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Interviewee: Carolyn Frojen
Interviewer: Gladys Peterson
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Gladys Peterson: This is an interview with Mrs. Carolyn Frojen on July 9, 1987. Carolyn, you've been involved in so many things during your life, I imagine; (there's no question in my mind," but education was the big thing professionally. I would like to go way back because I know that it's always interesting to archivists and people like me to find out whether you're a native Montanan, if so, what brought your parents to Montana? I would like to think that we're all part of the westward movement, but in different stages and so, if you don't mind, I'd just like to go back and tell us a little about your family, your early life.

Carolyn Frojen: This would be fun to fill you in on my parents. My dad graduated from high school in 1904 in Dennis, Massachusetts.

GP: Massachusetts!

CF: So he had known some of the people who lived back there. A man who was a sea captain whose name was Captain Howe. Dad had not met him himself, but he did know friends who knew him. So Dad thought this would be a wonderful experience to come west.

GP: And he was right out of high school at that time?

CF: Right out of high school. So Dad came west in 1904 to Otter Creek and to the Howe’s Ranch on Otter Creek.

GP: Where is that located?

CF: That’s 28 miles south of Ashland, and it's in Powder River County. It’s 100 miles from Miles City; 75 miles from Sheridan, Wyoming.

GP: So this was isolated country?

CF: Very, very, isolated. So that was in 1904 and he was really a cowboy and of course an entirely new lifestyle for him. But he loved it. And then he went back east in 1907 because he had a friend there that he thought very much of—

GP: Male or female?

CF: My mother. So then Dad and Mother were married in 1908 and the folks then were going to stay in the east because Mother didn't like the idea of coming west, so Dad went in business
GP: Is that right on the coast?

CF: Cape Cod, right out on the ocean. But this confinement was hard for Dad to take and in 1910 Dad had a very severe illness and was sick for a long, long time.

GP: He was quite young, too, wasn't he?

CF: Yes, but when he recovered, the doctor told him that he thought he should return west. So Mother and Dad came west in November of 1910. Then arrived in Sheridan, Wyoming, spent their Thanksgiving in Sheridan, and this is a dreary time of the year to be coming to a new location.

GP: Was there a railroad?

CF: No. One of the men from the Circle Bar...Dad was coming back to the Circle Bar to work. So Mother and Dad come in a buggy and it took them two days to get from Sheridan out to the ranch. So that first winter after Mother and Dad arrived, Mother and Dad had a bedroom in the ranch house.

GP: How did they get to Sheridan, though?

CF: By train. At that time, you were on the train the three days and three nights it took to make that trip from Dennis to Sheridan.

GP: It could have been worse, couldn't it?

CF: Oh yes, because when I was just a very young girl, we made the trip many times and that was the time it took. So then Mother and Dad stayed at the ranch until the following spring, and the spring of 1911 Dad bought property that bordered the Howe’s Ranch. He had a home built, and Mother and he moved into the home in the spring of 1911. Then Mother had an accident—fell down into the cellar and a baby that she was expecting was born dead. She had planned to go to Sheridan to have the baby, but after this happened they sent a horseback rider to Birney which was about 25 miles away to get a doctor. The doctor came and took care of Mother.

So after that, in 1913 when I was to be born, Mother had decided that since she had stayed at the ranch, she would stay at the ranch for my birth. This same doctor came, and on September 7, 1913, I was born on the ranch. Later I'll show you some pictures I have of the places—this Circle Bar and our ranch.

GP: That's exciting. I don't want to get off our subject, but we spent some time in Sheridan
when there was an oil boom over there from the '50s, so I know the country you're talking about in there.

CF: It's a very, very beautiful country.

GP: Yes, it is.

CF: Very isolated. So then, of course, I was a lonely child, so alone much of the time. I think this is probably when I developed my great love for animals, because I had pet cats and a dog and even chickens and horses because I enjoyed riding horseback.

GP: What was your dad raising there?

CF: He raised cattle. It was a ranch. All of the area, this Otter Creek country, it is noted for its ranching and cattle ranching. There had not been any sheep raised in this part of the country yet. The Otter Creek country and all of the people all along this creek have raised cattle. They used to raise Herefords. It has been an interesting experience for us going back, which we did just a month ago, and see now to the Black Angus that is coming into that area.

GP: Now, how close would this be to the Indian reservation?

CF: Well, right at Ashland is the beginning of the reservation. Just since you've mentioned this, you'll see in the picture there is called a "Horse Hollow." This rock horse was built by the ranchers in this Otter Creek area, and it was, I think, 1897, right in that area that they had concern. Evidently maybe a white person had been killed, or there had been a killing and the whites were afraid that the Indians were going to come up the creek and maybe do damage to some of the folks in the area. No one ever came. But I do remember my dad telling that he and Mother went down to Ashland this 27 miles, and they'd go down one day, get their groceries and them come back the next.

While they were in Ashland—they were staying at this little inn, as they called it, Ashland Inn—my dad noticed that all the men eating there that evening had their rifles across their laps. So Dad thought he better find out what was the problem. On inquiring, they found that the Indians were upset or concerned about something that had happened. So again they were on the alert, but nothing ever developed.

GP: So, you never had any personal contact with the Indians at that time.

CF: No. Now the Indians would come up the creek later years and I'll tell you about that, but I'll just go back to my schooling.

GP: I'm glad that you mentioned that because I was about to ask you.
CF: I thought you would be interested. The school was only one mile from our ranch, but for many of the people who had to go to school there, it was about five miles, four miles, and the only way to get there, of course, was by riding horseback or in a buggy. The teacher stayed with this one family, and they had this little two-wheel cart that would carry about two land three people in it. One year I rode to school in this cart, but most of the time I rode horseback. We went to school in the summer. I never attended a school, from my first grade until my eighth grade in the winter. I would have loved to have seen the teacher’s contract in those days because it was the feeling that school started when the spring came. So some springs, if we had an early spring, we might start about the first of March and then some years, I could remember, it was about April.

GP: Until when?

CF: If the weather stayed nice in the fall, we would go into November, but usually about October. We start with March—March, April, May, June, July, August, September—seven, eight. I think I had one year of nine months.

GP: So it wasn’t a matter of necessity, of the students or crops, it was weather that determined—

[Interruption]

GP: What about the teacher, now? Were you aware at all of what the teacher’s qualifications were of where he or she came from?

CF: Nearly all the teachers, in fact, all the teachers that I had, lived right in that area. They were from the area. I had several married women. One teacher I had in the fourth grade and again in the seventh grade. But as far as education, I can’t tell you how much education they had. Nearly all of them had taught before they had come to Otter, our school was called the Otter School, but very able. Especially my fourth...She was the same teacher, my fourth and seventh grade teacher. She was the one in seventh grade who taught me how to drive a Model T.

GP: Oh! Driver education. (laughs)

CF: Driver education; very concerned and the facts of life for her. She was a marvelous, marvelous teacher. She had an English background. She was such a beautiful writer, and she certainly did teach all of us beautiful penmanship.

GP: Two question, first of all, was it a large school?

CF: Oh, we varied. We would have, I think maybe the smallest might have been five or six and then we had at one time about 15, 16 in all grades. Boys and girls, quite a number, and almost an even number of both. We thoroughly enjoyed school, and I can never say that we suffered a
great deal from the heat. When it would get too hot in the schoolhouse, why, we would go out
in the shade, and there were a number of trees close to the school. We’d either sit in the shade
of the schoolhouse or up on the hill there were shady trees there.

GP: My second question is, I have talked to a few teachers around Missoula who taught in
country schools and they had expressed their stress over having to pass children at the eighth
grade level so that they could get into high school. Do you remember any of that sort of thing?

CF: As a student?

GP: Yes. The teachers would worry so about that.

CF: Well, now that I had to take the seventh-grade test—state exams, they were called. Of
course, there were two sublets that we had to take exams in the seventh grade, were
geography and health. Well, I took that. I had to take them in August. Of course, started
probably in March, and then our exams were in August. So I took them and luckily passed and
then we left that fall for vacation back in Dennis because my Dad the first of the year was going
to become deputy sheriff in Powder River County, in Broadus. So we were gone then. I took the
exams and passed then finished my seventh grade there by about the first of September. Then
we came back to Broadus in January and I started the eighth grade then in January. So then I
went from January through May so I had five months, you see, of the eighth grade. Even in
Broadus at that time we had to take the state exams.

My teacher was concerned whether I was going to be able to pass with so few months in
seventh and in eighth, but my dad asked if I would possibly take the state exam and the
number that I passed in May then I would not have to take them. You had two times you could
take them—May and August. The rest I could take in August. After much discussion, the
teacher and superintendent decided to let me take my state exams and all the rest of the
subjects except geography and health and luckily I passed them.

GP: I am sure it wasn’t luck.

CF: So then I was able to go into high school in Broadus. It was quite interesting, I’ll never
forget when I took those exams, all of us as a class went down to the old courthouse and
everyone in class, but myself sat around a nice big oak table. I was off in a room with the
county superintendent all by myself, so I said, I certainly had to know everybody that I wrote
on the test because there was no help from anybody. (laughs)

GP: So then you went to high school in Broadus all four years.

CF: Four years.

GP: At that time were the programs arranged so that you could orient yourself toward a
college education or you just took what was there?

CF: Definitely the subjects that were offered. It depended, too, certainly, on the subject background the teachers had, and the subjects that were offered.

GP: So did everybody take the same thing?

CF: Very much so. Then, of course, always, from the time I was about ten years old, I had always planned to become a teacher.

GP: I was going to ask when you decided to become a teacher.

CF: I was about ten years old. My cats were students, and my dogs were students. I loved the thought of teaching and always have.

GP: Did you do a lot of reading?

CF: Oh, yes!

GP: Where did you get your books?

CF: My folk back east used to always send [books]. Mother’s sisters and brothers and then Dad’s folks. My dad’s sister was a teacher, Aunt Ella, and always she sent things for us. Of course, my folks always took many magazines and many newspapers. We’d only get the mail three times a week, but I always had many books and many magazines in our home.

GP: Do you ever recall a feeling of isolation living in that ranch?

CF: Never did. Sometimes, certainly in the winter, I would miss seeing friends because always at Thanksgiving and Christmas we’d get together with friends for those holidays. But other than that we didn’t do much driving because the snow was deep. About the only way you would travel would be by sled. We just didn’t make those long trips because the winter were, in those years, very bitter. But I never seemed to feel that I was isolated. It was remarkable with my mother coming out east and the west was not her greatest love. She loved the east and being with people and doing things, but I never heard my mother complain—never. My dad was accident-prone when we were still on the ranch. Of course, he had a terrible flu in 1918-19, and then he had many bad falls from horses. But Mother always seemed to be able to cope. We never had to get a doctor to take care of him. She did a wonderful job. She said she’d have loved to have been a nurse, and she did a marvelous job taking care of him. Even accidents that happened to neighbors, she would go in and help.

GP: You mentioned nursing. I was wondering, when you graduated from high school, were there people whom you graduated with who intended to go to college? Was there a large
college? Was there a large percentage going to college at that time?

CF: Some of the girls, but not the boys. The boys would go back on the ranches or farms in that area and usually work. Out of my class, of course, we only had one boy and eight other girls. Now Earl went on to school. Then in our class, about three of us went on to college. Another girl took up teaching, a couple took up nursing and then the others some got married and didn't go on to school.

GP: What I was trying to establish was whether teaching and nursing were pretty much the options if you went on to college.

CF: Seemed to be about along those lines. The others, occasionally they would take up business, you know.

GP: Go to business college for a while.

CF: That's right.

GP: I understood that they were giving teachers courses in Miles City. Is that where you went?

CF: I went to Billings. It was called Eastern Normal. I went to Billings, but in summer they would have Billings, or Eastern, for one year, and then a summer in Miles City. Then I started teaching. And then I started teaching I was barely 18 years old. My birthday was in September so it was only about a week, so I was 18 when I started.

GP: So you got out of high school at a young age, didn't you—17?

CF: And the reason that I started teaching was during the spring when I was home from school. One of the new trustees came to see me for the little country school, five miles from Broadus, and it was a part of the Broadus Elementary School District about five miles from town. And he came and he said, "Carolyn, this school we've had quite a few problems, discipline problems, in it. We thing you could do a good job. Would you like to try?" Of course the salary at that time was very good for an elementary rural school. It was 100 dollars a month.

GP: This would have been—

CF: Nineteen thirty-two when I started teaching. So, I thought, that would be really interesting and think of all the money. So I went to school in the summer and I picked up what was called, I think, a second-grade certificate that I could have for two years. So I taught then, and I had about 15 students and all eight grades.

GP: Oh, my! (laughs)
CF: So you know who learned the most in that school! Getting those little first graders started and then getting the eighth grade, and I had a couple of eighth graders who had to take their state exams. But we did it. We had a very successful year. Beautiful year. I taught four years in that same school. I want to just say to you, Gladys, that one of the most beautiful experience, I think, of all my teaching years, came from my second year when I was at this school. This mother came to me and asked if I would consider taking her son who was nearly 16 and had been expelled from two schools. Would I consider taking him and his sister and teaching them? Because he had to stay in school until he was 16. This fellow's brother had been a classmate of mine so I knew it was going to be a challenge, but I thought I would do it.

GP: Now this was at the school or separately?

CF: At the school, because he lived in a different area. So his first day of coming to school—he was six feet tall—and he walked in, and he said, "Hello, Carolyn. How are you?" Well, in that day and age you did not call your teacher by her first name. So I nearly fell down on the steps of the chair that I was standing on to hang up pictures.

I said, "Ben, I can't have you call me Carolyn." What could you call me that we could both feel would show respect?"

He said, "May I call you Teach?" To this day, I am "Teach" to Ben. I saw him graduate from high school, first the eighth grade, of course, and never a day's program did I ever have. I saw him graduate from high school and from the university here in Missoula, and he had been through the years the most successful businessman. Just a month ago he and his dear wife were here in Missoula and he said, as he has many times, "Teach, where would I be if it weren't for you?" That was one of the most beautiful experiences I have had. He is now retired, very sensitive, very marvelous father and family man.

GP: That's really a wonderful story, but I can just see you in that setting, too. You'd have done a fine job handling a person like that. I was wondering, Carolyn, now, you're talking about getting started teaching in 1932. This is about the height of the Depression.

CF: It was the beginning. It was really the beginning.

GP: I guess there was a little lag in Montana, although it has started earlier in the east.

CF: Because if I may to give you an idea...You know I told you how excited I was over the 100 dollars a month I had. The next year our salary in that same school was 75 dollars.

GP: Oh, right,

CF: So then I taught nine years before I was back to my first salary.

Carolyn Frojen Interview, OH 131-055, 056, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
GP: Isn't that interesting? Now did they provide you a teacherage or something like that?

CF: No. Not in that school. I was able to stay at home and then I drove to school. But then I taught four years there and then I moved into Broadus because, in the meantime, I had gone on to school. In 1936 I had my two years that were required.

GP: They were required. I see.

CF: To have a diploma. See, I was able to teach, first on this...it was a second class certificate. I think you'd enjoy this Gladys, in the summer...I started, you see, in '32—

[End of Tape 1, Side A]
CF: She said, "Carolyn, I'm sorry. You cannot renew that certificate. You have to go to school and you must take economics, philosophy of education, and Montana school law to be able to get your first class certificate."

GP: Had the law changed, or—

CF: It was my neglect in not finding out for sure so I said, "Edith, what do I do?"

She said, "There's one thing you can do, because it's too late to go to school so you can take the state exams in those three courses." Well, out there in Broadus you don't have a great deal of material on philosophy of education in those years nor economics. Of course, Montana school law I could get material from her office on that.

So I said, "Edith, do you have old tests?" Well, she had old tests and mailed them to me, and I wrote here to Missoula, the University [of Montana], to get materials and some books on philosophy of education and for economics. I picked up some books from school. From then until the middle of August you can imagine what I did, day and night.

GP: I can imagine.

CF: So I said, "What is the grade that I have to have to pass them?"

She said, "Seventy-five." Gladys, you never saw a person in your life more happy with a couple of 76s and a 75 that I received for those three subjects.

GP: But that was all right, though, that you were able to do that. So what did you notice about the Depression aside from your paychecks for nine years? How was it affecting the community over there, Carolyn?

CF: Extremely hard on the ranchers. So many of the ranchers had to sell their cattle. They couldn't get rid of some of their cattle. Gladys, I have pictures of places that some of the ranchers had to drive cattle their cattle. They drove them over embankments and killed them in these areas. Also pictures of the sheep men getting their sheep in the corrals and beating them to death because they could save the pelt, but they could not, could not, sell them. There in Broadus we had a little area that is known to this a day as Cranel's Acre. It was an area that was west of town, and this man owned quite a little land. Some of these poor folks who had given up their ranches bought an acre, and they moved into Broadus and many of them worked on WPA or whatever kind of jobs they could get. Some of the ranchers, of course, made it. Like my dad worked for the county; he was the deputy sheriff.

GP: Had he sold the property?
CF: At this time, no. He didn't sell until many years later. He had a friend who had lost their place over there, so then they moved in and lived on our ranch for a number of years and then finally Dad sold it. But we had moved, you see, before the Depression started. These people then moved into this area, and of course, it certainly made a difference in the size of our school that fall of '36.

I think you would find that rather interesting because at this time I was teaching first, second and third grade in Broadus. I had moved in from this rural school. That first year we had all these youngsters and then they'd been enlarging the school so when the school first started, they did not have the flooring in. They had just the rough boards and the cracks, so you could imagine how I spent many, many trips to the basement to pick up the pencils and all the equipment that had fallen down. The first month I had over 40 children in first, second, and third grade.

Finally, after about six weeks, they decided this would never work because I taught first grade in the morning, third grade all day, and second grade in the afternoon. So then they brought in another teacher, and I had first and second grade and the other teacher took third and fourth. As far as my salaries, now I never had a registered warrant, and of course many, many teachers had to have registered warrants, you see.

GP: Meaning that they could borrow money until sometime later?

CF: They did not have the money, you see, to pay.

GP: In that respect, Broadus might have been a little better shape than a lot of places.

CF: We were, because around in the Powder, you see, three weren't registered warrants. Then in 1939, my salary was still here on this 95 dollars. I hadn't gotten back into the hundreds, so I decided maybe it's time for me to move because I had taught seven years there, you see. So I made the move to Baker to teach. I had a friend with whom I'd gone to school in Billings when I'd gone to Normal and George suggested that I come down and apply. I went down and was hired to teach the fourth grade, so I taught the fourth grade there for two years.

GP: And this would have been '39?

CF: Thirty-nine to forty-one. And that is the year then that I had 100 dollars, and the last year I taught they paid you ten months.

GP: You were coming up in the world again! Were the teachers that you were for the most part single women like yourself? And were there men involved in those schools?

CF: In Broadus and Baker, they did not hire married women in those days. For instance, when I
was married in '41 then, of course, my teaching days were done. There was a very dear friend of mine who was being married that spring too, and at first we told Mr. Belledge that we were going to be married and you knew you would not be rehired when you were married.

GP: For the most part were the men in the administrative jobs?

CF: Yes. Both in Broadus and Baker, no women.

GP: Did the men teach at all at that time?

CF: The principal in Broadus, we had no superintendent at first, he taught. Let me see, at Baker the principal did not teach.

GP: I guess what I was wondering is whether they did not teach because the salaries were so low.

CF: I never heard that mentioned. It was just a job of women.

GP: That's right. The job of women. So you probably would have, or maybe you wouldn't have, continued teaching. What was your feeling about teaching after you got married?

CF: Well, of course, I loved teaching so much that I would have loved to have been able to teach, but you see, really, up until the war [1941] when women were married, it was kind of the philosophy that they'd stay at home.

GP: They'd stay at home.

CF: That's right. Then you had in special communities the feeling that as long as there was one making a living in the community, two should not be taking so much money from the community. Oh, I did some substitute work. Then Chet and I were married in April of '41.

GP: Was he teaching?

CF: He had been a teacher, but he was an educational advisor in Three-C, or CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps], at that time. We lived in Belle Fourche and Sturgis, South Dakota. Then at that time our daughter was born, so I didn't mind staying home then to take of her. So of course I didn't go back to teaching then, Gladys, until the fall of 1952.

GP: Is that right?

CF: I was out 11 years, and we were back in Broadus again. During the war, Chet had stayed and worked in Cheyenne on B-17s for the United Air Lines. After the war was over, then he went and taught in Newcastle, Wyoming. But by that time we had three youngsters, so of
course I stayed home. When we moved to Broadus, there was a small rural school again close to where I'd started teaching, and they came in late August and talked to me. I was working in the post office at that time. They said, "Oh, Carolyn, we need a teacher. Would you consider coming up?"

So I went home and talked to Chet and the youngsters, and we decided it was 13 miles that you drove from Broadus so I could stay at home. Then I was back to teaching then in '52. It was quite interesting here. As you well know, you did all your own cleaning—custodial work. I think you'll enjoy this, Gladys. Now, remember, it's '52. So they said to me, "Carolyn, you know the grate in the furnace is burnt out because the teachers just didn't clean the ashes."

So I said, "What do I did?" "Well," they said, "you have some rocks in there so you arrange the rocks, and you build your fire." Of course it would not hold a fire overnight.

So every morning I would get on a shower cap and an old duster that I had there at school to protect my clothes. I'd get down into that furnace and rearrange the rocks and get out all the ashes. For two years, I did that. There was no new grate put in the furnace. Then another interesting point about this time was, "Carolyn, we have a lunch program."

"Who fixes it?"

"You do." So every day there would be some hot dish, either soup, or sometimes I would fix, oh, like casserole dish or something at home.

GP: Who was in charge of the buying and planning for that?

CF: Carolyn did that.

GP: Oh my.

CF: My stove was a two-burner kerosene stove that can smoke like mad. That was the first year. The next year we had electricity, so it was much easier. But I would start my English class about 11 o'clock and I'd be back by this little kitchen, so I would either stir the soup or whatever the hot dish that I was preparing for the remainder of that period in the morning.

GP: Isn't that amazing?

CF: Now sometimes, of course, we had lots of nice commodities.

GP: By that you mean they were furnished by—

CF: -Most delicious cheese that I've probably ever eaten, and butter or turkey. The folks would prepare those dinners and bring them in, like a nice turkey. But I had to do all the other buying.
GP: How many students?

CF: About 15. But we had it planned nicely. The dishes, the youngsters took turns and they would clean up after the meal, but we had no refrigeration, of course, so you just had to plan it so that about everything was used unless, in the winter, when it was cold, you could set stuff outside.

GP: Now you say you got the eighth grade going on its English. Was this pretty much using textbooks?

CF: Yes.

GP: All from the textbooks?

CF: And the teacher. You know they did a lot of written work, in other words.

GP: Oh yes. Oh yes. What about paper grading? Did you do that with then, or how in the world did you do that with all your other responsibilities?

CF: Much of the time, Gladys, it was always kind of my feeling, oh, like in math or spelling, I always felt that the youngsters learned so much when they helped correct. But of course like themes and this kind of work or written tests and social studies, I had to do all that. So much of that work I would have to take home, you see, and do at home.

GP: Were the older children able to help you grade the younger children's paper at all to relieve you a bit of that?

CF: Nearly all the work that would have to be corrected, I usually corrected—of that kind. Now by that time, the students in the upper grades, of course, didn't take state exams. But they went on in the high school, and all of the students did at that time go on into high school in Broadus.

GP: Now you haven’t mentioned the plumbing. There was no water in the school.

CF: No, no.

GP: You carried your own water.

CF: From the outside. Much of the time the youngsters would bring juices or things of that kind to drink. Then we would have large containers for the water, and much of the time I'd bring water from home.
GP: Did you feel that teaching and having three children at home was a burden? Were you able to handle it? Too much stress?

CF: I had a very understanding, very helpful husband, and our youngsters, assumed much responsibility. Then in Broadus when I went back, you see, Mother and Dad lived next door to us and helped taking care of the youngsters. Because Wendell wasn't in school yet, so during the day Wendell would stay with his grandparents. But it made a full, full day, especially the drive, you see, because I had to leave early in the morning. Then in January of 1953, my mother was stricken with a stroke, and she was in the little hospital there in Broadus for nine months. Then my dad lived with her, and Dad's health was very poor. He had Parkinson's disease. So of course we had, you know, the extra care because Chet would always take Dad down to spend the time with my mother during the day. Then at night there was all the work taking care of the household duties that had to be done.

GP: So by this time you were adding up some years of teaching. You had nine years before and then two—

CF: I taught out there two more. In the summer of 1954, I was asked if I would consider becoming county superintendent in Powder River County. So then I became county superintendent.

GP: Excuse me. I was wondering if for that, now, you didn't run on a party [ticket], did you?

CF: You did, yes. Yes. This would be interesting because when I was a county superintendent in Powder River County, I ran on the Republican ticket and then before I became a county superintendent in Missoula County, I changed my party. So I ran here, the three times I ran, as a Democrat. My reasoning at that time was because it seemed to me the field I was most interested in, the Democrats were certainly more concerned about the education of the state, maybe, than the Republicans. That was my reason for changing.

GP: Getting back, then, to the '50s, what year was it that you became county superintendent?


GP: 1954. I can understand why you would have had a lot of confidence in yourself because you're such a capable person, but that must have been quite a challenge. I look on the county superintendent's job as being a mass of figures and budgets.

CF: Oh my Gladys. You have no idea. I had never worked closely with the office. I had helped a very dear friend, Lillian Seymour, and she had been county superintendent there several years before I became county superintendent.

GP: She had? I didn't realize she had been county superintendent.

Carolyn Frojen Interview, OH 131-055, 056, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
CF: I helped her correct those eighth-grade examinations. But other than knowing budgets, tuition, all of the school law and allocations and this was all new to me. Of course I went in after one of the most difficult times because it was right at budget. The other county superintendent had finished the budgets so I did have an opportunity to work with her. But then getting the teachers lined up and of course at that time we had, I think I had, about 25 rural schools still in the county. We certainly don’t have that now. But we did then. To visit all the schools and get all the teachers, and then we always gave all the achievement tests, you see, in the spring, to all the youngsters, and corrected them.

GP: When you say you got the teachers, you mean the hiring was done through the county superintendent’s office, or did you just kind of—

CF: We would help the trustees. Always the trustees did the hiring, but then we would try to find people for them. Of course, being in an isolated area as we are out there, it is very difficult to get teachers to want to go to some of those places to teach.

GP: Did you advertise then or what?

CF: We would call and then we would work through the teachers...What is the one in Helena? Teachers’ "employed"?

GP: I don’t know.

CF: There is one in Helena that—

GP: A placement type place?

CF: Then let’s see. By word of mouth, of course with...Many times we would not be able to get a qualified teacher.

GP: I was wondering if you ever came up short.

CF: I have quite an interesting experience in this particular case. It was time for school to start, and I had this one school with no teacher. There was this girl who had moved into the community. She had four little ones, and she had, I think, about thirty credits which she’d taken in school, so that would be two quarters or three quarters of schooling. I finally pleaded with the OPI (Office of Public Instruction). Would they please consider giving me an "emergency" for her? So they did, and she turned out to be an excellent teacher. Just this past summer, this is now over 30 years, I went up, and she is the principal in the Pablo schools.

GP: Isn’t that interesting?
CF: She now has her Master's degree and is about to retire and has been an outstanding teacher through the years, and principal, so I thought you might enjoy. In fact, she has just retired this year.

GP: Well, I'm sure that you had good intuition about her in a situation like that.

CF: Another interesting experience. I had this man come and he had a Master's, and so of course you were always worried. But we had no other teachers. Very good papers, all the education that he'd had, but he had been in several different schools. He started and, oh, he didn't get along well with the youngsters or their parents. All of a sudden one night he just left, and left many bills. That was the end of him.

CF: Walked out on everybody?

CF: Everyone. So then again I had a young girl, had about the same amount of education as this other girl I told you about, and I asked the OPI again if I could have an "emergency" for her and she just did a beautiful job and she, too, went on and has taught, had her degree and then had taught in the Broadus area. Very outstanding teacher.

GP: Did you ever, once you got into being a county superintendent, take any courses in administration or anything like that? Or did you learn, so-called, "by the seat of your pants?"

CF: We moved up here after two years of my being county superintendent. Then this one summer, Chet had applied because he was teaching in Broadus at the time and our youngsters were getting close to high school and college age. We thought, well, if we were going to move, maybe the summer of '56 would be the summer to do it. So Chet applied. We talked to Charlene especially because she'd be going into high school and we said, "Where would you like to go?"

She said, "I'd like to go to Missoula." There was an opening up here so Chet applied early on in the spring. Nothing happened until the Fourth of July, and so the fourth we had a phone call and it was from the superintendent here, Mr. Beery. He was then called the principal, and could Chet come for an interview? So even that afternoon we started for Missoula, Chet and I, and we left our young people with Mother and Dad.

GP: Had you visited here before? How did your daughter know about Missoula?

CF: No, no. I had never been here. But Chet had been up her to school in '54. Came up to pick up some credits. But the youngsters and I had never been. So we came up, and he applied. While I was here, I decided that maybe I should see if there would be an opening so I applied to Mr. Porter and talked to Mr. Larsen—who was Kleis Larsen principal, you know, of Franklin. We went home, and within just a very few days Chet and his job and I hadn't heard anything yet. But it was time to sell our home, and then I had to get someone to take my job. Of course this
was so late in the summer for Chet to be released so all this took place and we came. I think we arrived about the 18th of August. By that time, I also had a job at Franklin, so I taught sixth grade there. Then I taught there six and a half years. During those years, you see, way back when I had quit teaching, Gladys, at that time in our state, with your two years’ and three years’ experience, you were then given your life corticated. So I had received a life certificate and thought, well, I am fixed for life, see, in teaching. So then, of course, when we came here Chet worked on his Master's, and I had to get my degree. For all those first years I went to school summers after I finished my school years.

GP: I see. Now was that because the Missoula law had changed or the state law had changed or what was it?

CF: The state. We had to put in four years for elementary as well as high school. Of course high school always had it but not elementary.

GP: In other words, those life certificates were no longer valid?

CF: They were still valid. Of course, I taught on that until I had my degree. Chet also had a life certificate and even though he had his Master's he still—I think, over in Helena—had the record of the life certificate. I can't remember when they quite honoring those. I'm not sure about it now.

GP: When I started out in Bonner, which was 1965, those teachers who had gone to Dillon and had their two-year certificates did go back and get four-year degrees. Mildred Dufresne and people like that.

CF: This was a life certificate, but then the regulations were like in schools that you had to have your four years.

GP: What made you decide to seek the county superintendency?

CF: Here in Missoula? I loved the work in Broadus, and I truly missed it when I left. Not that I didn’t love teaching, but I loved all the contacts that you had in the office, working with the teachers, the students, the parents. Then, of course, the people in the department—I thoroughly enjoyed all of them, so I had really missed it.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]
CF: So Mr. Bob Watt, who was the county superintendent at that time—this would have been '62—had come to me—it was several weeks before you had to file—and said that he wasn't going to run. Would I be interested? Then I had to go talk to Mr. [Harry] Porter, our superintendent, to see if he would be willing for me to do this, and he said, "Well, yes." He didn't want to lose me from the system, but if I wanted to run. So I then filed.

Then the person who filed against me in that year was a member of the school board. So we used to [go to the PTA meetings] in all the areas we went, and I think we went to about every PTA meeting in Missoula. Harry and I would sit there, and we'd chitchat and visit. I said to him early on, I said, "Harry, you know, I think we both just have to tell the kind of a job we thing we can do because I certainly can't talk against by boss," because he was on the school board. I said, "It wouldn't look very good if you were talking against your teacher."

GP: Could I ask you a question first, Carolyn? You were running as a Democrat, The initial time you ran in Missoula it was as a Democrat.

CF: Democrat all the way through. The election was very close. Harry Stetler (?) was in business here and well-known, and I, being in the teaching profession, knew a lot of people but not in the community or business world. So the election came and that was in '62, and I finally won by about 500 votes. I really had a very good vote in my Franklin area.

GP: Well, that five hundred was significant, wasn't it?

CF: It was for a person not too well-known. A person that was not too known outside of just the schools and it was quite interesting that night because I was behind Harry all night, poor chap, and Duane stayed up all night because I had to teach the next day. Finally about four o'clock, Chet said, "You were ahead for a short time, but you're not now." So then the next day in school—I always kidded Kleis that I thought he did it on purpose—that was the day he gave the tests in my room so I could listen to the radio to hear, you know, the final results. Finally then my son found out. He went to all the schools and got the results and came and told me that I'd won. So I went into the office in December of that year to work for a short time with Mr. Watt. Then I was County Superintendent for 12 years.

GP: Twelve years. Did you have to run every two years?

CF: Four. But I had no opposition after my first year.

GP: Of course, you were county superintendent when we move here and indirectly you helped me get my job out at Bonner. I was always very grateful to you about that. What were some of the challenges that you had as county superintendent?
CF: One of the greatest challenges I had—and I don't know that anyone else ever had this happen—was the thought of combining, at this time, District 1 and District 5. That was Cold Springs and Missoula. Then the election. So I had been in tough because, you see, we here in District 1 as a first class district, and Cold Springs was a second class district. So I had talked to the State Department about this: Could we be annexed? The man with whom I talked had said, "Yes. It could be and that information would be sent." This was from the Attorney General’s office. Before the word came, this poor mad died.

Then we went back. Mr. Barrow and Don Paddock and I went over [to Helena]. This was not the way it would be handled. There was no law that a second class district could be annexed to a first. So we had to dissolve, if you can imagine, both District 1 and District 5, and come up with a combined District One. That meant they had no trustees and everything with the school had to be changed. I nearly died.

GP: Was the public aware of what was going on? Was this all over the Missoulian and everything?

CF: You didn't have all of the newspaper coverage that we do in this day. But, of course, we had to have elections and then, of course, I had to appoint this board and the other board. I'll never forget Mr. Tom Payne was on the board at the time, and Tom was kind of concerned because of my political background not being as his how I might appoint my new board. I told him that certainly the people who'd been elected would be certainly the ones to sit. We appointed a new board and we all of the members accepting the latest elected person who had been elected that spring. Then we had one person from the Cold Spring [district] to serve.

But you can imagine what a most difficult situation this was, so then, of course, legislation was passed immediately after that so that if now, you see, a second class wasn't to become a part of a first class. They can be annexed.

GP: Did that happen to Porter later or was Porter always on the—

CF: That was after Mr. Porter because it was during Mr. Bell.

GP: No, I mean to Mr. Porter's school.

CF: Oh, no; that was always a part of District #1. Cold Springs was the only one annexed. I think that was probably one of my most difficult. I had several hearings for teachers. They were kind of difficult hearings; those always are. One was appealed on to the state and the decision from the state was the same as my decision. But really, in all the years that I was in office, I was most fortunate when all the people with whom I worked teachers, parents, we all worked together. Problems did arise, but we were able to sit down and usually work them out. One interesting meeting was out in the Swan, and we had had concerns about salary out there and contracts had been drawn up and the teachers weren't happy, so I went out. And we sat down and

Carolyn Frojen Interview, OH 131-055, 056, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
contract were torn up and new ones were drawn up after this meeting. But I did find that so many problems could be cleared up if only we would sit around that table and take time to work and discuss, and each one sometimes has to give a little.

GP: Was it money?

CF: Well, at the time that I was county superintendent, Gladys, we had such tremendous growth here in Missoula. For about two or three years the increase in our District One schools would be about three hundred more students each year and of course that meant building. So, as you know at Bonner, Target Range, Lolo, Frenchtown—all of our schools had building programs. During a building period, it is a very difficult period for trustees/superintendents because sometimes people hate to take on this extra burden and yet the youngsters were here. So that was, I think, one of the areas that had much concern, but all of our levies seemed to pass very well.

GP: So money wasn't really a big issue during those years because there were jobs. The lumber industry was pretty stable in the '60s and the agricultural situation. I'm wondering now about professional organizations like the Montana Education Association. I'm not really aware of what your relationship with them was. I guess what I'm thinking about are changes, perhaps, in standards for teachers? What would be required of them in order to get a teaching certificate, and what were teachers asking for in the way of changes? Were you involved in any of these MEA matters at all? Did you feel that the MEA had a lot of influence in changing conditions for teachers?

CF: Very, very much as far as our salary schedule was concerned in our state. A person that had much to do with this was Kleis Larsen (?), who worked for years on the legislative committee for the MEA at that state level. I in turn worked for years on the legislative at the local level. His great concern was to have better salaries. Then the MEA worked really hard to have sick leaves and (unintelligible) so they did have. I have always had a concern, and I would find it very difficult being in a teaching position not with the feelings between your administration and your teachers that has arisen through the years. I suppose it had to come, but I still find this very difficult. I always found it so much better when you could all sit down together and iron out the problems. Now we have more administration and we have the teacher group.

I have found that difficult. I saw the change coming. I went to an MEA meeting in Minneapolis. Chet and I were really shocked when we saw the attitudes coming in—this was from the Midwestern states and already of course they had made this change—and we didn't make the change for a long time here to take administrators out of MEA.

Because really, up until just before I left the office, the administrators were no longer a part of the MEA, and some of our best presidents were superintendents. So that has been difficult for me. When we were called a union, that has been difficult for me to accept. Both Chet and I feel that way, but I guess this is a part of the change that comes.
GP: I think that from my perspective, we can thank the press for that, don't you? Calling it a union? I doubt whether they are aware of or concerned about all the professional matters that the MEA has been connected with through these years.

CF: The MEA has brought some of it on itself too by more or less following more or less the same pattern that (unintelligible).

GP: That's true. They have been quite militant about things.

CF: I know this was hard on the MEA because (unintelligible). Dee found it so very difficult to see this happening. Because really many of the better things that we have in our teaching profession in the state now where things that were started and very much done during the time we had these superintendents and principals. They often did have a great influence on the school boards. These are the things we need. I think right to this day how much better when the superintendent could go into his board and say "These teachers are (unintelligible)," and when the teachers have to go and say, "We are working."

GP: That's true. Well, certainly the benefits are much better than they used to be. When you talk about insurance and dental insurance and all those things that finally the teachers have.

CF: This is something that I try to remind teachers, certainly my own family because, of course, Shar is a teacher and Dwayne is also a teacher, a librarian. But I have said, "You don't realize, really, how much you have." With all the insurance and then with retirement, because the nice retirement the teachers have, plus Social Security and there are many people out there who are just on Social Security. Sometimes our teacher forget. They are feeling that they aren't getting all the raises that they would like to have.

GP: How do you feel about the status of teachers today? Status might not be the right word. Do you feel that the attitudes of teachers today are as good as they were, say, 20 or 30 years ago? Think they're as dedicated?

CF: I think you have done this, Gladys. You have been supervisor at the university. It's several years since I have been, but both Chet and I did supervise a couple of quarters and I was truly pleased with the attitudes. It's like anything else. Occasionally you see some attitudes that you want to please them. But I truly feel that the teachers are dedicated. You know people can't stay in teaching too long and not be dedicated because it's too hard work. I feel this—the stress of the classroom now is so much greater than the stress when I first started teaching. I worked extremely hard as you can well imagine, but I didn't have the stress because if Johnny did many things in school that I wasn't happy with, all I had to do was get in touch with Mother and Johnny's acts would improve in a hurry. So much of the time, you don't have that at the present time.

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GP: You don't have the support.

CF: Not the support. Because so many times Johnny can do no wrong.

GP: That's true. Parents can be quite defensive.

CF: Johnny can do no wrong. Then in so many areas. Gladys, it has happened—everyone has become an expert in this field as well as so many others.

GP: Everybody needs an expert for whatever.

CF: People are very critical, and sometimes it's your only goal to see what's happening and you can see what an outstanding job is being done. It does bother me when I hear that Johnny can't read or Johnny can't do math. I do think we became quite lax for a period. The youngster was supposed to do what he wanted to do, and for that reason I don't think that maybe Johnny learned as much as he or she could have, or should have, during those periods.

GP: Education has changed so much that even though you and I would both believe in the old-fashioned approach, there's nothing wrong with doing something with a pencil and a piece of paper. But the kids have changed so much too. They're getting computers now in kindergarten so that...The way I look at it and I know this isn't my tape, but I think the teachers are faced with the prospect of having to approach things that are going to be more creative, perhaps, more entertaining.

CF: Well, think of a youngster coming into first grade. Think what he has learned watching TV then we try to teach him. Some of the methods that have been used and materials...Think how creative you have to be to keep that youngster’s attention and interest. Many times, you know these able youngsters have practically learned to read before they’re ever in the classroom.

I had that happen while I was still teaching at Franklin. It was at a parent-teacher conference, and this mother was very concerned because her little second-grader was just having a very difficult time in school. He wasn’t paying attention, and he wasn’t reading this second-grade work. I said, "Well, does he read at home?"

She smiled, and she said, "He reads all of the books that Lance brings home from my sixth grade in archeology work and this type of stuff."

We had just had our conference. I said, "Go back and sit down." I said, "Did you tell her [the teacher]?

She said, "No."

I said, "You have to go back and tell your teacher what you've just told me because you little

Carolyn Frojen Interview, OH 131-055, 056, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
fellow is bored to tears. He can’t stand it.” So she did and lo and behold...Of course, this youngster had never said that he was reading all these things. So after this the teacher gave him materials that were more on his level.

GP: Sure. Carolyn, I know that we even haven’t touched upon all the community committees you have been on and state committees. I think one of the highest honors was that you were serving on the State Board of Education, weren’t you? Would you like to talk about that experience?

CF: I would say that I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the people with whom I worked. I also had many frustrations during that period because again, as an educator, I say many of the things that I felt were needed to improve the education in our state and my thinking was not the thinking of many other members of the Board. It led to much frustration at times. At other times I truly enjoyed it. But looking back, it is not one of the most pleasant experiences of my years of being involved in education.

GP: Were the other people on the board—people with school backgrounds such as yours?

CF: No. One was a rancher’s wife, one was very active in the activities in Helena, one was a doctor’s wife. I don’t sense it quite as much now. It’s been a while since I’ve been off the board, but we had a terrific tug and pull between the Office of Public Instruction and the Board of Public (unintelligible). The only way that you’re ever going to accomplish anything as long as it is set up this way is for the two of your to sit down and work together. We would have meetings, and after all it was my feeling that as long as these people are in office, they are the ones who should know something about the needs of education. We had an art addict much of the time that I was on the board, it was just a battle between these two bodies. You’d just wonder. This one little salesman was just the cutest little guy you ever saw. He had never been involved in education and had just gone to parochial school. He would be here, there and everywhere—most wonderful salesman you ever saw.

Then, of course, we had the horrible tug and pull over Vo-Tech—the governance of Vo-Tech. I was on the board...Finally—it is now years since I left the board—the governance of the board of the Vo-Tech is now going to be set up in the manner that I suggested when we were having this terrible time. Under the Board of Regents and then of course leaving the Vo-Tech and high school under the State Superintendent. At the time that I was on the board, we had, I think, in a period of about three years, we had four people that had vocational education who were fired or whose health was ruined and pained and for nothing. So you see, that was a horrible situation.

GP: With so much responsibility.

CF: So this all happened during the time that I was on the Board. And, of course, many of the members on the Board wanted vocational education under just the Board of Public Education.
And as long as we had vocational education in high school we had to have the state superintendent involved (unintelligible) So lots of nice things happened, but there were many frustrating moments that I did have when I was on that board. I served on many committees, many boards, and like the MEA I was active in that for many, many years. Gladys, through my years of work. Now in my retirement, I have worked on close to 50 boards and committees. This is something I have never been picked in some of the fields, as you say, but my love has always been working with people.

GP: And you certainly are gifted in that.

CF: You feel, you know, you may have some expertise in a field, and I have loved working with people and I love working all the years that I was teaching.

[End of Tape 2, Side A]
GP: You’ve accomplished a lot in just the way that you just mentioned, too, because I don’t know anyone who can smooth things over better than you can.

CF: I thoroughly enjoy, you know; it’s like I said, so many people sing beautifully or they’re musical or all the arts and that door was closed when I came along, but I have felt maybe—

GP: In this other area you have a gift, Carolyn. You really do. Where did you get that gift? Were your parents like that?

CF: My dad was very, very much—

GP: Gregarious person?

CF: Outgoing and met people well. Even in his kind of deputy, he would have to correct folks. But they would come back to him and say, "But Wendell, you understood us and you helped us." Of course my mother was very outgoing and a lovely hostess who loved people. I love people.

GP: That’s very obvious. Your work now with the Aging Services, is that what you are doing working through Missoula Aging Services?

CF: Yes. I’m on the governing board of the area agency. I have the years I spent as ex-officio I worked on that, and now I’m finishing about ten years now. I’ve been six years this fall on the governing board, and then it was a Missoula County agency before it became the Aging Services.

GP: Now is this using federal and state money?

CF: Federal and state and of course we have county and city and United Way monies involved in the programs. The main programs, you know, that we work with RSVP, Foster Grandparents, Senior Companion, and then of course the specialized transportation and nutrition programs. Then the home chores that we have for some out of Mountain West. So they are programs that certainly benefit out community and the people.

GP: Does this occupy a lot of your time?

CF: Many hours. We have a meeting every month, and then we have many, many committee meetings. I’m on the finance and the personnel committee and then especially right now when we’re in budgets and we have to meet often and how are we...What kinds of monies are we going to be getting and what do we have to do to budget. How to spend this money wisely, you know, and what to cut back and we are afraid our money—
GP: Are there crises in his area also?

CF: You mean by that financial crises? Well, of course, our budgets are just so lean and if you are asked to cut out about five percent the county has asked you to do really means you have to cut back on programs because administration budgets just practically haven’t put out any additional staff. We have so many more programs, so that it means, then, are you going to cut back on nutrition or are you going to cut back on foster grandparents and those people who work in very limited funds or (unintelligible). That, of course that is a new program that we have that is so needed. These people go out into the homes where people are just in dire need of someone to come in and reliever the spouse, especially, well, very similar to hospice work only not to the degree that we have days with someone who is terminal. Ours are maybe just an inch away from some of those cases, and it’s really hard to cut this one.

GP: Well, once again, you’re in programs that really take the kind of skills that you have and the wisdom that you have.

CF: But I enjoy it, and of course, I work a lot in the AARP.

GP: I think once you told me that you were involved in education over 50 years.

CF: I started teaching, it’s 55 years now.

GP: I wish I could remember the story you told me once about the newspaper over in Broadus. That is such a good story! If we could get that on this tape before we stop, it you don't mind telling that.

CF: This was in 1955, I think, and at that time there was a move to bring back into the high school’s normal training. They have some normal training in the high schools before I had ever started or was ready to take it. Some of the folks in eastern wilds of Montana—it was the Montana Stock Growers Association—they thought that maybe this is the training we should have. So there was quite a move for this, and I spoke at several meetings opposing it because we wanted to be moving forward with our education instead of going really back. Finally, it had become quite an issue so this one morning I picked up my Broadus paper and on the front page was this article and it said, "We don’t need pedigreed teachers for our students any more than we need pedigreed sheep dogs to take care of our sheep." When I looked at that, I just nearly collapsed because to think that our editor who had a degree would think that we did not need our teachers to be qualified to teach our youngsters.

GP: This was 1955. Amazing. This was a news story on the front page?

CF: Yes, and it was the editor of the paper who had done it. I was just crushed by it!
GP: One of those times when you got mad?

CF: I was belong even being mad. I was just so sad to think that we had a person at the head of our newspaper who would thing that this was a move that should be made. So after a short time, I looked up and out my door was this man and he said, "Do I dare come in?"

I said, "I have never been so shocked or hurt in my life, I don't think."

He said, "I was afraid that you would be, so that is why I've come to see you." He said, "I went too far, didn't I?"

I said, "I can't understand how you, in your position, and with your family”—they had four delightful young people—"could ever write an article like that."

He said, "I was wrong."

GP: What made him do it? Did he tell you?

CF: No; no. I never knew. Of course you see now, at that time, the Stock Growers Association was a very wealthy and a very able powerful association.

GP: But that wasn't exactly the dark ages, either.

CF: Whether someone had come to him and maybe said that teachers are earning too much money and that they don't need all this education, I never knew and he never told me.

GP: Do you think it still could have been related to the fact that they thought that women should not be teaching if they got married?

CF: I suppose it could have been. He never rescinded that, though. In his whole life. I can't remember...I don't think it was legislation that was ever drawn up that was thought about that we have this legislation to put normal training back into the high school.

GP: That was amazing.

CF: I'm sure it was 1955.

GP: Carolyn, this has gone on for some time. You must be thinking of some things you would like to add before we stop.

CF: I would just like to say that one of the greatest professions that we find is the one of teaching. As a little quote from a little story that I read not long ago about this little lady who the folks couldn’t but wonder what she had done. There were all these people who held very
prominent positions, and this little person said, "I have taught them all." When we look out in the city, your community, and you see that you have worked with some of those people and maybe influence their lives, what greater pleaser or pay could one have? Just like this morning I picked up the paper, and here is one of the boys that I've had just set up his office as a doctor in Miles City! So this is what I would like to say. If I were to start over, I would do the same thing I did 55 years ago.

GP: Now that's a wonderful tribute. Thank you very much, Carolyn.

[End of Interview]