You lied to me." I said, "What is your name?" And she told me. And I said, "Where do you live?" And she told me which apartment. And I said, "I'll be right down." She said, "No, no, no, no." I said, "You have the door open." And this was not very many years before I was out of business, closed the store. And I said, "Will you let me see that, would you bring that shoe up? Now," I said, "you know I haven't seen it since the day you bought it. But inside on the lining of that shoe, the size, I told you it was a six and a half, yes?" And she said, "And it isn't," I said,"Would you bring me the shoe?" I held it up to her, it had a six and a half B in the heel of it, just like I said. "Now," I said, "is everything alright?" And she turned and walked, never apologized to me. Well, they called me on Christmas day. They were here visiting from Texas, would I go down and sell them a pair of boots. I sold them a pair of boots. I built the business on that. They knew I was giving service. And I kept track of everybody's size, who they were. I could remember their kids. They had all the faith in the world because I never cheated them. I never lied to them. If it wasn't the right size I said so. And they said, "Well, it feels all right." I said, "It does now, but it won't three days from now because your toe will be hitting the end of that shoe, it just does not fit." And they got to believing me, and the more they believed me and the more that they knew that I was honest, and I kept all their records, and they were so thrilled to have somebody that was interested, to keep track of their size. And they come in and say, "Well, you know what size I wear. I want such and such a boot." And I'd go over to the– And I had even five hundred dollar boots in there that I was selling to all these people. I never had time for vacations. I never had time for clothes. I don't imagine there's anybody in town that could tell you what kind of clothes I wore. I wore the same thing, skirts and blouses, skirts and blouses. And I was always in there. And I never cheated anybody.

BM: How did you get shoes from your suppliers during the Depression?

MA: As long as you could pay for them, you could get them.

BM: Could you get quality shoes during that time?

MA: I had Justin boots. I had Texas boots. I called my little brother and he was in the baseball business down in Tennessee. And I said, "I need a good medium-priced Texas boot." He said, "I'll find one for you." And so he did. "What are you going to do with them.?" I said, "Well, I'm going to put them in stock and sell them." "Are you going to sell all those boots?" And I said, "Yes, I am." And I did. They called me up one Sunday morning, on the Christmas morning, well, we got a pair of boots from you and my husband doesn't think that, that they fit all right and he's leaving today for Texas. I said, "I'll be right down." Well, no wonder I ran most of the other shoes stores out of town. [laughter]

BM: They didn't–

MA: And that's why, and I kept– I didn't know how to keep books. I never had any training in keeping books. And so Sharp Lannom, who lives here in town– I said, "I don't know how to keep books. I don't know how to make out a statement of any kind. I don't know how to do a balance sheet. I don't know any of those things because I never had any bookkeeping." "You want to learn?" I said, "I have to learn, I have to make a living here, and I have to know what I'm doing." He said, "All right," he said. "I'll give you a high school text book, and you read it and study it, and you come over every Friday night at six o'clock. I babysit with my kids." And he lived right over here. He said, "I babysit with my kids, and you come over and I'll teach you bookkeeping." And he did. And I made out an operating statement and a balance sheet in that little business down there every single month and did all the bookkeeping myself. And he says, "Well, you're an accountant." I said, "No, I'm not. I never had any training except what you've given me." And Mr. Lannom said, "Why don't you think that quite jives?" And I said, "It just doesn't for some reason or another. There's something wrong there. I'm doing something that I don't know how to do, or something." He said, "Well, all right, we'll try to get a handle on it." So he helped me with my bookkeeping, and Sharp did too. All for nothing. So I had to– I have all my records from 1944 on up and I have a professor from the University of Kansas has all those records, and he, he's putting them all together. And also, one of the professors here in town wants them as soon as he gets through with them because it's a good history of the business trends in those times. And, what's the name of the professor over here at the college who wants those? He's– I've even forgotten his name. Well, it's really in accounting and what not, and bookkeeping and that sort of thing. And he wants them because of those records, because I made out a balance sheet and an operating statement from 1944 right on through, and it shows the business trends. And this one book– Well he teaches in the University of Kansas, is making it out with these curves that show the trends, the business trends.

BM: When could you tell from your records that the Depression was easing?

MA: You could gradually see it coming. Another thing that helped out, you see, they had the ROTC, or something like,that here. And I got–I sent somebody up at the college and got all their ration stamps. Every month, when a new group of students came over here for this training in ROTC training, I'd pick up all their ration stamps and then I'd stay open at night and they'd come down after they were through classes, and I'd sell them shoes and get their ration stamps. So it wasn't anything to be working until midnight.

BM: What effect did the war have on your business?

MA: Well, they were coming here from all over. Every month or every six weeks, there was a new group of students coming in. And they all had to have shoes. And so I ordered them from my Friedman Shoe Company. And I'd make out– and the students would come in and I'd measure their feet, send in the order. It would be here by the end of the month. They'd pick up their shoes, and I already had their ration stamps so they couldn't go any place else. And that put me on the road up. So you were working until midnight many nights.

BM: Were you by yourself most of those times, in your store at midnight?

MA: A lot of the time, yeah. It was hard to get people to work those hours. In fact, I never could get anybody that wanted to work. Especially shoes. And then they, a lot of the men didn't want to work for me.

BM: Really? Because you were a woman?

MA: Uh-huh. Oh, there was an awful– The salesmen didn't like it either.

BM: Really?

MA: And they'd cheat me. So I learned that every salesman that came in, I found out what his family was, what his kids' names were and what not. And he'd put out his shoes on display and he'd say, well, now, this is a very good pattern, this and this and this and this. And he'd line them all up. And then he'd put two or three little dogs in there, ones that weren't any good. And he'd price those to the sky because he wanted me to buy them and get rid of them for him. I was never sarcastic with him, I was never anything. But I just took my sweet time to decide which ones I wanted. And the high powered pressure– "Well, come out for dinner tonight." I said, "I can't," I said, "I have a family at home." Well, that just stumped all of them, you know. Who wanted to go out with somebody that had a family? I didn't tell them I had just a daughter [laughter]. I had a whole family. So I didn't do much of anything but work in those days. But it was fun and it was very interesting and you certainly know–learn to know people.

Side Three

MA: Well, he was a– And I had the restaurant. And he was the one that evidently thought I knew what I was doing. And, in spite of all the other people in town, he was the one that encouraged me. Can you imagine that? And for why? What did he ever get out of it? A lot of headaches. And he came to work for me. He was one of the first salesmen I had. So he learned shoes and he has, up in his private office, he has my shoe measuring device and some other things that I had, I remember, especially boot slip-ons, and– I mean, for easing out boots, and shaping boots and that sort of thing. He has those hanging up in his office. And I guess he just thought I had– Well, in the meantime, my daughter married and took my granddaughter. And she was married very young and they came back. So that we had never been separated, really. And we still are just as close together as we– And her mother has been married about five or six times. And she has nothing to do with my granddaughter and I help support her, I have for years. So, that relationship wasn't good, and I helped them all my life. So, my granddaughter really, you know, I simply was going to protect her whether I had anything or not. And I have, and she's a honey.

BM: She sounds like a honey. And she's the one who has twins?

MA: Uh-huh.

BM: And a son?

MA: Eighteen.

BM: Going to graduate from high school.

MA: And she called me just today and told me, whatever has happened to me seems to be happening to her, except that I don't think she'll ever be divorced or anything like that because she and her– In fact, out of high school, she called me and she said, "This boy that I like real well wants to marry me and I told him not until he came out to see you." And he said, "What does your grandmother have to do with me?" And she said, "Everything, unless you want to leave now." She's so outspoken. "Well," he says, "I'm not going to leave now!" "Well," she said, "you better come right to Grinnell then and meet my grandmother." And of course, we've been very fast friends ever since. He's a great guy.

BM: Good. You liked him right away?

MA: Oh, yeah. And he likes my granddaughter. My granddaughter can manage them all, which she does very well, they don't know they're being managed but they are. [laughter] And she loves it. But she has to go in and have a hysterectomy in about two weeks or so. And she says, "I want you to come out there." I can't take that–

BM: Where does she live?

MA: Indiana, about twenty, about fifty miles from Fort Wayne. But, I told her, "No, I just feel as though I can't do it." I said, "I'll be–I'm eighty-five, and," I said, "I just don't think it's very wise for me to get too far away from home at this moment." She said, "All right. It's all right with them."

BM: Well, I'm sure they feel your support and your love if you're not there, they can still feel that anyway.

MA: Well, they know that I'm all for them, everything. But, I said, there's just a few things at eighty-five that you just don't do, because if you get too tired–and I said, "If I get too tired and I try to get up out of bed in the morning and I lose my balance and," I said, "I'm not about to fall down the steps or do anything else. So," I said, "I just learned that when I get to that place that I quit," I said, "I quit right now and I don't let the cat out. I don't let anything get in the way. I just go to bed, get rested. And I've had trouble with my eyes." And so she said, "Yeah [unclear] to do." So, she'll be out here one of these days. And I had a hysterectomy. Now she has to go through one. She just told me today. She said, "I wish you could be here. What will I do with the twins that are fifteen?" And her son is eighteen and just graduating from high school. And they have taken in a boy for the last year and a half that had no home, that was driving his car and getting drunk. His mother didn't want him, his father didn't want him. She's had him for a year and a half now. He's turning out fine. And they were all here over Thanksgiving. There were seven of us over Thanksgiving for four days. And my granddaughter brings her little dog, and I had the two cats. And the young people, two more came, two friends, of my oldest grandson, came in their car. So, there were nine of us here for four days.

BM: That's a long time.

MA: And so when, I thought after they went, I said, "I don't dare do that again. I just don't dare. At eighty-five I can't do it." So I just tell them, because, I said, "I don't want anything to happen while you're here." And I said, "I could, although I seem perfectly well." But you can't tell, because I've done all my own work all these years, and managed my business and managed my grandkids and my great-grandkids, and everything's gone fine. But there comes a time when you just have to call a halt. And she said, "Can you come out while I go to the hospital?" No, I can't, I really can't. Because it would take somebody here to take care of my three cats and I can't stand that pressure. But they don't realize that because I've always been able to do it and I hate to admit to them that I can't anymore. So I just say, "No, I guess I can't do that."

BM: And they understand that, they take that?

MA: They're beginning to, yeah. And I said, "I wouldn't get out there and have anything to happen or anything." I said, "I'd just rather not go. If you want to see me, it's better for you to come here." And they said, "But, you've never had anything the matter. You're all right. You always manage everything. It doesn't make any difference if there's ten of us here or nine." I said, "I know, but that was last year. This is another year." Well, you might as well tell them.

BM: Of course, you have to. You have to tell them.

MA: And they said, "But you've always been able to do it." I said, "Yeah," I said. "In fact, I've never had any help in the house in my life before until three weeks ago. Now I have a girl–the first time in the sixty years that I've lived here–that comes in on every other Wednesday and vacuum cleans the rugs and keeps, does the kitchen floor on her hands and knees." I said, "That's the only help I've ever had in all the years I've lived here." And I said, "That's all the help I want. I can do the rest of it just fine. But I said, "I will do that. [laughter] Because," I said, "This is a big house and I never know when they're coming, because the boys are old enough now so they can come by themselves." They said, "They'll be out to see you this summer." And they love my old car. It's an old Chevy, a '65 Chevy and it's rusting out and everything. And they said, "Grandma, why don't you buy a new car?" I said, "I can get this one in the garage–the garage is narrow–and I've never taken a door off of it, I've never run into the side of it or anything. And there isn't another person," I said, "there isn't a single one of you who will even drive it in the garage for me." I said, "You're all scared to death of it, because it's so narrow." So she said, "You never [had an accident in] it." I said, "No, but one of my grandsons did and put a dent in the side." And so they laughed and said, "You can have anything you wanted." I said, "I don't want anything. I don't want anything. I can handle that old car." "Get you a new little one." I said, "No, I'd drive it too fast. And I'd probably cut the corner too close." And I said, "This– One of you will get it when I'm through with it, but not until then." So I just keep on driving the yellow car and they laugh.

BM: Tell me what you, how you've seen this town change.

MA: Well, I think the greatest thing it has lost is the personal touch that we used to have with the merchants downtown. I could call them all by name, I knew how many kids they had. I knew what they wanted. And they loved that. Now, I go into a lot of these stores: "What size do you wear?" That irritates me, but I never say a word. And I go into some of the, girls, well, "What

kind of slip do you wear?" "Well," I said, "just a minute, I'll look and see." And I said, "Do you have any size four?" "We don't carry that size." I said, "I have to go to the store over in Newton to get a size four, I just can't buy clothes." I can't buy a six and a half double A shoe. I have to wear a six and a half B that I can–can kick them off but I can't keep them on. There's nothing I can do I can't find a six and a half double A. I used to fit them. Right, now I can't even buy the size. They look at me as though you're nuts. And if I ask them for a size four, woo, woo, we don't carry that size. No one ever wears that size. I said, "Well, this one does." There's only one place I can get them, and that's in Newton, and I have to wait six weeks to get them. But that's a small matter, I don't have enough to sneeze at.

BM: Well, I've always admired your clothes. I have. You've always looked very nice to me.

MA: My granddaughter said, "you've never worn jewelry." I said, "I was selling shoes. Men don't like a lot of jewelry hanging around and getting in your way." And I said, "I couldn't afford it and it didn't look professional to me." And I said, "I always had to wear my clothes too, too long." I don't, never want anybody to remember what I had on, and I couldn't afford clothes. I always– She said, "You always wore skirts and blouses." I said, "Yes, I couldn't get anything to fit in the first place and they always looked tailored enough and nobody could ever remember what I had on."

BM: And that was what you were after?

MA: Uh-huh. I didn't want them to know what I liked and what I didn't like. So it was always just a costume. They said, "We'd faint if you ever came to a party." I said, "I don't go to parties. I don't play bridge. I don't do anything." "Why don't you?" I said, "When would you?" "Don't you ever play bridge?" "No." "Do you want to join a bridge club?" I said, "No." "Why?" I said, "I like these [books] too well now, and I've never had a chance to read." I was always too busy at raising a family or working at the store or I couldn't stay up long enough to read it. And I said, "Now I can read anything I want to. Look at that one over there. Everybody's read that book right here on the table. Everybody's read that one. And," I said, "I haven't. So I'm reading all of these books I've always wanted to read all these years and never–Well, when was there time?"

BM: Are you enjoying them?

MA: Oh, I love it.

BM: They're as good as you thought they would be?

MA: Uh-huh, yes, they are. And of course, one eye is deteriorating so I have to watch it carefully.

BM: Does it get tired when you read a lot?

MA: Uh-huh, yeah. And I said, "Well that's, if I live long enough, I'm going to get some of these books read that I've been wanting to. Even *Les Miserable*, all those–

BM: Big words.

MA: I've never had a chance to– I said, "I want to read those. I feel ignorant on a lot of things, just because, well, I've never had–" And this *Prophet* have you ever read that one, that book?

BM: Some of it, uh-huh.

MA: Well, I like that. And they said, "Where'd you ever get all your books?" And I said, "I bought them." "Why?" I said, "Because I've always loved books." And for many years I couldn't afford even one. So I just got them little by little along the line, and I just love them. So, but eventually you get all those things, you just wait long enough. [laughter] How about some tea?

BM: Oh, I think probably.