OH 49-20 and 21

Sophie Guthrie interviewed by Katheryn Person White

August, 1976

RG Robert Guthrie
SG Sophie Guthrie
KW Katheryn Person White

Tape A side one

KW ...at the Stillwater Nursing Home in Columbus, Montana. The date is August, 1976. Mrs. Guthrie, do you remember the stories about your childhood, the activities that you had, the things that you used to do? You lived on a ranch near Bozeman.

SG One and a half miles west of the college and it can be seen from the field house. Our home - the house that my father built in 1880 - is still there and the people who bought it put it into lots - selling lots like...

KW I was going to say, I'll bet it's a subdivision now.

SG Yes.

KW Who sold it?

SG My mother. My father died at 49. He died in 1898 and we lived in the house.

KW So he sold the farm then?

SG My father died in 1889, the year that Montana was made a state. He had been wounded in the Civil War in the Battle of Shilo. A bullet shot right through his thigh and in a moment he reached around him the bullet was there - he caught it in his hand. He didn't - you understand - he didn't catch it on the swift, he caught it after it had lodged in his coat. They had a farm in Missouri. The custom of those old southern people, you know, was no limit of the size of a family and so he had made up his mind long ago that if ever there was a passage west he would take his family and go to Montana so there would be spaces then for them to take up. There would be places they could get a home. Now at that time that he gets ready to come he has seven children and his wife and all his mules and horses and whatever we had on this farm. And he prepares to bring everything. He wants to bring everything he's got. So he found that he could get shipments into Ogden, Utah, and someway he gets a message back from his friends that the Missions [?] [who] are his close friends in the Gallatin Valley are on a holding place for him for they knew he'd come with a big family and he has no place for them to go. Now he must be on this place by twelve o'clock at a certain date in April - I think it is - in 1880. And these people are there - they are friends. They have the logs all
hauled and laid where they should be but they couldn't put them up. He must build this up by twelve o'clock that night - he must be on this plain at twelve o'clock that night and at that time Bozeman was just a little station and that was a mile and a half out from where we lived.

KW So did he get there on time?

SG He got there on time and not only that, they helped him lay up the logs and put in the chinking to some extent so that when they come, you see, it's spring of the year now and they can come and kind of put up with a little bit of cold. Anyway, he lays these logs and gets it all ready and they come - as well as I understand it - now one history that I have given somebody said that I said they came on passenger train but when my mother was talking to me she says we got the car and they put bunks for beds for the sleeping. [interruption] Now listen. He had to get there - well, now I'm going to tell it like I think that my mother told me that they come into Ogden, Utah, and every child took down with the measles. Well, they had come into the little inn there to stay until they could get ready to move overland to their property. That's as near as they could get. The first place west was Ogden, Utah. You may find some of my history that doesn't jive with somebody else's but now I'm telling it as I know it. And after he got this, they hurried and they helped him and everything and he got so he could live in it. That was sufficient. He then takes back to bring my mother and the rest of the children. But before he left this inn, he said to the innkeeper, "I want you to let my wife have anything she wants or needs. The children are all sick and I must leave my family here. We cannot go on with the children sick." And he [the innkeeper] said, "I will let her have anything she needs." My father must have taken the mules and gone overland and just how he managed it all but one boy was nineteen - my brother - at that time. About nineteen so he rode along and they took the stock. They took all the stock they could take and when he gets to Bozeman and it's just wide open - no fences, nothing and they lived in the wagon that they - and they had everything. And so he fixes 'em up an outfit from this that he's going to take as much as he can for he knows he's coming back for his family. Well, in taking this by his mules he's driving. Mules are slow and so as he came on through to Montana it took him a number of days. I don't know how many days but it just seemed like it was about just twelve - ten days. It took him to come because you couldn't hurry the mules and the boy riding alongside driving the loose stock. It took all of this out of the cars and they had to have quite a few cars if you'll weigh it out for they had a couple three cows and they had mules and couple of horses, I believe. I cannot say for sure that's all. The family now is satisfactorily well. It has taken him this long time and the family has recovered from the measles to where they're safe to travel and man towed 'em so he starts to this place successfully. He goes over this land to his place where - when he lands, he lands with all that he's got. Chicken, hogs.
KW And a whole passel of kids!

SG And all of this have been in other cars. It must have taken two cars - two or perhaps three. Then it's slow traveling and all and they come along and my mother had bought such food as oatmeal, and beans and common things that would be substantial and that she could fix and at that time they had no such as canned milk so all of this would be rough eating and yet substantial.

KW What year is this?

SG Now, they're traveling in 1880. They started so that they would land in the spring knowing they're going to have to live in this shack or a log house put up quickly. One of their outfits was made up when he first come and he used the same one. This is made into - I'd say a camp wagon.

KW How long after this was it that you were born?

SG I was not born until 1882 and you talk about 1880 but I had a sister older than I born on June 19.

KW 1880?

SG Yes, still in 1880. In 1880 she's born and I'm born in 1882.

KW So your mother was pregnant when she went on that incredible journey.

SG That's right. [She] took care of all of these children. If you talk about a woman that's just the finest, the sweetest, the greatest in the whole world, you're talking about my mother because my father had to come on to claim and my mother had to be left alone with the children. Why, the thoughts of buying a nurse or getting a nurse in those times - you know, there wasn't any such a thing. Well, she cared for those children and I'm just very sure now, although this could be because one place somebody said I said they come on a train. My mother tells me that they made bunks like this and this and that inside this boxcar and one end is cooking and here's enough of these put up to support seven children and the parents. You see, everybody had to have a bed and my mother stood in the kitchen and cooked and watched and took care of 'em and brought 'em out of their sickness.

KW So you homesteaded that spring then. Did your father raise cattle or did he plant a crop?

SG He didn't have anything but his own self - on him wounded and the wound bleeding - and he had more courage than anyone could think of because my mother made little aprons and tied all over this wound so that the pants wouldn't drop on it.
KW  Now, that was the wound that he had gotten during the Civil War?

SG  That was the Civil War wound.

KW  It bothered him all his life?  It never healed?

SG  They had no doctors that understood healing.  If it was today, why, they'd take out that hip and put in a new one and he'd have...

KW  What did it do, splinter his hip?  Did it crack the bone in his hip or splinter his hip bone?

SG  Do you understand what I said?

KW  Yes, I did.  I was just wondering why it kept on - it just aggravated him all his life, then.  It just kept bleeding, right?

SG  Yes, and when you said that I thought you didn't understand that he was shot.

KW  He was shot in the Civil War.

SG  As sick as he was, he was determined to come to Montana with his family and his mother had some money and he was the only one that took care of her and everything.  He just gave everything.  He must have because when he came to the end - he's able to pay and he comes on everywhere he's able to pay his way and build that big house out there at Bozeman - you can see it from the field house.  With seven children and my mother pregnant and things hard, too.  They weren't hard like they are now.  At that time they could buy the good substantial food that they needed for a very reasonable price.  For instance, they were buying such as - well, just any of the staple things such as rice and beans and potatoes and all sorts of that - you know, twenty-five dollars would buy a big bill when now it wouldn't buy enough for two.

KW  I know, for a week!  [laughter] So did he then - did your family farm that land or did you..?

SG  He come into that place and built that house and built that barn and he must have had a carpenter but they never mentioned a carpenter.  But he could never have done it by himself.  In the meantime, he just gets right busy with his mules and he plows a garden and he puts in a great bed of strawberries - we're close to the market, you know - and he set out apple trees - mostly crabapple because people said the crabs would live but the other apples wouldn't live there - so that she could make jelly and make things out of it the crabs and there my wonderful mother with all these children and looking for this other one.

KW  So then you were born.
SG Then I was born the next year and there is one born every two years now until she has twelve.

KW My goodness, did they all live?

SG Well, there was a twin that died - outside of that they all lived.

KW Who assisted her in her births out there on the prairie?

SG Well she didn't have a birth on the prairie.

KW Well she had a birth in the Gallatin Valley, anyway.

SG Well, she had a birth when she landed, you see. Now I would say they landed about the fourteenth of April and the baby was born the nineteenth of June.

KW And how did she deliver, did she have a doctor?

SG I don't know that.

KW You don't know that... Did you have a doctor when you were born?

SG I don't think she had a doctor with any of them because they were scarce, you know, and besides that they were poor - but they still he has enough money everyplace he isn't owing a debt.

KW But you don't remember if there was a natal woman or a midwife or somebody who came in?

SG No. There must have been, but I don't know.

KW Who made most of the decisions in your family, your father? Decisions about what you were going to do and what was going to be done with the money.

SG It was my father almost entirely because my mother was very, very congenial with him and had no doubt that he had weighed up the cost and whatever he had said was law because he determined on coming west. She could have said, "Now I'm gonna stay right here with these children and I'll not go west." But evidently she didn't and whatever the hardships were - I'm in doubt as to whether they came on the train and the goods came in - but they're all there together and they're all sick when they land so it must be that I'm right on it in saying that the immigrant cars as they called them... and one end was fit for the cooking and for this and that.

KW Who decided how to discipline or how to handle the children? Was that the mother?

SG That was the father.
Oh, the father decided that. Did he discipline you, then?

Yes, he did and he had – I never remember him striking me but he had – the boy was sometimes not in and he whipped him but not in any extreme. He was very kind and with all this sickness and this pain he was – must have been special.

He was not impatient with you or sharp with you?

No.

He must have been quite a man.

It would take the patience of Job to have seven children. [laughter]

...and not spank them all the time!

Yes, he would have to.

Were they pretty strict with you?

Well, now, I think he must have been but – my brother that was nineteen and could drive the loose cattle and any little side trip to buy something special so that they could send him, you know, for anything. He was a very trusted boy.

Do you remember what chores you had to do as a child around the place?

Well, if you mean chores, I stayed three years in one place and minded babies to go to school when I was eleven.

Now, you minded babies to go to school, what...?

Now, I'll have to go and you'll have to catch it, however you will. But after my mother lived there and my father died, then here came the big lines – the reservations aren't open for settlers and my mother says, "I'm so in debt and I've only 160 acres." That's all you could take then. And she says, "I'm going to take my family and go to this reservation to where I can have the boys as they get to be twenty-one (or whatever age it took). They could take land and they can have their homes." Well, that was quite a success. She came down and I'll tell you my mother had very little money in her hands. Time she settled with everybody. The reservation was thrown open in 1893 and she was so implicated. She couldn't get away until 1895 and then coming down and being subject on the count of the 160 and my father not able to do much – was working. He was bound to be working all the time. We had this big strawberry patch and it had all this – just come up wonderful. Now you'll have to ask because I forget just where I was.

Okay. Well, I was asking you about the chores that you had to do as a child – what chores that were... [interrupt each
other].

SG In taking care of children, we had a school down on this little reservation. It was an eighth grader teaching and I someway had a premonition that if I stayed there under that teacher that I would have no hope whatever of an education because I didn't have - I don't know what grade I would have been in, perhaps I'd been in about the fifth grade. It was my sister that I was going to stay with in Bozeman - and my [her] two children. My sister was a person that didn't understand what a child should do so I had the children night and day, which was something very extraordinary. You know, you go to babysit now and they count the hours and it's a dollar and a half or a dollar seventy-five or...

KW How old were you then?

SG When I started to take care of the babies, I believe at first that I was eleven years old.

KW Man! And you were with them all day long?

SG No, I had to go to school. I was staying to go to school. I purposely left there. My mother says, "Who wants to go to Bozeman?" because we had to go there to buy our supplies and now they go away in the fall with a big wagon and buy the staples such as we knew was just - and buy them in hundred pound cases and that and we could go up with them and then stay and my sister says, "If all of them want to stay, all right." Then they tried to put up with it but it was really too much so she chose me to stay to mind these children and I know I was eleven years old. So when I'd come from school lots of times she would have her hat and coat on waiting for me to come to take care of the children because she liked to go places.

KW So she went out - she wasn't working - she just went out to visit or to..?

SG No. Her husband was a waiter in a restaurant. They didn't have anything either and wages were forty dollars a month. That was the highest wages he ever got. He rented a house and paid eight dollars a month for a house - a good house - a nice looking house there in Bozeman on Ralph Street.

KW So you went to school there in Bozeman?

SG Yes, I went to school all day long, come mind the children and so on and Saturday and Sunday I have them if they wanted. We didn't have cars then. We had no way to go and there was no horses - nothing. You didn't have any way to go. You just lived and went to school, come back and that was it. That was the whole story.

KW So how far in your school did you go?
SG Seventh grade.

KW Seventh grade. Did the other children get to go that far in school?

SG The little country schools - they just kept on. At first there's a terrible eruption in this little country school. The early settlers of this thing - a man came in - he was a real bad man - a real bad reputation. He has his wife and he also has one woman that's also his. Whether she had eighth grade or sixth grade or whatever she had, he had charge of the school and she got it - don't make any difference what it was. She would just go and take the ___________. So they had the money. Through the Northern Pacific they paid taxes because all these people that settled there were so poor they didn't have - they couldn't pay enough taxes to have school. It was the Northern Pacific that much of the track had run through - they paid taxes and that gave us enough to pay for the school. I think that they first paid thirty-five or forty dollars - something like that. I have a book up there that would tell the facts of that - for a teacher a month.

KW What did you do after you were done with school? Why did you stop school at seventh grade?

SG Well, now, in the seventh grade - I'm mistaken because I was thirteen when I left those children. I was thirteen years old and my mother had lived in the old Indian cabins while my brothers were building a house and these old Indian cabins were - I don't want to discredit the Indian - I don't want to say one thing that would even indicate that the house was dirty and terrible, you know. The place did have a board floor. It had only a sod roof. It didn't have any accommodations you might say but it was home. We were all glad to be together there.

KW Was that on the reservation that was opened up.

SG That was on the reservation.

KW Where was that?

SG What part? Well, it was - Reed Point was where we landed and my mother - because she couldn't get off in 1893 and take a claim - she had to wait two years before she could get loose and she had to pay $500 for one - a home.

KW So what happened to the place there in Bozeman? Did your father keep working there on the homestead in Bozeman and your mother was homesteading the place at Reed Point at the same time?

SG No, now you're mixed up because when he lands there, he lives 'til he dies there in 1889 and my mother is a widow.

KW That's in 1893 that she gets the other place.
SG That's in 1895 she came there.

KW Was she adding to—now you told me before that your father sold that place?

SG My father died before my mother sold the place. It had entirely used itself up in supplies for such a big family. That's what put her in debt.

KW Did she get any money from that place?

SG Well, she got a settlement like this. Now, she's going to get ready. This man Benepe— he was a son-in-law to Story [?] but I don't want to mention that. Anyway, he was so anxious—see now she just came and got supplies and he added on and on and on looking forward to the time that he could tell her, "You have to get out, this place is mine." So she had bought until now—this reservation opens up and all and she gets ready to go. In her supplies she bought a wagon—a big [ ] wagon that would hold the cattle in one end or divided up there would be chickens and hogs and machinery—her stuff to run the land when she gets there. So you see, my father came there in 1880 and died in 1889. She's there all this time but seeing that she cannot hold and he's ready to throw her out she says, "I want to use all the rest"—whatever he claimed she still owed to buy a big wagon and I have a wagon—now two wagons. Now, we're coming over from Bozeman. We're in Bozeman. We're coming down to our claim at Reed Point and it takes us a day and a half to come because we're driving some alongside the wagons and the wagons are loaded to the brim. Nowadays they would make the trip in an hour and a half. It took us a day and a half and at night the boys had to watch the stock and all. My mother was driving the team sitting up in the big wagon and driving two big horses. We had—whatever they had there—horses, cows, one steer (which they could have left that, sure) and all the rest and to make that journey too often—now, then, they're here on this place and my father has died in 1889 and my mother gets away in 1895 to come down to take this place and she brings the children. Well, when she got down here, there was an old man that lived here. He was a squaw man—he was a very, very prominent good old man but he marries a squaw and she is good, too—good-hearted and he gives my mother three hundred pounds of peas and he says, "Now here you've brought your hogs. You've got nothing in the world to feed them. So I'm going to give you three hundred pounds of peas to plant. Now you can feed the hogs here with what you've got." Of course, she had a little feed with her. She had $250 and that's all the money she had for she figured the boys could get out and work and bring in and found out that a dollar a day was the highest wages they could possibly get and besides that if it wasn't lambing or if it wasn't farming, they could only work for the board.

KW For the board? Oh, I see. So there was only certain times of the year that they could really make any money.
They couldn't make it at all - only just when the lambing was on. The man would pay them - well, they were green hands, of course, but then they'd soon catch on to what you wanted them to do and so they'd work every bit they could and mind you there was five or six that was able to work. It had been some time - my father would have died in 1889 and they had seven of them and those would now have been big enough to bring in something.

What's happening to you now? You said you finished school in seventh grade and you were about thirteen. What did you do after you finished school?

I was at home and then my brothers had given me a saddle horse when I came and a sidesaddle and I carried mail for people - that's long before I ever had the post office at all, now. They knew I had this saddle horse and some of them didn't have any way to go at all. Graycliff is fourteen miles and I...

They were able to sent them away to Carlisle, the Indian school. They had culture and we didn't because we were so poor. We can't have - only just what's necessary to keep us alive. Well, she introduced me to this man and he never failed to come. He'd just come and come and come and finally I was not quite seventeen. It was in December we were married and I was seventeen in May.

So you married quite young. Was that common? Did most of the girls marry that early?

Well, there wasn't many girls down there. Most of them worked out and some and there were bachelors that were just hungry for a wife. There were just quite a number of bachelors that had come and took claims, you know. They wanted and this happened to be one of them.

So women were in great demand?

Yes, and this man at that time was - and always - a very popular man, a man of good standing. He worked for the Buffalo Sheep company and the other one [his brother] worked for some other big outfit. I just don't remember right now. They put their money together - they pooled their money and after four years work they had earned sixteen hundred dollars and put their money into the sheep and went and took a claim out on Trout Creek and if they had stayed there they would have been wealthy but this wanting a wife caused a division and - well, that's neither here nor there. Now what?

When you were riding the mail back and forth from - what was it - Reed Point to Graycliff?
SG  Yes, to Graycliff and back.

KW  Did you ever get paid for that or were you just doing that for kindness?

SG  Oh, no! I wouldn't think of such a thing.

KW  You were just out riding your horse, is that the main thing?

SG  I would be going for our mail. They'd come over, "Would you take my letters and will you bring whatever I got that's recent." If it's a package I'd just tell them about the package unless it was a little package.

KW  You were busy with that. I assume that you were also busy at your home helping your mother.

SG  Well, I didn't do much. My mother was a person who would do all of it or else.

KW  So what did you occupy your time with?

SG  Well, I occupied my time with - I was still studying. I didn't go to this little school at all but I had a foundation from that Bozeman school which was one of the finest in the state. To this very day much detail of my writing and much of my things are reminiscent of the very fine way that the woman taught in the Bozeman schools that I would never have gotten.

KW  Did you have books or music in your home?

SG  Yes, at that time everyone got handed down - there was seven of us and all of mine was second hand.

KW  But there were books your parents had gotten. Did you have any knowledge of these?

SG  I don't know whether you'd call them text books or not, they're school books. My mother had nothing to do with it. In fact, she was so awful busy and so the teacher would get the books for the children and I don't think we had to pay anything for them.

KW  Did your mother encourage you to go on with your studies after you had gotten...

SG  No, my mother was very anxious. She had two older girls that had given her quite a lot of disappointment. Then there comes myself - no, then Rena and Corey and myself, three girls. Well, she's so afraid that these younger ones will copy the big ones which didn't do the right thing, you understand. And so she begins to encourage husbands. I don't want to emphasize that but that was the reason of my marrying so young. It was not my headstrong saying I wanted to this or that. I wanted to go back
to school! I was willing to mind babies and at the time to try
to gain myself because I realize that my mother would not be able
to take care of me and some way the Lord gave me a premonition
that you get what you can!

KW So, did you have something in mind that you wanted to do?

SG Well, no. My mind run in the way of - certainly never
raising a big family or getting married. Oh, no!

KW What did you want to do instead of that?

SG Well, now what I really felt like I wanted to do was - just
seemed like I just earned some money and I wanted to be able to
sew and I wanted to be able to do the various things that would
present itself. We were kept in so close because there was
nothing doing in any kind of a party except it'd be a dance. And
lots of times those dances weren't too - they weren't bad as they
are now. But they were always a few drinking men. Well, I had
no use for any of that - not a bit - my heart was as straight as
anything could be and my mother would tell me many times, "Now as
you pass those saloons" - see, now I was staying in town when I
minded these kids and my mother's still out on the ranch before
the reservation is thrown open. Now she's telling me from time
to time, "Now when you walk to school, you pass eleven saloons."
(In Bozeman, that's a lot of saloons - one was a wholesale
house.) "And when you pass 'em don't listen to the music. Don't
turn your face toward the saloon." I listened so close that I
wouldn't for anything - you couldn't have tempted me to stop
there for one minute in front of that saloon. So I listened to
my precious mother although she was the promoter of, you know..

KW Your early marriage.

SG I don't want to mention that in history because if anything
would be even a slight against my mother I would be...

KW Well, lots of women in those days were encouraged to marry
and get it over with, I guess.

SG And then there's a lot of these moving cowboys and a lot of
that and this cheap trash and she was so afraid I would want to
go out with some of those boys. Well, I had no desire to. If
she had known my heart right - I'd tell her often times, "I don't
care to go, I'd just rather go with this one because he's clean
acting and nice and I have no difficulty whatever" and so I just
stayed with him. There's nothing to it so I then raised a
family.

KW So then you did marry and were you happy with your decision?

SG Well, I was happy with in this way. At first I felt a
terrible burden I could see ahead of me - that there was nothing
said about a preventative. There was nothing said about any kind
of - yes, I'll change my mind now on that - my sister had some
sort of a — something that could slip up and put over the mouth of the womb and it was like a rubber. It was a round — you may have seen such a thing.

KW Was that like a diaphragm?

SG I used it for a while and then I got a pain in my side. I got a — it sort of hurt me or something so I didn't use it any more and then my babies came about one every two years.

KW How many did you have?

SG Eight.

KW Eight. Did your mother prepare you by telling you about sex before you were married?

SG No, my mother failed.

KW She said nothing to you?

SG She said nothing. I was very surprised. It's hard to remember when I first became a woman...

KW Did you tell your mother?

SG Yes. Oh, yes. I told my mother, "I see now." Anyway, we're married and we didn't have much of a place and my husband was — he was so proud of me. He was so vain over it all and we were married in Bozeman and the train came home at two o'clock in the night. We had to come into Graycliff and then come on down so there was a lot of people there to wait for us. They had decided when we got home that they would have a supper for us so we got in with the wagons and horses — just slow driving, you know. The train got in at two and it was just about breakfast time so they had all got together and got a breakfast and all the neighbors were in. Well, when we got out of the wagon and my husband just stepped to one side and he said, "I guess that I'm the happiest man in the world, folks. There's nobody could be any happier than I am. No matter what you'd had." He just made quite a talk. He says, "I feel so good that I can jump that gate."

KW Oh, no.

SG Well, no sooner said than done and he jumped the gate, broke his ankle and we had to put him to bed and we sat up with him for nearly two weeks.

KW Well, that was an interesting honeymoon.

SG Well, that put me in this light. There was his outfit that he was bringing me to. There was twenty-seven big rams and there was 2,000 sheep and it was in winter when they're feeding them. We had one man working and then the hogs had to be fed and this
had to be done and that and the little chores and the big chores
and all and I stepped right into a job that was real.

KW I bet it was real!

SG And before the eleven months was up my first baby was born –
moved in December but in November...

KW You tried to use birth control a while.

SG I didn't - I used that just a little while, but I had no
confidence. You've got to have confidence, of course, and if I'd
kept on I might have controlled... and so that started it and
then - oh, I know. After my first baby I began to use this and
it was three years before the second child. And then from then
on.

KW So it worked fairly well. Why, then did you stop after
using it after your second child?

SG Well, I don't know. I can't answer that because we were so
far from the drug store. We are twenty-five miles to Big Timber
and these things break. The center of them are thin, you now. I
didn't get one and then from then I was careless and didn't try.

KW But you didn't have any religious or moral objections to
doing that. Did you feel guilty about using that?

SG No - now I don't know about that because I've been pretty
strict. Ever since I was nine years old I realize the care of
the Lord and that he was well able to take care of me and I would
follow whatever the rules were. I think I objected in my mind in
my simple way because I must have or else I would have continued
to use it. I got it - if I had to make the trip I would make it
to get it but I didn't so then that was...

KW Did your husband want to control the family, too. Was he
interested in..?

SG My husband was determined to raise a big family.

KW So you didn't really have mutual support for..?

SG He wouldn't say if I used it. He wouldn't say one word.
But if I didn't I knew what the consequences were, so I said to
myself, "Now, according to this, 'Go forth and replenish the
earth.'" And now it's replenished until if it doubles, it'll
won't be no places - but I think the earthquakes are going to
take care of all this.

KW [laughter] You do. They might.

SG And the disasters.

KW Did you have any girlfriends who didn't marry or who left
Montana to do something different besides marrying?

SG No, because he's already in business. He's already got a band of sheep and had some cattle and he had bought a little ranch.

KW No - I mean your girlfriends - other young women that you knew.

SG Other young women - to do what?

KW That didn't marry or that decided to have a career or wanted to go on to college or...

SG Well, you know, I never had - after I was out of school at Bozeman - this one was working here and there and there was very few - very few girls.

KW What happened to the Kent girls?

SG The Kents were - there were four of them and the government gave them for this land that is thrown open that I'm talking to you about. The government gave everyone of them 160 acres and if he's not born yet - if she's in the family way - he would make him a name and give him the same amount of land. So when they went down on the reservation, the government was careful enough to set each one out on his place and see that the names figured to that place and so on. Now, there's another little point in there I want to call - let's see, it was when the reservation is first thrown open, which is not what you want - you want women's stuff. But you could only hold squatter's rights which was forty acres. You filed on 160 but if somebody came in and took a forty and you weren't able to put him off of there by main force and awkwardness, he took your forty.

KW But you said that the Kent girls did get some education but then they came back and took those homesteads.

SG And they all married white men.

KW And they married white men and then the white men had...

SG But now they didn't take it - now mind you, they sold this land. They can't take any of it and home here. They have to go down to the reservation. The government is buying this - dealing with old Chief Joseph. I think it was Chief Joseph. Anyhow, it was one of the big Indians and this is not theirs anymore, so just as fast as they can, except what was allotments. Now find in the dictionary and you wouldn't have any ______ of that. But where a man like Kent that had been there that long of a time and was so established, he could have continued to live there. He had a privilege, you know - seemed like.

KW Back to your children, then.
SG And the Kent children, they – one man said, "Wouldn't you think that Tom Kent's girls would marry off in place of marrying on?" They'd get married and come right back and live at home until there was three or four families and their families before they ever left and when the reservation was thrown open, then it was an enticement for them to go because they thought that they could own all their land. They all – before they left home, they had – one had six children and another had four and so on and when they got down there – look at the land they'd have – have enough to run a bunch of sheep almost.

KW You said that your older sisters' disappointed your mother. What happened to your older sisters?

SG Well, I don't want it in history. But they had gotten in the family way or something and...

KW And did they later marry, then?

SG Yes, one of them. My mother thought that – as I think today, that girls sixteen know less than she'll ever know in her life and she doesn't know enough to take care of herself. Now that is a settled fact.

KW At least if her mother hasn't told her anything.

SG And I myself had it in me. Now I might have seen some boy that I would have gone crazy about but now my husband was nice and all and I just began to believe that they were all like that and that he was just – in other words, just as well as any of them and he was. He was just what I thought he was.

KW Okay, so you started having children then. You had – we've come up to two children and you had eight. Did you have any help with your children? How did you deliver them and where did you deliver them?

SG My mother took care of me. I had a doctor only with one.

KW So did you go home to your mother and then give birth at your house?

SG My mother was at my home.

KW She came to your home.

SG And when this child was born – the first one – we were twenty-five miles to a doctor with only old plugs to take us. It was a matter of life or death.

KW Really! You made it, though.

SG That's right, and the last one – a man came in there talking twilight sleep. Perhaps you never heard of twilight sleep. He claimed that he could – well, I'd say hypnotism. I don't know
what else to say - that you'd have the baby without any pain whatsoever.

KW Did you let him do it?

SG Well, he began to take care of me and my husband was sitting right by the bed and of course the pain's getting heavier and heavier all the time. Finally I saw he was - he was doing - I didn't understand what he said to him but I had had several children and I knew well and good that he shouldn't be doing what he was - trying to lift the child when nature was taking care of it slowly and gradually. I said to my husband - 'cause he told my husband, "Now after she gets into this she won't know anything. You can talk to her but she won't know anything." So I turned to my husband and I said, "Lewis, I want you to order this doctor out of this house. He says I won't know anything. You ask me anything you will and I'll answer you because I know and one thing I know is to get him out of here and away from us," My husband listened to me and he put him out and I go on through the thing just all right.

KW Was this man a doctor?

SG Yes, he claimed to be and he's found to be a quack. He was found later to be a real quack.

KW Did he go around and try to do this with other women in the area?

SG Yes, he was soliciting all around. He hadn't been there much but when they came to me and asked me what I thought about him, I says, "I thought enough to order him out of the house, that's what I thought. And I says to my husband, 'listen to me and put him out' because he's told my husband, 'she won't know anything. Now you can talk to her and she'll talk all incoherent. She doesn't know a thing and so all and all.' So when I talked to him and told him to get out of here and stay out,' he says to my husband, 'now she doesn't know what she's talking about." I said, 'Lewis, I'll prove myself. Ask me any question you will and I'll answer it' and so I made it stick."

KW That's good.

SG And that was twilight sleep and it was going to be real popular because I was one of the first specimens, of course. I had to be and so the other women then they just kind of listened. There might have been one more that had him. I don't know, but anyway, that was the last of him in that community.

KW Did they make him leave town?

SG No, didn't make him - he did it.

KW Did you ever use anything for pain? Did you have anything to use for pain?
SG  No, no way in the world did I use anything for pain in labor.

KW  You didn't use any herbal medicine or any old remedies that somebody knew about?

SG  Didn't have any - if I'd have taken it it would have been all against - you see, those older people. We didn't know then all we know [now]. It was just to live together the same as they did back in the Stone Age and...

KW  [laughter] It wasn't quite that bad.

SG  And so - that was the way we lived, then. That's how it was and 'cause - and I had eight children.

KW  Did you ever lose any children? Did any of your children die at birth?

SG  No, not at childbirth, but I lost one four years old with the scarlet fever. And one - fifteen, would have been sixteen years old real soon - with the measles. I loved both completely and that was a blow - an awful blow.

KW  Who made the decisions in your family - in your married family?

SG  Now, listen. If it was anything very important, I didn't hesitate to speak up. And I'll tell you...

KW  I bet you didn't! [laughter]

SG  And I'll tell you what it was. When the awful hard times set in in 1919, it was such a bad - there was just nothing to be had. Things were just at a standstill almost and...

KW  You were talking about decision making and when you spoke up.

SG  Yes. And now we had to sell out store and we had to sell everything that we had. We didn't have anything left at all, scarcely and my husband now is old - he isn't awful old but he's old enough.

[interruption]

KW  You were saying about decision making and who spoke up when and mentioning about the drought and that that was one time when you...

SG  Yes, that was his idea.

KW  Now what was his idea?
SG His idea was to - at that age even then - the drought was on and he was old - he wasn't real old, but he was too old - you take a fellow that's forty-five or fifty and he's too old to go outside running sheep or starting something and he wanted to go on sections and start running a bunch of sheep or something or other. Everything had gone to pieces, you now. that was the awful hard times. So I objected to it and he couldn't go because I wouldn't take the children from the school - live way out in the country and you only got old plugs to drive in. If you had a car it would be bad enough.

KW Was that the only time you really took a hand in..?

SG Well, I don't think there's another time when it was necessary because the reason we left the sheep business and came to town was because the children now were big enough for school and you can't be away out here on the hill trying to get children into school. You can't do it. You've got to get them close to school.

KW Did your children go all the way through the school, then?

SG Yes, all of them and every one turned out good and we have a record in this family that I want to mention. I have eight children and they're all married and their children and not one charge against one - not one divorce, not anything and that is one of the things they're rating me by.

KW Oh, for the things that you're winning around the state?

SG Yes. So you see and that's the family rating.

KW Well, that's a credit to you I must say. Did you have any serious conflicts in your marriage, then?

SG No serious causes that I know of except starving to death.

KW [laughter] That's not serious enough? But you were both doing it together, so...

SG Yes and that's right. And that's what I wanted all of them to understand and it's hard for my children to understand how we had to have less on our table when it came to where it was a showdown - 1919 and a whole - the rest of it until the Depression - there wasn't anything and this boy was brave enough and big enough to go to the college and wash dishes or - he tutored at the last. But at the first year - anything to go to school and every one of them had to educate themselves.

KW How did you and your husband handle conflicts that did come up?

SG Any conferences?

RG Conflicts.
KW Conflicts between you and your husband - how did you handle them?

SG Well, I don't believe we had very many. My boy ought to be able - do you remember what troubles we had between us were? Now we moved to that ranch after we had all of this, now. I have a letter from a friend - a niece of mine who had a ranch at Reed Point and she hated the ranch and so she - she's in debt. She's got a mortgage on it - a lot. And she just wrote me and said, "Now you're broke and you're without this and that and the other, how would you like to take over the debts and take over the ranch and own it?" I said the Lord be blessed, I'll be sure doing it. So I took over this ranch and then we lived there and then my husband wanted to sell out and go out North. He still had that on his mind and I says, "I'll make one provision. It must join the river. I won't go any farther than that. I will go with you to the land you pray about but I will not go any farther." So he took out, bought two sections of land right on the river and that's the biggest controversy we had about it. That was definite.

KW But you settled it.

SG We settled it.

KW How did you get started in your post office?

SG In the first of the post office when it first started, the Date [?] brothers - people come there and the railroad set off a boxcar and a little old lady was their operator and so she took the post office temporarily. There was no place for it. These Date brothers came in and started a store and they took it. Then, when we came in, the people that had been holding it were - somebody just obliging "We'll keep it until..., we'll keep it until..." Now that was exactly it. So here my husband and I realized we've got to bring these children in to the schools, you know. It's the law in the first place. I've told it many times - they come with a man of very bad reputation but he was obliging enough to the country to hold that. Well, he poured it out on the floor. There was everything: money order books and everything else just all in this gunny sack - big gunny sack. And he said to my man something about running it and he answered him, "I would rather work on the railroad than to run that post office." "Well, what are you doing about it?" the inspector says. "Oh, my wife will take care of it." That's what my husband says!

KW Did he ask you about it before he said this? [laughter]

SG No, he never said a word for he knew that I would do whatever he wanted to do with that store because I backed him in whatever he's doing that is reasonable for the family.

RG Do you mind if I make a comment occasionally? This is
really a result of one conflict. She is going to bring them in to the city. Well, okay, you take the post office. You couldn't argue much.

KW That's right. [laughter]

SG And I had good children. I haven't a charge. Not a single one with a teacher.

RG But she wants to know more about that post office, so continue the story.

KW Right, tell me about the post office.

SG Yes and then I went on.

KW And so you took over the post office.

SG Yes.

KW What year was that?

SG I took the post office in 1906. That's the year he was born.

KW Did you keep that post office, then, for many years?

SG I kept it - I thought I kept it twenty-eight years but my daughter says less and this one says I kept [it] twenty-seven years. Well, now I have one girl in the house. I had to hire somebody to cook our dinner for my husband, [who] is running the store and I run the post office. So with all - there was much difficulties in the way of the little children wanting to come to me and all that but the girl was always ready with something for them to eat or something to have them do and it was just taken care of - each little baby that came. You see, I raised all my family while I run this post office.

KW Did you have to be there at the post office from eight in the morning until five at night?

SG I had to go into the office at seven. I would arise at four thirty and go to my mother and eat breakfast with her 'cause she was old-like then. She liked to get up early and it didn't inconvenience her. Then I wanted to play the piano so bad that I guess nobody in the world ever did want anything worse and the trustees told me, "Now that old piano down there, there's seven keys that don't sound but if you can get anything out of that, you go help yourself." Well, I would stop when the frost would almost fly off my fingers - the round [?] to get an idea of the piano. In the meantime, my brother bought me one.

KW Oh, how nice.

SG So then I sure did practice and I got so I didn't play as
well as many but I always had the chord and always had the harmony. The preacher told me - he was rather...

End side two

OH 049-021 Tape B side one

KW Now about the post office...

SG Yes, he said he wouldn't take it - he'd rather work on the section. He says, "My wife'll take it. Well, but there's got to be a head." So they put him in as postmaster until 1914 and I kept the post office.

KW So you were really the postmaster.

SG Yes, indeed.

KW Why did they have it down in his - as him as the postmaster?

SG Well, nobody would have it, now, in all the country. And this bad man had had it only to oblige the people. Now it comes to where we are on the spot. We're the folks that came in next, you see. And so there we stand and this is in the floor and here's the inspector talking to Lewis and he's saying that he wouldn't - I wouldn't keep it, I wouldn't do this, I wouldn't do that and I'm not going to and so on, and he says, "My wife'll take it." The man had turned to me and he says, "Will you look after the post office? Will you do the secretary - will you be the assistant?" And I said, "Surely I'll take care of it. Yes." So I kept it that many years.

KW You agreed to take care of it.

SG And without - listen, without any complaint. I never had a complaint - just worked so much to the hour - that he was there or I was there or somebody right there all the time. They never had to holler and wait, you know.

KW Did the checks from the government for keeping the post office come in your name or your husband's name?

SG No. Paid myself.

KW You paid yourself out of the...?

SG I just - the books were - the fourth class book is worked that way. Pay yourself and charge it right in and...

RG Out of the cash.

SG Out of the cash, right.

RG So there isn't any record that way.
KW Why was it in your husband's name, then? Was it against the law - I mean, as far as government was concerned or..?

SG Not with the consent - the inspectors are just like you're talking to headquarters. And there was one other thing I was gonna say in there that since... When I got it it paid forty-eight dollars in a quarter. (Now that's three months.) So the people that wouldn't be home was taking care of it - they had no store, they had nothing - no idea so they wouldn't have it at all. And then when he said he wouldn't have it, why then I told him I would take good care of it.

KW Did you keep it then after his death - after your husband's death?

SG Let's see now, he died in 1944...

RG 1942.

SG 1942. I know when he died in 1942 I had it then. I had a girl that was trained - I'd had her there with me a lot. So it just lifted [?] off everything and took care of people. He died right in our own quarters. So then...

KW Did you have the post office at that point?

SG Yes, I had the post office.

KW Then did you keep on with the post office?

SG Well, now, I'm just thinking. Why didn't I keep right on with it?

RG You did for a few years.

SG Yes, I did for a few years, that's right. And I stayed in the same...

RG We couldn't remember the other day what year she stopped. It was at least 1944 or 1945 or maybe a little longer.

KW So you had it during the war, then?

SG Yes, during the first World War.

KW And during the second World War so you had it between the two wars.

SG Yes. Now there was something I was going to tell you there that I didn't.

RG Well, now, having left this - he's post office master and you're doing work for eight years, you ought to tell the little story of how it was transferred to your name and what made you important.
SG Yes, that's it right there, Robert. You're right because that's when Lewis used this expression of "I would rather work on the railroad than to keep this post office." He meant it. He hated any part of it.

KW So then he did transfer - it was transferred into your name.

SG Then the man - immediately when he said that, he said, "I'll just change it right over to Mrs. She says she'll keep it." And while I was true to it the only trouble I had was keeping people out of it. We didn't have a full post office like - we just had like from the wall out and all this was open. And we'd walk back, you know. And people would come in and you could tell them and tell them all you wanted to and they would help themselves to the mail. Even they'd holler, "I looked in your mail and you've got a letter. You'd better come and get it or else I'll bring it to you" and that, you know, wow! So one morning the inspector came in and he's sitting in the office, but he's sitting a little back. So in came Mrs. Wagner, a neighbor that I knew so well. The worst one to come into the office and the one that I'd tried to break. She reached up to get the mail and was flipping the letters and he grabbed her by the arm and he said, "What do you think you're doing?" She says, "Why..." He says, "This is a post office - a United States Post Office - and it's under the supervision of this woman. And now are you..?" So on and on and on until he made her feel like fifteen cents and I spoke right up, although she was a friend. I said, "I have asked her repeatedly and she'll tell ya, I said to keep out of here and ask for her mail." But you see we have a store here selling shoes and all kinds of stuff and over on this side dry goods. And somebody'd call me out for a minute, but before I would get back they're into the office, you see. That was my trouble.

KW What other community activities did you take part in besides Sunday School playing for the church pianist?

SG Well, I was twelve years President of the Parent Teacher [Association]. Not for popularity, perhaps, but they couldn't get anyone, you know.

KW You were just the all around volunteer, huh?

SG And if you didn't have children in the school, and this was necessary for our school at that time to have some organization going to keep it on...

KW On the beam...

RG On the rating a certain period of time.

SG And so I've just year after year - year after year I kept it up. At the same time we had the Women's Club. Well, the woman that went out, she says, "Well, you stayed for her, now why can't you come in under me?" I was almost afraid of breaking
friendship or something, so I went into the Women's Club. Now this was along in 1917. I can tell you the date. And then the Bridger Creek's outfit—they started a separate club. Same story.

**RG** And that was for you to be secretary, right?

**SG** Well, I'm just joining now. The other I was in—and then you know right away they're naming the officers and they know you're handling the post office books. They know you can handle the books, you see, and there you are. You're stuck and that's the way it was here. I don't know who told them that I was used to writing or anything but first I knew here they come with all this.

**KW** You could be the newspaper reporter for the nursing home.

**SG** And his wife came to see me if I would write. Well, then in the next little while was the church organizing and out church went down and out—the Methodists—because a little rivalry between two old men that happened. So that started—a new preacher came in and started the church in the school house and after he ran it for a while, then they built a church. Well that made it all the worse for the little Methodists, so finally they had to quit. Then they named me secretary there.

**KW** At the other church? At the new church?

**SG** And then there was two lodges. I don't know the number of books I have. I had to stack them just so that I knew when I was reaching for the PTA or whatever it happened to be.

**KW** So you did just about everything in town, then?

**SG** Yes. So then, that was. You lived there. There's nothing there in that town now but this house. I've got the picture of my place here. And there was nothing for us to do but keep it. And I lost a little money on it.

**RG** That's right, she was handy. And she could prove that she could keep the books for the post office so...

**KW** Yes, right. They really grab you when...

**RG** I think you ought to repeat a little about the post office, that's interesting. I don't know the angle you're looking for here, but...

**SG** The closets were so hard, Bob, I couldn't read...

**RG** Well, you aren't naming the man that had turned the post office over, so you don't have it anymore. I don't know why... Johnson.

**SG** Oh, Bill. The man I had turned in to the office. He's the
one I just called him the bad man and I...

RG The books and the money orders and so on in a gunny bag. Dumps it down on the floor and says, "Here it is." And she's going to tackle it. It's all a mystery. It was quite a deal to learn what this was all about.

KW Did the inspector come down and help you learn how to handle the post office?

SG Once he came in but most times I would just get a check-in. I would get a card that said, "You are failing to do this, this, that." I would study hard on that and pretty soon I had that down pat. Well, you had to have the clerk to know just how to run the office, too, to some extent - not books but just to not mix things up. And so the one clerk that was a bother. I had to watch him all the time because he was liable to put the general delivery mail in "L" - he was liable to put it over in "T" or somewhere else and on and on and on.

RG And the other angle there was it turns out to be nearly as simple as you would imagine because the improvement of railroad bed with big gangs of Italians and others. This meant money orders in foreign currency, you see - and thousands of dollars worth of it, too.

KW And she had to keep track of it, too.

SG And we had foreign work - they don't have it now. And so they wrote people from... They'd come in and - "I want a hundred dollar money order for Italy." And so, first, well I didn't know one form from another. So I had a lot of money. One evening they bought twelve hundred dollars worth. And I had the money in my hand and Lou said, "What'll we do with it?" And I said, "I don't know. Look for a form that says something." And we found the New York Exchange. So we put all the money in this envelope and tied it in a very strong envelope that had the same address and sent it in. Oh, my goodness, here came the inspector! The New York office said, "Go down and look after that, they don't know what they're about down there." We'd had it about ten days and these boys are looking for their money to be in Italy and there it was all tied up because I had sent it to the wrong place. But you get one or two chastisements and they're awful kind - they're as nice as they can be. And then they'd make me study harder. But I had nearly all my babies while I was in the post office.

KW Did they give you books to study or things that say how to run your local post office?

SG You have one book and I - what's it called, Bob? It's called - well, "Postal" is one name that's on it. And then we had to hang the mail. We had a crane. The railroad owns the crane and if you hang mail that the train doesn't stop and you're supposed to put it on - you hook it here and hook it up here and
the train takes it, you see. We had to work at that so lots of times on the eleventh hour Lewis would start running with the mail so most times we'd get it there. Then finally came to a time we were real enlightened. We got a mail carrier. So things were...

RG The post office was bigger then, you can imagine.

SG Yes, the post office was bigger and when I was in there, the four year I believe were something—why it paid seven hundred dollars. I remember when it counted seven hundred dollars and I just thought that was the richest. Why that was the biggest wages I'd ever heard of!

RG Seven hundred total for four years?

SG Yes, when it was forty-eight dollars when I started and it increased because people said, "Well, there's a store there and they come buy their stamps and..."

KW So you ended up getting seven hundred dollars a month then?

SG No, that was seven hundred dollars a year because—no I wouldn't be right. At first it starts with one hundred percent of the first fifty dollars and ten percent—you just go on and on and on. The fourth class post office is much harder than the third and when mine was turned to third, I thought I'd just had a bonanza because I didn't have to figure my wages by scaling it down.

RG It might have been seven hundred dollars a year probably.

SG That's what it would be, I'm sure.

RG But that would be quite a lot later.

SG It was years, Bob, before we had...

KW I just have a few more questions for you. Did you ever participate in politics? Were you at all involved in the Montana Women's Suffrage campaign?

SG Yes, I was named the head of the Democrat of the state. We have to meet in Helena— I can't tell now it's so long by that I can't tell.

KW Was it a women's organization?

SG Like they're naming men now. That's going to be over their party. Don't you see that—not the president or anything, this was a Senator. We were working for [Senator] Wheeler and we had all drove to Helena to meet and have a caucus—what they called a caucus.

KW So you were the chairwoman or were you a delegate?
Yes, I don't know what part I had in it. It's been so long ago.

When was that?

That would have been in - then Mrs. Baty from Billings was the chairwoman one year and I think she was the one that recommended me. Anyway, I had a leading part in the committee that is boosting the [nominee] - like they are now. They call them something.

What is it?

The nominee.

Yes, they call then now. What did they have to have at the last so many in order...

Delegates.

Delegates - on the order of a delegate.

This was after women got the vote, I assume.

Women got the vote in 1918.

1918, yes. It was after that. Did you participate in the suffrage movement at all?

You mean for women's rights?

For women to vote?

No.

But you did both after the law was passed?

Yes, I think I voted. I sure did. If a vote came up, of course, I'll tell you. I've had my vote all my life and I'm going to keep it as long as I live.

You haven't had it all your life.

Well, I mean all my life that I've been voting.

She took it extremely seriously all the time.

Yes, it sounds like you did if you were a delegate.

And I learned to read those clauses.

Well, tell about your experience campaigning for Al Smith.

Oh, you wouldn't want to hear anything about that, would
you? That's way back.

KW Go ahead and tell me - you were campaigning...

RG That's about as far back as we're talking about.

KW How did you get involved in that?

SG Well, whether I'm a delegate or what, I don't know what I am but I'm named on this committee and from this committee they named me to go to New York to meet the women of the world. Strange to say they would choose such a simple person as myself and I was named a delegate from Montana.

RG This is not what I meant... Well that was when you were Mother of the Year.

SG But that's another deal. That's much later. I was thinking of the campaigning for Al Smith as being typical of what you did in nearly every Presidential campaign and for our Senators and Representatives - a real solid Democrat in a more or less Republican community, you know.

KW Well, now, here. You're county committee woman.

SG That's what I held. A county committee woman. That's exactly what it was and we made up a bunch of Democrats and we drove to Helena and there we had this meeting and came back and at that very time someone died of importance. I don't know what it was - it was a death, anyhow, that kind of hindered things. Anyway, we finished it.

KW Thank you.

End side one tape B