

Interviewee: Marian Dunham
Interviewer: Lois Meacham
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Marian Dunham

Side One

Lois Meacham: [LM] This is March 12, 1992. And my name is Lois Meacham. We're going to ask you a number of questions about the Depression era and World War II era plus other things that happen to come to your mind. First off, we would like to ask where and when you were born.

Marian Dunham: [MD] I was born— where: about two miles from here— three miles northeast of Grinnell. When: February 10, 1919, at four thirty in the morning at home.

LM: You were born at home.

MD: Umhum.

LM: What kind of attendants did your mother have?

MD: The doctor came to see to me and he— I don't think she'd ever even seen him before. Not much— well, in connection with other things. And there was a nurse there named Rose Wiess.

LM: I see. OK. [pause] Describe where you were born.

MD: Well, the house out there is an ancient house. It was built by my grandfather and I believe that it was built before the road was and it was put there shortly after the Civil War, part of it. And when they wanted to come to town, they just took off across the fields. They didn't need a road too much.

[Break in tape.]

LM: The person we are interviewing here is Marian Dunham which missed getting on the first part of the tape. Now we'll go back to our questions. Did you have indoor plumbing in your home?

MD: Not a bit of it.

LM: At any time during the period we're discussing today, was it put in?

MD: No.

LM: No.

MD: We had a super privy though. It was very well built by my father. It really had most of the comforts of home.

LM: It wasn't heated though, I don't suppose?

MD: Heavens, no.

LM: Did you have electricity?

MD: No, we got electricity in about 1946.

LM: How was your home heated?

MD: We had a stove that we could get red hot in the living room that you could put your shoes up on the fender and get them well burned. And in the kitchen was a large range. It could go red hot, too.

LM: But none of the bedrooms were heated.

MD: Just the one that was downstairs got some by radiation or something.

LM: Who were the members of your family, say, around 1929?

MD: My father, my mother, my uncle, my two older brothers, and I. I was considerably younger than these people. I got to be a pretty big kid, I think, before I realized that other people didn't have three parents.

LM: Could you name your parents and give a little bit of their background and your brothers and your uncle?

MD: Starting in— My father was Egbert Harold Dunham and he was born in Illinois near Neponset, Illinois. And he came to Grinnell with his family. He was kind of a young sprout at that time. He went to the academy at the college. I don't think he was too serious a student. He lived for some years in Florida where his father got a grant and they—as a Civil War veteran—and they tried to raise oranges. So he had that experience of living in Florida for some time. He did a lot of— He was a super gardener and he raised apples, plums, pears, peaches, all kinds of vegetables and that's what we lived on a great deal of the time.

My mother was Harriett Grinnell Dunham. Her father was a double cousin of J. B. Grinnell, the founder of the town. And she had lived there, she was born there, too, at that farm. And lived there her whole life and probably traveled only to back to New England with her mother and into down to the Ozarks to visit relatives were her only travels in life.

My uncle was J. B. Grinnell, II. He was named for his father's cousin and he was born there on the farm and lived there all his life. He graduated from Grinnell College in around 1894 and he was one of the early football players. He loved to go to football games and to basketball games. My brothers would take him, but they wouldn't sit with him because he made such a fool of himself [pause] by yelling. He

liked to come to town to play pool at the Elks and carry home a big piece of steak for Sunday dinner. My brothers were ten and seven years older than I. My older brother, Grinnell Dunham, is well known to everybody in the town of Grinnell. And he lives here yet. And he's farmed most of his life. And my younger— My brother in the middle is John. And he died in 1944. He was a member of the armed services. And then there was little Marian.

LM: What were the roles and responsibilities of the individual family members?

MD: The farm actually belonged to my uncle and to my mother. My father was kind of a— He helped here and there. And he did all of this wonderful farming. He tinkered and fixed and did things and he killed weeds and he helped milk the cows and he did whatever needed doing. My uncle made the decisions about the farm fields and what was going to be planted and what was to be harvested and so forth. Mother did everything in sight—cleaned house, cooked, gardened, disciplined a little kid, raised money for people who wanted to go to college.

LM: Did she sew, make clothing and that sort of thing for the family, or did you have someone come in to do that?

MD: Nobody came in. She could sew. Her fuse was a little bit short when it came to sewing, but we got some done. She taught Sunday school and she went to lots of church meetings and she was president of the Grinnell Garden Club and a division of the women's club and she liked to go around and visit her little friends.

LM: Who were your family friends during the early the late '20s and early '30s?

MD: Our best friends across the road were Mrs. H. W. Belden, no I mean, Mrs. Miriva Brooks Belden and her son Worth Belden, H. W. Belden. And we visited back and forth with them a great deal. Very few days passed when we didn't see a Belden or they saw us. We'd sit and talk for hours and enjoy each other. And then there were lots of old relatives and neighbors who we'd [see when we] came to town. Of course, we drove a horse back in the time that you're thinking of here. We had Snip who drove a buggy. And we'd go see Aunt Alice or Aunt Dora or Mrs. Buchanan or Mrs. Murphy or some of these other neat people in town on our way home from the grocery store and the library.

LM: I was going to ask about the grocery stores. Where did you do most of your shopping for food?

MD: Well, I can remember going to Macintosh's store on the corner of Commercial Street and Broad Street. Latter on we went to the United. I can't remember in between. Stopped off at the North Market fairly often.

LM: And where did you shop for clothing?

MD: Can't remember if I ever shopped at all. When I came along a little later, I shopped at the Broadway.

LM: Well, we're talking here, you know, through the Depression years so —

MD: I don't know where we shopped.

LM: And you already mentioned that you got to town by horse and buggy. And —

MD: We did. My father and my mother and my uncle never did learn how to drive. We had to wait until my brothers were old enough to drive. And we got a 1922 Dodge touring car — a long time after 1922. And they could take it apart and put it back together. This H. W. Belden across the road was a mechanic as well as a mail carrier and a farmer and he could do lots of things with cars. So that's — I think they learned all about cars from him.

LM: You already mentioned your father's expertise in the garden. What kind of food preparation activities were done by different members of the family?

MD: I was a hunter and gatherer. I'd go out and pick things and bring them in and help get them ready, but I never learned how to cook them. Still don't know.

LM: So your mother did most of the canning and the preserving.

MD: She did the canning. Um hum.

LM: What kinds of things did you can and preserve?

MD: All kinds of fruits. We did some butchering early on and made some marvelous big quart jars of meat — beef. But we canned immense numbers of tomatoes. And we had apples: we had quite an orchard, really. And my father also did custom spraying. He had a spray outfit rigged up on a spring wagon with a hand pump and poor old Snip had to pull that around to town and so forth. And one of us had to be up on that on the wagon and pump it while he directed the spray up into the tops of the trees. And I've got a feeling that we probably all got a good dose of whatever it was. Especially the horse.

LM: Did your family eat out at all — going to restaurants and that sort of thing?

MD: No. The chief eat out was when we went to our relatives on Thanksgiving Day. That was a big eat out.

LM: Did you exchange meals with the Beldens —

MD: Sometimes.

LM: Did you eat at each others houses occasionally?

MD: Sometimes. Sometimes.

LM: What did you do about health care? You mentioned that there was a nurse in attendance and a doctor came, but you must have had other needs – I mean medical-wise.

MD: I think that we were outstandingly healthy. I can't remember going to a doctor. I maybe – maybe I did. We went to the dentist regularly.

LM: OK. Good. Did you have home remedies? [pause] Special things you did when you had a cold or –

MD: Went to bed. Greased up with something or other. [pause] I can't remember.

LM: You were talking about when you were in town stopping by the library. And what, what role did the library, Stewart Library, play in your life at that time.

MD: I started using the Stewart Library when I was in about the first grade. In the second grade, I started in Mrs. Bray's summer reading club or contest as she called it and carried them on every year until through the sixth grade. You – we were awarded a book if you won a certain number of credits. I went to the library all the time and in the summer time I could walk to the library. I could walk to town in the summer time. In the winter time, I got my books from the church library – we were there on Sunday. And I remember in the second grade I was – There was a school program the night that Mrs. Bray had the party for the summer readers and she brought the book. I couldn't go to the party, so she brought the book out to me. And it was *The Overall Boys*. And she said, "You're going to not find this much a challenge." But it was a lovely book. I sat down and read it in about twelve minutes. After that [laughs], the next year, I think, I got the *Adventures of a Brownie* and then *Heidi*. She was a great librarian. She motivated us to read.

LM: What do you remember most about Grinnell in those days, the physical Grinnell or just the feeling of the town?

MD: Trees. Lots of trees. Lots of elm trees and others. Of course, when we rode along in a buggy, we could have a chance to enjoy all that sort of thing. And then we hitched our – Along the north end of the park there was a long hitching a row of hitching posts with chains that hung down in loops between them. And we crawled over and up over those and we crawled under them. We had a lot of fun playing there and we hitched our horse there usually. And it wasn't the only one. Though we were the last people out of that part of the world to ever get a car.

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

MD: Well, we had a terrible summer in 1933. That was the summer that my mother broke her hip. My brother graduated from college and there was no job. The only person in his class that got a job married the boss's daughter or was going to. And he spent a lot of his time writing letters trying to get a job. My mother spent the entire summer at the St. Francis Hospital in a cast from clear to her ankle and came out of it in not very good shape. And then my uncle had a ruptured appendix the same summer. So we spent all our time on the mile and so between our farm and St. Francis Hospital going to see them. There was no crop to speak of. There was no garden to speak of. We ate – and my brother, my younger brother, could cook biscuits and scrambled eggs and we ate an awful lot of biscuits and scrambled eggs that year. And the expenses of these illnesses, of course, were kind of considerable. But we managed.

LM: Did you do any of the cooking yourself?

MD: Yes, I can make scrambled eggs and biscuits, too.

LM: You probably had to take over the house chores.

MD: Definitely.

LM: How were holidays and special occasions observed?

MD: Well, Thanksgiving we always went – we usually went – to a cousin, one cousin or another of my mother's, either in Tama or Montura. And on one occasion, even to Waterloo. And those people were eaters and cookers. And we took chickens, and pies and cakes, whatever. But that was just the beginning of what we had. And we had a wonderful family reunion with those people. Christmas we were pretty much on our own. We always usually had the Christmas tree that was out at the school house because it had to be out of the school house by the time the Christmas vacation was over. So my father brought it home. He was the school director for many many years.

LM: Where was the school located in conjunction to your home?

MD: Very close. I could run all the way. It was right in the corner of our farm actually. They told me that when the first school house came it sat out down there at the corner and nobody wanted it and finally my uncle – My grandfather said he'd take it. And he moved it in. So our farm was a little bit shortened by that and by the fact that the railroad ran across the back of it. So that it was a seventy-seven acre farm supporting six people. And sending four of them to college – Grinnell College.

LM: So you went to country school through what grade?

MD: Eighth grade. I had a total of two classmates in that time, but not at the same time. Artis was there toward the beginning and Boyd at the end. There was a gap in the middle when I was the only one in my class, but we always had quite a fairly large school because it was the area around the northeast corner of town and there were a lot of small acreages there where there were a lot of children. It was a standard school, which meant that we always got extra money because we always had a teacher with a certain standard of education and I don't remember what the other qualifications were. We had a nice school house. It had a cemented basement with a big furnace in the middle of it and we could play there with bouncing balls and batting things around during recesses when we couldn't get outdoors too much. We had some fun things we did, like that big register in the middle of the floor was a wonderful place to throw little bits of crayolas so that they'd land on top of that furnace and make a stink. And until my father hung a big piece of wire in there so that they couldn't get away with that too well. We had a good place to play besides our school yard. Across the street— Across the way was Dare's grove and for some reason they didn't really farm it intensely. We had a stile there, so we could get across the fence very fast and up the hill and then we had a baseball diamond up there. Then further along there were trees and that was the grove. We played softball intensely. Recesses and noons, but after school we were expected to go home. We flew kites from over there. We played lots of games.

LM: Sounds like a good place to be. To what churches and voluntary organizations did family members belong?

MD: Well, we were members of the Congregational Church. And my uncle came to church back in the early times. My father didn't attend church. He was very deaf and it just would have been lost to him. My brothers, my mother— my brothers and I came quite regularly, too. Well, mother went to the Women's Society— whatever it was at that time— and my brothers went to Christian Endeavor and I did later, too. We walked into town quite often and walked home again and come walking back again to go to these Sunday afternoon affairs.

LM: Were they involved in any other voluntary organizations in the community?

MD: My uncle was a charter member of the Farm Bureau. They had belonged to the Grange earlier, but that Grange had fallen apart before my time. I think they enjoyed it at the good time that they belonged to it. We went to Farm Bureau meetings quite a bit. I belonged to the 4-H club when I was [pause]— Let's see, I was in Campfire first when I was in about seventh grade and so forth and then I dropped

that. I went to 4-H club for several years. We met around at people houses mainly and we learned to do demonstrations which were not too great – some of them. The ones I was in were not great.

LM: What kind of projects did you have?

MD: Sewing and home improvement things, like making a wardrobe out of a piece of cretonne and a bunch of orange boxes. And reframing pictures, taking them apart. That is about the most useful thing I learned how to do. I do that yet.

LM: What did you do as a family in your free time? It doesn't sound like you had very much free time but –

MD: Well, we all read books all the time. I learned how to read before I went to school by hopping on somebody's lap and letting them read to me and watching what they were reading and caught on to what it was all about. I can remember though that we used to sometimes on a summer evening we'd sit around on the porch and sing. There were some people in there who could sing, but most of us were not too great.

LM: Bet you had a good time doing it any way.

MD: Umhum. And my brothers and I used to sit up to the table and draw pictures. We were better. They were pretty good at that.

LM: And you had games you played outside.

MD: We had games we played inside like Flinch and we played caroms until my mother decided she couldn't stand to hear that noise anymore and told us that was all for today. We could play all day if we she'd let us. Outside I don't think we did much because of the disparity of our ages – my father having been fifty-one years older than I and my mother forty-one years older than I, and my brothers ten and seven years older than I. My uncle didn't play games at home; he just went to watch people play games.

LM: What reading materials did you have at home?

MD: Oh, we had a lot of reading materials because this was a house where other members of the family moved away and dumped all kinds of possessions on us because we always stayed. So I have books even now that belonged to both my grandfathers and even further back than that. And there were always books to read and we got – we took magazines like *Saturday Evening Post* and *The American* and *Country Gentleman* and some farm papers that I didn't read so much, except I liked "Hank the Hired Man" that was in one of the farm papers. I always read that. And we were regulars at the library and at the church library. We had lots.

LM: Did you have a radio?

MD: Not until we got [pause]— we got one with a great big heavy battery. It didn't seem to last very long. That was not a very early radio. But, of course, we couldn't plug it in the wall because there was no electricity.

LM: When did you say you got electricity?

MD: In '46. That was back—

LM: What sort of programs could you hear on your radio at that time?

MD: Oh, well, there was some mystery, dramas, and music, other dramas.

LM: Did your family have a phonograph?

MD: We had had one. It was one of the ones with the cylinders.

LM: Edison.

MD: Oh, I suppose. That was— It was an antique even then.

LM: Did you go to the movies ever?

MD: Hardly ever. I remember the first movie I ever saw was on a family expedition to Marshalltown with some of the neighbors. And we went to see *Rin Tin Tin*. And I thought, "Gee, this is great stuff. We'll be going to see movies all the time." I found out that wasn't true. It was too costly.

LM: What was your Saturday evening routine? Or did you have one?

MD: If you mean baths, I don't think we did baths then.

LM: No, a lot of people in those days—

MD: Went to town.

LM: Went to town—

MD: We didn't do much of that.

LM: —and sat around in the square.

MD: No, not unless I went with friends and walked around and around and around the block. That happened sometimes.

LM: Now you sort of answered this question, but how did members of the family earn a living. Just from the farming or I suppose your father got something for spraying people's orchards, too.

MD: He got a little. Not too much. Well, the farming. Well, of course, a lot of the farming. the special things like threshing and silo filling, were shared work in the neighborhood. We belonged to crews that went around for different houses— different farms— to do that. Uhm, any other money? I don't think so. I remember my first job when I ever earned any money. My father hired me to get the potato bugs off the potato plants. He gave me a little wooden paddle and a can of kerosene and turned me loose on them. I made quite a bit on that.

LM: Were you paid by the bug or by the pint or—

MD: By the so many bugs. See, he proposed a rate and discovered that I was going to bankrupt him so he changed it immediately. I had a tendency to save my money for the 4th of July fireworks.

LM: Describe your standard of living compared with others at that time.

MD: Well, depending upon if we're talking about the farms or the city people. We were an old-fashioned family, you see. These people were so much older than the contemporaries around that I met other parents that I knew. And they didn't go in for fancy stuff. I think our standard of living in material things was probably low like the others. But in intellectual things, I think we were sharply above them. And when it came to associating with my old friends who were in Campfire group, I wasn't with it at all. I was different.

LM: What was their attitude toward the Farmer's Holiday during the Depression where the farmers were killing little pigs and pouring the milk down the ditch?

MD: I think my uncle killed a few pigs and I think he cried and he never did it again.

LM: What was their attitude about people –

Side Two

LM: What was your family's attitude toward the people employed by the WPA?

MD: Can't remember anyone having an opinion, except Uncle Joe. And he was against anything that any Democrat did. He would – He subscribed to the *Marshalltown Times Republican* and that was the word. And I don't think the other people said much about the subject. He raved against the Democrats so much that, you know, that I'm a Democrat today.

LM: I assume then he didn't care for the New Deal and the CCC and all those. Were you affected by the agricultural programs, like the corn-hog program and things like that?

MD: I kind of left that up to them. I didn't pay much attention.

LM: You don't recall them speaking about it particularly then.

MD: I probably let it go right by me.

LM: In what ways did your family try to solve economic problems during the Depression? What new and different things did they try?

MD: On seventy-seven acres, you didn't try much new. You changed your crops and tried different grass crops, I think, but I can't really say. I remember when I was in college, Professor Stoops used to question me from time to time about what was going on with the farm and I didn't know one thing I could tell him. And he thought it was funny.

LM: Do you remember any disasters, economic or natural, that affected you or your family?

MD: Those droughts affected us terribly. We didn't have any water in any of the wells. We had to dig a well in the back. Had to haul water – had to haul water from town. Didn't have any crops. Didn't have much of a garden. Couldn't water the garden; there was nothing to water it with. It was pretty slim pickings.

LM: How did you survive those days?

MD: New England grit.

LM: I see. [pause] Did you ever feel that you didn't have enough to eat? Not a lot, but enough.

MD: Just that one summer when we ate all those eggs and biscuits.

LM: But you did have chicken throughout this period.

MD: We always had chickens.

LM: So you had eggs. Weren't they affected by the drought?

MD: You'll find out in my little notebook here I was counting how many eggs I got each day and as it got hotter and hotter and hotter, it got fewer and fewer, but enough to eat.

LM: How did the churches help families in those days? Do you remember?

MD: Just gave us spiritual hope, I suppose. That's all they did for us. I don't think they recognized that we were in any kind of a problem. We were better off. We owned our farm, mortgaged at that time, but we got out of that.

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

MD: A little bit of distrustfulness, I think, on both sides. We had terribly good friends that came and bought things from us and were very cordial and [pause] either they were friends or they ignored each other, I think.

LM: Did you sell some of your fruit that you grew on your farm to other people?

MD: Right, we had an apple stand all the time. We sold cider.

LM: What kind of apples did you have mainly?

MD: Wealthy.

LM: What varieties?

MD: Wealthy, and Jonathan and Greenings and Anesemes and Charlemoffs and Snows and more.

LM: Quite a variety then.

MD: We had lots and we had other things. And whenever we had too many of something we could take it down to sell it at the store quite readily. I can remember selling quite a lot of raspberries. I remember taking them to the store. They were happy to get them.

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

MD: Well, I heard tell they didn't see eye to eye quite a lot, but it didn't affect me at that point.

LM: In the community, were there people of other faiths and different ethnic and racial backgrounds that you realized were there and, if so, what attitudes did you have toward them?

MD: Well, some of my best friends, my playmates, early on were Catholic and that didn't bother us. My other friends were Baptist. Other friends were Methodist.

LM: Do you have any memory of the Gypsies in Grinnell during the Depression?

MD: There was a family of Gypsies that stopped at our farm one time and were all over the place immediately. And my — they were — one saw my uncle out by the barn and went over and wanted to tell his fortune. And he said, "I don't have a damn cent on me." And — [laughs] that took care of her. And another one came. My father went into the house to get a nickel or something and she followed him right up the stairs and little Marian was following her — right up behind her — and that discouraged her. This was in June. They wanted apples off a Wealthy tree that was close to the — And they were hard and green and knobbed. There was pie there and they wanted that. They were all over the place immediately. They said that they were Oklahoma Indians and they'd been over to Tama visiting their relatives, but they were Gypsies. They had a big old black car out front. And that's about the only time I ever met up with them.

LM: You don't remember a group of them camping out on the six-mile corner on Highway 6?

MD: No.

LM: Did the family use alcoholic beverages?

MD: Never. Did they smoke? No. My mother was a little bit more tolerant, I think, about alcoholic beverage use because there were precedents there. She had some cousin back in New England who had made a home brew and, when she was a little girl, she was standing next to a bureau and she heard something in the bureau drawer. And she said, “What is that in there making this noise?” And they looked and it was a bottle of something he’d made that was just about ready to blow. [Laughs] There was a family precedent. There was nobody who smoked.

LM: How did your family feel about the honesty and ability of elected officials and other people of authority in those days?

MD: I don’t know. I don’t really know.

LM: It wasn’t discussed?

MD: Probably. I had a good way of tuning out some of these discussions, I think. They talked a lot.

LM: What sort of educational training took place within the family? I know you’ve mentioned college for most of you.

MD: Well, uncle and my brothers and I all went to Grinnell College. My brothers and I had gone to Grinnell High School. My mother had gone to Grinnell High School. She qualified to be a teacher, but she never did. She just kept busy at home. Is that what you mean?

LM: Yes. So the family valued formal education highly. Evidently made great sacrifices.

MD: In my — And some of my other relatives, like my Aunt Alice I mentioned before, was a Grinnell graduate and had taught Latin and English in Grinnell High School and in other places.

LM: Alice who was

MD: Alice Dunham Hannay.

LM: Did expectations differ for boys and girls in your family?

MD: Not as far as my mother was concerned. My father thought that it was kind of silly to send me to college, but he wasn’t doing it. My mother and I were doing it.

LM: I see. [pause] How was your search for education affected by the Depression?

MD: Well, I probably would have gone to Grinnell no matter if we had had some money, but there was no question of going anywhere else. Here I have a notebook that tells exactly how much I spent in five years in college — four years at Grinnell, one year at the University of Denver. Would you like to know?

LM: Yes.

MD: As a freshman in 1938-39, I spent \$199.94.

LM: And this was for —

MD: For everything, including tuition.

LM: Tuition and books?

MD: Yes.

LM: And you were living at home?

MD: Yes. And clothes. A dollar and a quarter for a skirt. I mean, really. And the next year I spent two hundred thirty, no, \$186.57. Junior year, \$230.80. Senior year, \$266.83. See, it's creeping up. And in the year in Denver, 1942-43, I spent \$798.16. For five years. That's post-graduate college. My rent was \$20 a month in Denver.

LM: So this seven-hundred and ninety dollars whatever includes rent?

MD: Rent.

LM: And food?

MD: Food. Thirty dollars for lunch and fifty for dinner. The total for the first four years was \$884.14. The total for five years was \$1,682.30. And if I didn't have it here in ink and on paper, I wouldn't believe it myself.

LM: Did you work at the college as part of your tuition?

MD: Yes.

LM: Where did you work?

MD: I worked in the college library all except the last semester that I was in college. And at Denver, I worked at the University of Denver library. So there's an item there for streetcar tokens quite often as I was going out to the campus.

LM: So you did actually work?

MD: Right.

LM: For your education?

MD: I had grants, too.

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

MD: [pause] They knew how to farm, but that's not unusual.

LM: Well, I think your father's skill with gardening and caring for —

MD: That's right.

LM: — fruits and things.

MD: He was a super gardener. Wonderful stuff.

LM: What attitudes did they have about persons less or better educated than themselves? Obviously, you would be looking at people less well educated.

MD: Well, not necessarily. I think they were pretty tolerant of all types of people. They were not – they kind of kept to themselves more than you might think, partly because of transportation problems. Uhm, I didn't remember hearing a lot of criticism of people. If there was, they usually said why those people were different, in those respects. Really a pretty broad-minded bunch.

LM: Did the family members become involved in community affairs, charitable activities, reform movements, or local government?

MD: [pause] Well, my father was the school director for years and years and years. He said he was going to quit when I got through the eighth grade, but he didn't. He kept it up for several years. That meant he cleaned the school house. He kept the key by the back door where anyone could have raced in and gotten it, but they didn't. And he hired the teacher with consulting my mother, of course. And he met with the other directors of the other schools in the township as a township school board. On his birthday every year, which was on October 28th, he went a few days later and set the privies back up on their bottoms because they usually got tipped over as part of Halloween fun.

LM: Did he have to stoke the furnace and that kind of thing?

MD: He had to see to – I think he bought the stuff – that was the coal and the wood – that was there to use, but he didn't actually do that work.

LM: Who would do that?

MD: The teacher.

LM: The teacher had to keep the fire going. Did they build it fresh each day?

MD: I think they –

LM: Or did they damp it down?

MD: I think they damped it down. It was a good furnace.

LM: Were some activities considered appropriate for only one sex?

MD: Oh, I'm sure. I never had to do anything like milk the cows and that sort of thing, but there were two men and two boys after all. I did do some farm work. When we put up hay, I drew the horses to lift they hay up from the hay wagon into the hay mow. I helped with other hay jobs.

LM: So there was really a –

MD: One of my brothers ironed his shirts, white shirts, but the other one, and he could cook – but the other one – that's here now – would not touch either of those jobs.

LM: What was their political outlook? I gather your uncle was conservative. What was the rest of the family?

MD: Mother was kind of along that line, but not so rabid as he was. And, I think, my father never said anything about it as far as I can remember, but he would have voted Republican.

LM: What was your reaction when the U. S. entered World War II?

MD: Aghast. I was in college at that time. And I can remember gathering in the back room of the library listening to the radio and we immediately felt that because the men started to disappear from the campus immediately and one was killed very soon. And one of our classmates had left college to marry him and she was gone, too. And that shocked us probably as much as anybody and you probably know who I mean.

LM: Hum.

MD: That was a bad one. The second thing I felt was Miss Anderson's conditioning classes. She put us through—

LM: Miss Anderson was— ?

MD: The head of the women's physical education and she was going to have us healthy and in condition and she put us through a series of exercises that lamed everybody on the campus. [laughs].

LM: What was the nature and extent of military service by family members?

MD: My brother John was drafted in, oh— He had been out of college for several years and he was teaching in Colorado, and he was drafted. And he was in the chemical warfare service in Maryland and Alabama and Utah. And he never was sent overseas, but he died from an unrelated illness in Utah in 1944.

LM: And what about your other brother?

MD: He was deferred for farm.

LM: What were your attitudes toward the military service?

MD: Well, it wasn't anything I wanted to do myself.

LM: What did you do during wartime?

MD: I was in college. And in the library school in Denver and working in libraries in Clinton first. Then I was working in Waterloo at the end of the war.

LM: How did World War II disrupt your family life?

MD: Well, it disrupted it terribly when my brother died.

LM: Yes. But he had already left the farm

MD: Yes.

LM: And Grinnell was still on the farm, so I suppose as far as that goes it was—

MD: Well, of course, we had to go through all of that rationing business.

And—

LM: What kind of rationing did they have during World War II?

MD: Like sugar and meat and gasoline and shoes—things of that sort. And where I was, I was able to trade rationing stamps for meals, in Clinton, that is.

LM: Well, you weren't here during that period, so you don't know exactly what the community feeling was during World War II.

MD: It was something they had to put up with, I guess.

LM: Was your family aware of migrant workers in and around Grinnell during World War II, like from Jamaica and Mexico?

MD: I don't know. We, of course, did our own. With that size farm, we did our own. Two old men and a young man at that time.

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

MD: Well, we had to get by without a lot less of the good things in life that we might have enjoyed if we'd had a little more money, like more interesting clothes, maybe travel.

LM: Did you feel any bitterness or frustration that you lived during the Depression?

MD: I think that probably not too much. As I said I could have used more clothes and I never was able to get out of the state of Iowa until I was junior in college, when I went on a family trip with my father, my brother and my cousin down to visit relatives in the Ozarks. And I could have— And I see now what young people do in the way of travel and it just seems like I could have used more of that.

LM: Do you—during the Depression years and during the drought years—do you remember infestations of grasshoppers?

MD: Yes, there were some, chewed up the place a few times.

LM: But not the kind that came in and took the entire crop.

MD: Not the entire crop, just messed it up. I can remember being awfully frustrated by not being able to get a drink of water when I wanted it when there was not water to be had and you'd go out to the pump and the pump would cough up a little bit of water and a few corpses of different bugs and that was terribly frustrating. We probably shouldn't have been drinking that water anyway.

LM: How did you feed— How did you water the chickens when you had very little water?

MD: Well, it wasn't rain water. We used the stock well and when that went out we dug that other well out back. And we always had water after that and we hauled water from town, I think, before that.

LM: Was your family affected by the bank closing?

MD: We did. Do you mean the one in '32 or the one back before when it was—

LM: Well, both. I gather there were hard times in the '20s and then there were harder times in the '30s. Which do you think was the most difficult?

MD: I think the one back in the '20s was bad, was the worst. I remember that I patted the feet of the little griffins [Ed. note: These are carvings on the facade of the Sullivan Bank in downtown Grinnell.] when I went by because they were taking care of my money as a child. Then they—suddenly— they hadn't taken care of it so well. There wasn't any recourse there. In '32 everybody was in the same dish. We had to—there was provision made for it— but in the '20s it was too bad.

LM: You just lost everything that you had.

MD: Well, you got a percentage back from time to time.

LM: Do you have any knowledge of the Uncle Sam's Club?

MD: Just when I was in college. My first story hour that I ever did was there and that would have been about 1938 or '39.

LM: Can you describe to me what the Uncle Sam's Club was?

MD: It was a community club for the kids of the area. And they had games and classes and a place to be and sewing classes and I don't know what all.

LM: And do you know very much about Sam Reagan?

MD: I knew who he was, but I just knew him by sight.

LM: He was the welfare director or something wasn't he, something like that?

MD: Hum.

LM: Well, are there any memories that you have that stand out particularly over those years? Something that makes you feel good and maybe some that make you feel not so good?

MD: Well, I found this diary here that my mother kept in 1930 and I kept, in '34, in the same book. And I had some fun reading that. I was impressed by the enormous amount of breads that my mother made.

LM: Could you read us just a little few excerpts from your mother's?

MD: "January 20th, 1930. Baked five dozen cookies, eight loaves bread, eleven biscuits. Cleared up the house, quite a task because it had been too cold to do much. Read some of the *Happy Mountain*—story of the mountain people—based upon the

Lord's experiences of going out onto the land and his return to his people. An effort by the author to explain his people." Well, that was on Monday and on Saturday, she baked again. And that time she bakes seven loaves and eleven biscuits and that's the way it went on. About every few days we made an enormous number of loaves of bread.

LM: Was she selling them do you think?

MD: We ate them.

LM: You ate them. I see.

MD: Six of us and we chewed them right down. "January 14, 1930. Snowed very hard most of the day. Roads about blocked. Mail from the south" That means the mail carrier just came out to our road and dumped the mail he didn't try to go all the way around. "Lloyd and Maxine Wells and Ada stopped in after school hoping Mr. Wells would come as the drifts were too deep for such short legs. Baked ten loaves and eleven biscuits. Two graham. Marian got in snow very deep coming home for dinner. Wore her overalls in P.M." And then she tells what she was reading and wrote about another book that she "sampled this book – not much," she says. That means she didn't care for that book.

LM: Why eleven biscuits always? I find that intriguing.

MD: Well there was a pan – a foot across and there was big globs –

LM: And eleven fit in.

MD: Hum.

LM: I see.

MD: Here's a – The next day "John and Grinnell walked to school – there was so much snow. John came home for dinner and took me into the luncheon at the church put on by the fifth division. Scalloped potatoes with meat, rutabaga, cranberry salad, rolls, apple pie, cheese, and coffee. Mrs. Kearney led devotionals, reading the Beatitudes and from the Old Testament. Mrs. Conard spoke of the missionary changes in thirty years. Christian, especially and of some of the religions besides Christian, especially Confucianism, the attitude of politeness, reverence, the altar of remembrance for the departed, the Christ of the Indian road went to teach, but stayed to learn. Mrs. C. looked so lovely while talking. Mrs. Bouma sang. Saw (?) who gave me her ideas on child welfare and so forth. Snowed a little more. Very cold. Got to the library. Got *Father William, The Happy Mountain*. G. took a crowd out bob's riding." Now there's something he did once in a while, but not very much.

LM: Now read us a little section of something you wrote in '34.

MD: I've got that one. Let's see here. I had a good one. I lost it. Here. This is great. This is so wonderful. "Tuesday, November 27, 1934" I was in high school. "Got to school at 8:15 and Miss Cook told me that my essay on tuberculosis had won a prize and that the prize winners were to read their essays at 9:00 in the auditorium. Dorothy Showalter won first prize which was two dollars and a chance to compete in the state contest. I won second which was one [dollar and] seventy-five cents." [laughs] "Janette Frazier won third which was a dollar and a quarter. The money was enough even without the glory." [laughs]

LM: That's great. [laughs]. Got any other?

MD: "Report cards out for term. Second six weeks. English, A+; History, A; Trigonometry, A; Typing, B; Drawing, B; PE, C" [laughs].

LM: I see. Weren't big on Physical Education, huh?

MD: I endured it. [pause] Oh, dear. "It snowed and drifted all day. John and Grinnell managed to get the car out into the road this morning. This afternoon John started to town with us as far as Belden's turned around and came back."

LM: What date was that?

MD: November 30, 1934. I remember there was a drift that always happened right near where Grosses(?) is out there on Penrose. And there was the winter of '36, I had steps kicked going up and steps kicked on the other side so I could up and over that thing.

LM: Well, it sounds like you had a good life even if it was a little sparse at times.

MD: It was sparse.

LM: Yes. Well, we thank you very much for sharing your thoughts with us and we appreciate your time.