"THE DEPRESSION OF THE 1930s"

INTERVIEW OF MARY FRANCES ALEXANDER McDONNEY

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Gladys Peterson (indented): This is an interview with Mary F. McDorney on October 8, 1985. Our main topic will be the Depression of the 1930s. Mary, even though we are interested in the Depression of the 1930s, you have had a rich life and a varied life, and I hope you won't mind if we go back before the 1930s and find out what your background really is. I know you're not a Western Montanan by birth. Are you from Eastern Montana?

Mary McDorney (margin): I was actually born in Minnesota, but my folks [William Alexander and Mary Davison Alexander] came out to Eastern Montana when I was only 4 years old, so I don't remember anything except Montana.

Where did you grow up, then, in Eastern Montana?

I grew up on a dry-land farm about 20 miles south of Culbertson—about 50 miles west of Sidney, Montana.

Oh yes, I've been in Sidney; I've never been in Culbertson. Then you went to school in Eastern Montana?

Yes, I graduated from high school in a little town you've never heard of—it's called Lambert. And it's still there, they are still graduating people from high school. But I was the valedictorian in a class of 3!

Is that right?!

(Laughs.) That doesn't say much.

Well, knowing you, you would have been the valedictorian in a much bigger class, too. I know you would have. So your family moved out—was that your mother and your father, and did you have siblings, too?

I had one little brother [William Alexander] two years younger than I. And then in 1915, after we had been out in Eastern Montana for a while,
my youngest brother [Jason Alexander] was born. He's seven years younger than I am.

So you all grew up there, and I suppose they went to school there, too. Was that a country school? Or was it actually in the town, did you say?

Oh yes, we went in the country.

What about the high school, then?

In high school, of course, we went to the Lambert High School. And Lambert was a good 25 miles south of the farm where I grew up. So you see, we were really out in the middle of nowhere—20 to 25 to 50 miles from anywhere.

How did you get there? You didn't board, did you, when you went to high school?

In Lambert? My mother was a schoolteacher, and she got a job in Lambert teaching lower grades. So that was why she brought her family—her two sons and her daughter—to Lambert to go to school.

And did your father come out, or did the family come out with the intention of dry-land farming? Was that their goal?

Well, my father was a school-man, too. He was a principal or a superintendent of schools, so he came out to Culbertson to be the Superintendent of Schools there. But he fell in for all of the propaganda about homesteading.

I wondered about that.

Oh, it sounded like a wonderful thing. And even my mother said that it probably would be a good thing to go out on this homestead and stay there for—what—three years, I think, in order to prove up on the homestead. Then the land could be sold, and probably they would come out of it with a couple of thousand dollars, which was probably equal to about $20,000 right now. So it seemed like a pretty good thing. But my father just didn't ever leave that place until he absolutely had to. And at that time, he'd been there for forty years on that dry-land farm.

That was the days when Hill was bringing the people out. Did you come out on the railroad?

We came out on Jim Hill's railroad, that's right.
And I suppose that many of your neighbors there had done the same thing?

Yes, quite a few of the neighbors left before that Depression had really gotten under way too far, so that my father was one of—I might say—the few that were left out there in the hills.

Are you talking about an earlier depression, because I know the farmers had a depression in the '20s, too, didn't they?

Well, the '20s were not very good, but they weren't anything like the '30s. When they hit the '30s, then they knew there was a terrible Depression. It was combined—and probably the Depression was partly caused—by the drought. There was simply no rain for so long. It was impossible to raise anything.

Let's back up, then. After high school, I know you went to college. Do you want to tell us about that?

I went to Dillon, to Montana State Normal College.

So many of the women here did that, didn't they?

That's right, and I know quite a few right here in Missoula who went there at the same time I did. I've known them all those years. So I went first and took just one year—that is, four quarters—and then taught school for a year in order to make money to go back to school again. You see, we did not have all these loan funds in those days.

I know. And you didn't need a degree to teach either.

Oh no. I just taught the one year, however, and then I went back and got my diploma, which still was not a degree. But in those days, this diploma was very acceptable for teaching.

That was all you needed, really.

Absolutely all you needed. And I taught, then, until the spring of 1935.

Where did you teach your first year, then?

Out in the hills. It was called the Girard School—West Longview School at Girard. And I had some 15 youngsters there in that school, all grades. But it was apparently quite a nice experience. I can still remember it. It wasn't bad at all.
How many students did you have?

About 15.

And knowing you, I imagine you taught them music and everything, too.

(Laughs.) I've always taught children to sing songs, and always enjoyed it. Even in those days, I had the banjo, and used to accompany them.

Did you have musical training when you were a child?

Well, this was interesting, too. In our community, there lived a lady by the name of Mrs. Bertsch, who was a fair piano player, I guess. My mother made an agreement with her by which Mother would do her washing and Mrs. Bertsch would give me piano lessons. So that's the way I got my piano lessons. I've never had any lessons since then. But when I was a little girl, I learned how to read and how to count the time and how to finger the piano.

Well, I'm sure you were an apt pupil.

(Laughs.) I don't know about that, but I enjoyed it. I've spent a lot of time at the piano.

What do you remember about those early times in Eastern Montana? What things stand out in your mind as you were a young girl?

Well, when I was a young girl, I was just as dissatisfied as the young people are these days. I didn't have very much fun.

I can't believe that! You seem like you like fun so much!

Yes, well, perhaps that's where I developed my taste for it, and then when I couldn't have it, I just was so frustrated. But there were a few things that we could do in those days. We had public dances in the communities, so I learned how to dance and it was one of the things I enjoyed more than anything else. Then, we could also ride horseback, and that was one thing I really learned to do. I always had a horse and could ride across the prairie. So when I tell people now that I used to be a cowgirl, it just absolutely floors them. They can't quite believe it! But it was true.

What about your brothers? Did they leave that area, too, and go to school somewhere?

Well, my older brother [Bill] did not. He's two years younger than I am.
He was a farmer from the word "go." Farming was the only thing he wanted to do. And through the help of our mother, he managed to get hold of a good farm down in the Missouri valley near Culbertson, and then he met a lovely young woman by the name of Norma Hawkins who had no desire whatever except to be a farmer's wife. So when she met Bill, the two of them just hit it off beautifully, and to this day they still live on a farm which is north of the Missouri River. And they've been very happy there. They raised four children on this farm.

The younger brother [Jason], however, was given an opportunity to learn the electrical trade. Mother saw to it that he was able to go to this college in Billings— it was the Polytechnic School in those days. So he became an electrician and has made that his career. He went out to Seattle and spent his time being an electrician, and has now retired, of course.

You said you finished your work at Dillon and then you taught some more. About what year would that have been?

I finished my work in Dillon in the fall of 1928, and began teaching in the Yellowstone Valley. I taught in the school in the valley for a year and a half. But then I decided to come out to Western Montana. All of that was just quite a remarkable series of events that brought me out to Thompson Falls, where I taught for five years. And when I left Thompson Falls, I didn't ever expect to teach again. I thought I was completely through with teaching, because I got married in early 1935.

In Thompson Falls? You married somebody from that area?

I married somebody who was at that time up at Glacier Park, James McDorney. But it was interesting because of the fact that I had to keep this marriage a secret. My contract stated very definitely—and many, many contracts during the Depression said this: if I got married during the duration of the contract, it was automatically null and void. Those were the words. So I knew that I didn't dare to get married. That was one of the worst things I could do. But I did, and kept it a secret until school was out. So I didn't expect to go back to teaching because I knew they simply didn't hire married women.

So you were married during the school year.

Hm-hm.

Was your husband working in Glacier Park?

Yes, he was working with the Civilian Conservation Corps—the CCC's— in
Glacier Park.

So what did you do, then?

Well, then he had an opportunity to come down as a civilian mechanic at Fort Missoula, and he worked there for a quite a number of years. We came down in August 1936. And at that time, we had our little girl, who was just six months old when we came down here.

I would like to get into the Depression some more, but I'd like to back up now so that I can find out what your life was like during the '20s.

Well, that was during the time I was in high school, you see, during the time when I really wasn't very satisfied with life. I just didn't enjoy things very much.

Okay, but what I would like to know is: were you aware that there were good times going on in other parts of the country and that this was a time of prosperity?

No, not particularly. In those days, we were pretty well aware that the whole country was really in a certain amount of trouble. That was during the 1920s before the actual collapse of the stock market in 1929, you see.

You were aware, you had some feelings that the bubble was going to burst?

Apparently, yes. My father was very well aware of things that were going to happen, so he discussed it with his family. He let us know that things were not very good as far as economics were concerned in the United States.

But people were living well, weren't they, during the '20s?

Not out where we were. They lived very, very poorly. And those were the days of a great many cases where the farmers would lose their land due to foreclosure. Of course, it was much worse during the Depression, but they were still losing the land.

Was this because they had 160 acres and they couldn't make it on 160 acres?

I think that most of the people in that particular area had at least 320 acres. My father had 320 acres. But Eastern Montana is not the kind
of country that should ever have been plowed up. Most of it should never have been plowed up to try to raise grain. Whenever a draught came along, they couldn't make it at all. There was no way of doing any irrigation except out of the well—this was what my father did in order to raise a garden. He pumped water out of the well and took it down and put it on the garden in order to raise vegetables.

...so you could eat. I suppose your mother did a lot of canning and things like that?

She canned everything she could get her hands on. But my mother started teaching in 1917. She went back into teaching when my little brother, you see, was only 2 years old. At first she would take him to school with her, and he would play around in the schoolroom while she was teaching the classes. And she taught several different country schools in the area around where we lived before she finally went to Lambert—that must have been in the fairly early 1920s, probably '23 or '24, that she first went to Lambert to teach.

Were you aware that there were families that were losing their land at that time?

It didn't make that much of an impression on me. I knew it was happening, but I didn't have any particular feeling about it. I suppose I said, "That's too bad," but it didn't impress me that much.

Was that a neighborhood or community, where your dad had his farm, of people mainly from Minnesota or had they come from all over or what?

That's a good question, because the big majority of the people who lived there were from Missouri.

Oh!

And they were just the type of people that you hear Missourians are. They came from the mountains of Missouri. They were uneducated. They were not in any way the type of people that my father really cared to associate with. His vocabulary was way, way above their heads so that often they couldn't understand what he was talking about when he tried to talk to them. He tried to tell them things that ought to be done to make a good farm, and they just shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders and walked away because they couldn't understand him. And this was the type of neighbors that I grew up with—surely one of the reasons why I didn't really think I had very much fun. I didn't care for those people any more than my folks did. There were a few of them, I know, my mother liked very much. I can remember a few families that were very nice.
Was the church important, or were their churches important in their lives?

Yes, another good question. We had several different missionaries who came out and preached at the hall. There was a great big hall—we thought it was big in those days. They came from the Seventh Day Adventists, they came from the Mormons, they came from the Baptists—I've been a Baptist for years, but I wasn't a Baptist then. They came from the Church of Christ—I don't know how many different churches, but these missionaries would come out and preach, probably having a series of sermons for two weeks. And everybody in the neighborhood would go because there was not much to do, as I mentioned before. To go to hear the preacher preach about fire and brimstone and what's going to happen to you when you get to the "glorious heaven above and sit down there with Peter and Paul"—this was the sort of thing that really gave a little bit of joy to the life of those people.

It doesn't sound as if there were many groups that actually built their own church buildings, then. Is that correct?

There was no church building at all. There was just this great big hall which was used for any kind of community event. So naturally, school was held there, and the dances were held there. And when a missionary came to preach for a while, then those would be held there.

But my mother tried to start a Sunday School. She'd grown up as a Methodist. And she thought she was doing pretty well—at least she had the promise of quite a few of these people to come. But one Sunday morning, she went over to the hall and there was nobody there. There was plenty of time for people to arrive to go to Sunday School. But she saw that quite a few of them were gathered at a little sod house which was across the road, so she went over to talk to them. And they were quite sullen, apparently, from the way I got the story. They said, "There ain't nothin' in the Bible that tells nothin' about no Sunday Schools. We're not goin' to go to no Sunday Schools." However, there were Sunday Schools established and some of the people went. I'm sure some of those Missourians did not go, just simply because the Bible "never said nothin' about it." (Laughs.) But that's the type of people they were.

Your mentioning sod houses, I have to ask you a question: When your family first arrived in that area near Culbertson, what did you do for living quarters?

You mean when we first came to the farm? Oh, my father had been planning this for some little time, so he had been going out all spring out to this land which was, as I say, 20 miles south of Culbertson. And he with the help of somebody else had put up a square shack about 14' by 14' with
a peaked roof, and that was where we were to live. My mother told a little story about how, when she was first brought out there, they went out with the horse and buggy, came up over the hill, and there below them was this shack. And Mother said, "Will! Do you mean to say that we're going to live in that little cracker box?" She'd never lived in anything but a large home because she came from a family of seven children in Minnesota. They had a large home, large enough for all seven of them to have their own rooms. But yes, they did. They lived in that little cracker box for a couple of years before they finally had a little lean-to kitchen put onto it. And that was all the room they had at any time.

There must have been some wood around there, then.

The wood was at the river. There were quite a few cottonwood trees along the river, and the river flowed along at one place about ten miles north of where we were. That's the Missouri River, of course.

But it was hard to get fuel. There still is, I'm sure, a good deal of lignite coal around that area. And a man would find a place where there was a vein of lignite coal, and he would establish a mine there. So then the people from the community would come with their sleighs or with their wagons and load up their lignite coal, and he would charge them a dollar to help them load and this kind of thing—whatever it would be. Nothing cost very much in those days—not compared with the prices nowadays, of course. Then the coal had to be hauled back and put into a protected place where it wouldn't get wet. But Mother always said, "You put in one bucket of coal and you took out a bucket of ashes"—that's the way lignite coal is.

Soft coal.

But they would get just enough wood to be able to make kindling to start that stuff, because it didn't start burning very readily. Once you got it burning, it would burn pretty steadily for a long time.

Unless you have some things you want to add about your early life, we will move on, then.

Okay.

I get the picture that during the '20s, you did not indulge in any of the flapper-type life that was going on in other places in our country.

(Laughs.) Not really. Well, of course, you see, I went into teaching at
Thompson, 1926 to 1927, and then I went back into teaching again after finishing at Dillon. So I was teaching during part of these 1920s.

Well, you were in Dillon, which for Montana was a fair-sized place, at least. What was life like in Dillon?

I felt quite at home there. Dillon still is a little cowboy town. I don't think they deny it any time, but they certainly weren't denying it then. And the main way in which people made a living around Dillon was by raising sheep and cattle. So it was just a little tiny bit of a town. It had the college there and, to my amazement, a perfectly beautiful campus. I was disappointed in the campus at Missoula when I first came here because I didn't think it was as pretty as the campus at Dillon.

It's very nice. I lived in Dillon one summer when my husband was doing fieldwork in that area. It's a charming little town.

But I guess what I'm trying to find out is whether or not in those late '20s when you were over there or before the Crash, if you participated in anything like the flapper days where they wore the chemises and the short skirts and that sort of thing. Did any of that reach Dillon?

(Laughs.) I'm sure that it did. Yes, we had to wear short dresses—everybody did—somewhat above the knees, which never were becoming to me. But we were not even exactly aware of that when we're young. We don't know what's becoming to us.

You say you moved over to Western Montana and got a teaching job in Thompson Falls. What was life like in Thompson Falls?

Oh, I used to have a good time in Thompson Falls. I enjoyed the people there and I had some special friends who remained my friends for a long time, even after I left there.

Tell me again what year you went to Thompson Falls?

I went in the fall of 1930.

The Crash had actually occurred in the East, but what about in Thompson Falls?

One of the main ways in which we really knew about the Depression was that every freight-train that went west had a lot of men on it who were going west to try to find a job. And every train that went east had a lot of men on it going east to try to find a job—because there simply wasn't work. But Thompson Falls still has the Montana Power dam there,
and the Montana Power Company was a good source of income for the people of Thompson Falls. So, it didn't suffer so much. Many of the districts in those days could not possibly pay their teachers. They would give them a warrant—my mother taught under these conditions for years—give them a warrant, which would be a promise to pay sometime. But Thompson Falls always paid their teachers. I could cash my teacher's check every month because they had a good enough tax base that they were able to handle it.

In those early years of the Depression, then, in the '30s, you say your husband got involved with the CCC's. . . . Were you aware of any of those government programs in existence in the Thompson Falls area in the early '30s?

I don't think so. Let's see, there was no CCC camp really close to Thompson Falls that I know of. This one where Mac was was in Glacier Park, and there were quite a few of them in that area. Of course, the CCC's did a great deal of work in the forest, and so any area which had a forest to work in often had a CCC's crew up there.

But the WPA?

We heard about it all the time. I don't know of anybody personally that I could say that I knew they worked for the WPA.

The early years of the Depression, then, didn't affect you a great deal because you were working.

Actually, they didn't. I always had enough to get along. I drove a car, could go where I wanted to. I went with a friend to the World's Fair in 1933 in Chicago. And that tells you that I was one of the rich people! (Laughs.)

That was a long trip, too, wasn't it?

Yes, it was.

So when you were teaching in Thompson Falls, it was right in the town?

Hm-hm, yes. There was a school in connection that was in the Thompson Falls district, and I taught in that school.

And you weren't aware that the children at all were feeling the effects of the Depression?

I think we were all so used to it that it didn't really affect us too
much. They had enough to eat. I didn't have any hungry children. But they were clothed sufficiently, you know. Nobody was dressed particularly well—they didn't need to be. If they were, it would be out of place in that day and age.

Did you say your new husband had been in the CCC's in Glacier Park?

Yes.

And after you were married, then, he had the same connection in Missoula?

Yes, but at that time, he was called a "civilian employee," so he was out of CCC's but worked for the government. He was a mechanic.

And he was stationed at Fort Missoula?

Hm-hm. Yes, in those days, it was almost open country between the town and the fort. It was quite a long ways without seeing any other buildings at all—just open.

And you said your daughter was born here?

She was born in Kalispell, so she was six months old when we came here.

Now you had worked quite a bit so far. Did you stay home then when she was little?

Oh yes. It was impossible for a married woman to get a job of practically any kind in those days. They just wouldn't hire them. If there was one salary in a family, that's all that was allowed.

I was going to ask you about that.

However, in the early 1940s—this was after the Depression had really eased up a great deal—I did go into substitute teaching in the district here.

We'll get to the '40s in a minute. I know that you have you done so much volunteer work in Missoula. Did this start when you first came to Missoula in the late '30s?

Not too long afterwards. Yes, we went to the First Baptist Church not too long after we had come—for the simple reason that we lived close to the church, not because we had any special leanings at that time toward Baptists. But I went to the YWCA quite early, I suppose about 1938.
We'd been here not more than a couple of years or less when I first went to the YWCA. Of course, the YWCA is always delighted to find volunteers to do almost anything you can mention, so since I'd had experience working with children, they quite soon had me working with the young girl groups, and I was on some of their committees in the YWCA.

It was a very active organization in those days, too, wasn't it?

Oh yes. Yes, it was.

How long, then, did you stay unemployed, Mary?

Well, early in the 1940s, my husband bought a service station—I shouldn't say "bought," but he bought out the station; he didn't own the building. And it immediately became my job to be the bookkeeper. I had taken bookkeeping before, but I had to brush up a little bit. And I was the bookkeeper, so you might say I was employed then—I was really doing a job. And I was the bookkeeper for that place and for a machine shop which my husband got a hold of later, until I went to work in the YWCA as a professional, a paid person.

How long were you there in that job?

In the Y? Five years, and I was the Executive Director during most of that time.

That was during the '40s.

It went on into the '50s. I left the YWCA in the spring of 1954 and then I worked for KGVO Radio for three years before I went into teaching.

What kind of work did you do for KGVO?

I was what they called the Traffic Manager. Do you know what a Traffic Manager does?

Not really!

(Laughs.) The Traffic Manager would write up the daily log for the announcers to use on the radio, and on that log had to go all of the programs that were put on, all of the commercial spots, all of the public service announcements—everything that was to be said or done on the radio station from 5:59 (a.m.) until 11:00 at night had to be on this radio log.

What kind of a log was that? Was it done in pencil?
It was typed. So in those days, that was when I was my best at typing. I'm not as good a typist as I used to be, because I really spent my whole day typing that log and getting things organized.

We've got you up to the '50s now, and I want to back up again before I forget this. Did your husband after he got here, and he was still connected with one of the federal programs—do you remember the Depression in Missoula after you got here in the late '30s?

Well, yes, I certainly remember the Depression here. One of the things that I can remember is the fact that very frequently, sometimes almost every day, some man would come by the house wanting a bite to eat. And it was really awfully hard to know what to do. If you fed them, then your address was put on their log, wherever they keep their log, so that every other fellow who came to town and happened to go to that particular jungle would find out that 939 Stoddard was a good place to come to get a handout. And it just really happened altogether too often. It became an awful burden.

And this was in the late '30s, wasn't it?

Yes, that would be like 1936, right in the middle.

You said you went to the Baptist Church in those days because it was near your home. Were they doing anything to help people during the Depression that you were aware of?

You mean like feeding people and that kind of thing?

Feeding people or clothing them or giving them any kind of assistance at all?

I don't know that they were. They probably were, but it just didn't affect me that much. As far as I was concerned, one of the most important things that the Baptist Church did in those days was to provide a place where young married people without much money at all could go to enjoy themselves and to meet other people like them who were in the same boat. It was really a very delightful thing that we were able to be together like that.

Sure. You said you didn't like the dreary life in Eastern Montana, so your social life improved at least in Missoula, and I suspect it was much better in Thompson Falls. But what other kinds of recreation did you do, Mary, after you moved out here?

Well, one of the things we used to enjoy doing was to go to the movie.
So we used to go fairly often. I don't know what it cost us in those days—maybe even as much as 40¢ a piece to go to the movie. But one of the best movies we could go to was to the Roxy because they had a "cry room" there and we didn't have to pay a baby-sitter. We could take Sheila along, and if she got fussy, I could take her up to the "cry room" and she could fuss as much as she liked—it didn't bother anybody, and I could see the show and hear the sound which came into that room. So that was one of the things that we did. But our recreation at the church was one of the biggest items in our enjoyment. We didn't take any trips except in 1937, we drove back to Eastern Montana to see my folks. We didn't have money enough to do very many things. As a matter of fact, my husband was making $140 a month—some of them are making $140 a day now. Our grocery bill could not be above $25 a month.

You were on a strict budget?

Very strict budget. And that included the Carnation milk for our little girl to drink because she had to have good food, too.

Did you can and do things like that?

Yes, I canned quite a good deal in those days. In fact, I even canned meat, which to my mind is one of the hardest things anybody ever did in the line of canning.

Yes. Sometimes today, I wonder how people escaped botulism, don't you? Because the scares are so horrendous today.

Oh yes. Yes, it's worse today than it used to be. But we never had any trouble with any of the food that I canned. It all turned out beautifully. But I would have, oh, like 600 or more quarts of food.

Six hundred! For three people!

Uh-huh. Oh, we would eat it all before the time came to can again.

Well, we'll move ahead then. I know you've been interested in music for a long time. Were you involved in music groups in those days?

Oh yes. If I wasn't involved in an organized group, there was always a group of maybe three of us together singing. I have sung with more trios in this town, starting in the middle 1930s, and always enjoyed that very much. So you can really well say that that's one of the pleasures of my life as I went on through. And it was always possible to find somebody around Missoula who could get together in this trio.
Two more questions I've thought of: One is, how important was radio to you in those days and to your family?

Yes, radio was the main entertainment we had, that's true, and I should have mentioned that perhaps. Because we had a good radio. I don't remember just exactly how we got it—oh, I do remember how we got it. We had a little bit of a radio, and one of my husband's friends had to go to World War II, and when he went to World War II, he said, "I'd like to have that little radio you have. I can take that with me. And the one I have is a great big console thing and I can't take it. So I'd like to trade with you until I come back." And Johnny didn't come back. He was killed in North Africa. So we had this radio, which was an excellent radio—beautiful tone—and it provided us with lots of entertainment. You know in those days, radio was really something.

I remember that. Do you remember some of your favorite stars and programs?

(Laughs.) We liked "Amos and Andy," of course. And then some of these plays which were on radio and which were so real. The sounds were just as real, just as much so as the television stuff might be. We didn't have to see somebody fall down to know that they came acropper. There was "Ma Perkins"—remember "Ma Perkins"?

Yes.

I really don't remember much about what she did now, but I know "Ma Perkins" was a real favorite.

All I remember is that she sold Oxydol. Do you remember that?

(Laughs.) No, I don't remember what she sold.

Well, I remember the announcer would come on and he'd say, "Oxydol—ist Ma Perkins!" That I remember.

(Laughs.) But then there was "Helen Trent." Remember "Helen Trent"?

Yes.

That was the most interesting show, and nobody every watches a TV afternoon show with the eagerness that we would listen for "Helen Trent" every day. We really liked it.

I don't remember actually spending much time listening to it. I was a child when I was aware of those and a young teenager. I remember that they would be on, but I didn't really listen to them.
What about the University? Did that have any impact in your life at all? Did you go to any plays or programs over there?

Oh yes. This was one of the most delightful things. You know, in those days, we used to have "Community Concerts"—that's what they were called—and was handled by a Board, and they arranged to have some fine stars come. Paul Robeson was here. Marion Talley was here.

I remember that name.

Yehudi Menuhin—that was one of the most fun of all of them. Yehudi Menuhin, of course, is a remarkable violinist. And our daughter was very interested in music—I saw to it that she had an opportunity to learn music. So we always bought those Community Concert tickets. I don't know what they cost us in those days, probably $10 for everything, but it certainly couldn't have been very much because we didn't have much money. So we always took Sheila to these concerts. And there had been an article about Yehudi Menuhin as a child protege in the old Etude Magazine, and Sheila had read this. So when Yehudi Menuhin came, she brought that page with her. It was the custom in those days for the children all to go backstage and have the artist give them an autograph. So he was autographing these programs just as fast as he could, you know, and handing them on. And all of a sudden, in front of his face came this magazine page with a picture of him as a young boy! (Laughs.) That was the first time he looked up, I guess, but he saw Sheila there. So he autographed it for her, and that is still a treasure of hers.

Did you have some favorite movie actors and actresses in those days, too?

Oh, my goodness, yes. We had Clark Gable for one. I just never dreamed there could be any actor who could be any better than Clark Gable, and I'm still not sure that there's any. And I certainly admired Joan Crawford in those days. And Greta Garbo—I think I saw most of her movies. She was really great. Of course, she really became famous in the 1930s.

I guess she made some silents.

She first made some silents, but I don't remember seeing any of those.

I saw them at the Crystal. They were fun.

Well, do you remember any other things from that particular phase—we're talking now about the '30s and the '40s—that you want to add to this before we move ahead?
Well, of course, there was the war. The war came in. And I have often thought that I must have forgotten a lot of the things about the war. I remember that we had to have little tiny cardboard coins in order to buy things. You wouldn't call them little coupons, really, because they were much too small. And yet I can't really remember of having any trouble with those. It just didn't bother me. The thing was, you see, I grew up during the Depression. I was always used to getting by on as little as possible. And when they said during the war, "You have to get by on as little as possible," it was just a normal condition. I just didn't really change my way of living very much. So these things just didn't bother so much. If I had been used to having everything and going out with all the money I wanted to buy just whatever I chose, then I would have found it kind of rough. But as it was, it didn't really bother me.

During the '40s, then, you got along all right and your husband wasn't involved with the war at all?

He was a little bit too old to be able to be drafted or to go in. So he had to serve here. And he missed the First World War because he was a little too young. He was just born in those particular periods of time.

I guess the war's effect on the people in Missoula was pretty much the same as everywhere else, except I imagine more women went to work. Is that correct, during the '40s?

There were a lot of women who went to work during the '40s. They just simply had to.

So you weren't teaching, though, during the '40s. When did you go back into teaching?

Well, I was substituting in the district during the '40s. And I didn't go back into teaching permanently until 1957.

And that was right in Missoula?

Hm-hm.

By that time, married women could work.

Yes, they could work, but they were under a different status. We couldn't sign a contract in those days. Not until later was I able to sign a contract.

What do you mean!
We were on a different basis. Lucille [Forsman]'s sister was on that same basis—the per diem basis, I think. So they were paid so much per day.

Because you were married!?

Because we were married.

I'm amazed at that!

Oh, there was great prejudice against married women. There were a lot of things married women couldn't do.

Even in the '50s!?

Well, of course, by the '50s, then, I was working in the YWCA. And the YWCA has no prejudice against any woman. No matter what they're like, they're not prejudiced at all. (Laughs.)

But then you went back to work with those stringent conditions, into teaching.

So I don't remember when I got the contract—probably 1960.

1960, oh my. Did this affect a lot of the women who were teaching then?

Oh, yes.

Were most of them married by that time?

They either were married and were affected this way, or else they just didn't get married because they didn't want to be affected that way. If they were unmarried women, then they were able to receive a contract and teach.

That's amazing. I knew part of that, but I certainly didn't know that they were on a per diem basis as late as 1960.

I doubt if it was actually a per diem basis as late as 1960. I couldn't give you, really, any accurate dates on that. But it was in that general area.

Women have come a long way since then, haven't they?

Well, they have. They really have. They haven't made it yet, but maybe they will.
So then you continued teaching. What were you teaching, Mary?

I taught fourth grade at the Franklin School until I retired in 1973.

I remember when you were teaching because I got at least one pupil who had been in your room when I was teaching out in Bonner. I remember that.

Oh, who did you get?

Name of Baldry, I believe. Dennis Baldry, does that make sense?

Oh, yes, I think it was.

I know you've been active all of your life, and certainly teaching didn't stop you from doing what you wanted to do to be of service and to have fun.

Well, it was during the 1960s that I first began to travel. And I traveled a lot then up until 1976, I guess, was probably the last—well, in 1980, I went to China, you know.

Your husband passed away?

No, I divorced him in 1959. And of course, then, I was under a different arrangement with the district when I was single.

I see. And you began to travel during the 1960s, did you say, then?

Back in 1961.

What are some of the trips you've had besides the China one?

We had a trip to Japan in 1970 for Expo '70, and enjoyed that very much. At that time, we saw Bangkok, Singapore, and Hong Kong. And in 1967, I had a motor trip with my cousin from St. Paul to Expo '67 in Montreal—that was quite an experience. I was gone for a month altogether with all the traveling that we did, and I also attended an Alpha Delta Kappa Convention in Minneapolis. So that took almost a week.

In addition to traveling and having fun, I know that you've done other volunteer work, too. What are the other groups that you're connected with?

I've been a member of the Altrusa Club a good many years. Of course, that is a club which looks about in the community to find places where it can help and so, over the years, the Altrusa Club has done a great deal
for the City of Missoula. I think it would be quite an amazing thing for a good many of the people who have lived here all the time to realize all of the things that the Altrusa Club has done. And I worked with them all these years besides working with the YWCA and with the Church, and then with Alpha Delta Kappa, too.

Yes, I know you're a worker. One question I forgot to ask you was: You must have had to go back to school to pick up your degree in order to teach. Did you do that in Missoula?

Yes, as soon as I started teaching in 1957, I started attending summer school and taking correspondence courses, so that in 1960, then, I received my degree in Education at the University here. But I have been getting some education from time to time out there. When I was working in the YWCA, I took a class almost every quarter—just one was all I could find time for. And I did a couple of correspondence courses during that time, too—things at that time that would be related to the work at the YWCA as much as possible, Sociology courses and this kind of thing, you know. So I had almost another year of credits at the University beyond what I'd gotten at Dillon.

Well, I have just a few more questions to ask you, Mary. Do you think that the Depression had any kind of a lasting effect on you, or were you that much detached from it?

To this day, I cannot enjoy spending money, and the Depression did it to me and the hard times that I had as a child, where I just couldn't spend a nickle unless I really thought seriously about it. I mean a nickle, a five-cent piece. Nowadays, a five-cent piece is worth much less than nothing. But in those days, a five-cent piece would buy you quite a few things.

Do you feel guilty about it?

About spending money? I just don't take any pleasure in it. I told myself often that I don't mind spending money as long as I get something for my money, but I'm not sure that I really feel that. I try to tell myself that's true. But, no, once you have grown up with that kind of a feeling that money is not to be spent, it's to be carefully guarded in case of something happening in the future, it's pretty hard to get it out of your system. And I suppose a lot of people were not like that, but it was indoctrinated in me.

What would you say have been your greatest satisfactions? In the work you've done?
In the work I've done? You're not speaking about my daughter now.

Well, we'll take them separately.

I have gotten a great deal of satisfaction out of each one of the things I've done. I enjoy being a bookkeeper. I like to see figures—maybe that's because I want to take care of money. I like to see those figures all balancing up beautifully. No person in the world was ever more satisfied than the bookkeeper who's gotten the books to balance.

But I enjoyed very much working for the YWCA. It was really a great experience. I learned so much, and it just did me more good than you could ever imagine to have worked in the YWCA as I did. I'm thinking about the professional work that I did. The volunteer work is very valuable, too, but the professional work really opened up a broad scan for me.

But I enjoyed working at the radio station—that was so much fun. We just laughed our fool heads off so much of the time. But when it came time to being on the air, we were very serious about that.

And, of course, teaching is, as you know, a profession that offers a great many rewards. I just learned something yesterday—I'll have to tell Lucille about that. A very happy thing I learned yesterday.

Good!

One little boy who drove me up the wall regularly—I saw his father yesterday, and he told me that this boy has been for five years now a chef in a very important restaurant in Reno, Nevada, and enjoys his work and has been very successful. Now, isn't that great?

Yes, it always makes you feel good.

Oh, yes.

Have there been any things that have disappointed you greatly in the course of your career, or anything that you would have done differently?

I don't know. Probably not. Certainly with the light I was traveling with back in those days, I did the best that I could all the time, and I don't suppose I would have changed so very much. I might say that there have been some of the children in school, while there have been some that you're so happy about, there are others who really break your heart as they grow older and you learn what happened to them. And sometimes you might even say, "I knew that was going to happen to that kid." But when it really does happen, it really hurts, too, because you become very closely attached to those children.
You do, and sometimes you feel so helpless.

Very helpless. I used to lie awake nights wondering what could I say to that kid, or what should I have said to have gotten through to him or to her? And sometimes, really, there was nothing. And I would try to comfort myself with the thought that, after all, I had this child in the fourth grade and there had been three other teachers, or maybe four, before that, and they hadn't been able to get anywhere. But you never can tell. You always hope that you're the one that can really make a difference.

Yes, that's true. Well, I deprived you of the opportunity to tell us about your daughter. I'll give you that opportunity now.

Well, she was probably one of the real rewards of the Depression. She was born in 1936. I can't think of any way in which I would change her either. I know I made mistakes, but somebody did something right because along the way, she has done very well and she's still doing very well. So she's the top achievement I've ever had.

She's in California, isn't she? And I know you've told me once what she was doing, but I've forgotten.

She's worked at the University of California in Berkeley since 1961.

Is she teaching?

No, she has worked in various offices there. She worked in the Political Science Department for quite a while in the office. And she worked for Dr. Glenn Seaborg—he's a chemist, isn't he, a nuclear scientist. And she's worked in several other places. And now for the last several years, she's been working in the office of the Institute of East Asian Studies, which she finds very interesting. She really likes that.

Well, I'm sure she's a fine person and one you can be proud of.

You would enjoy meeting her.

Is there anything else you'd like to add, Mary?

I guess not, Gladys.

Okay. Well, thank you very much.

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Transcribed by Sheila McDorney Saxby