Kathy White: This is Kathy White. I’m interviewing Susie Huston in her home in Jordan in Garfield County, Montana, August 1976 for the Montana Women’s History Project. You were just about to tell me where you were born and something about your family.

Susie Huston: I was born in Ozark, Missouri. Twenty miles, at that time twenty miles from Springfield and I spent my teenage years there. It was a beautiful place to spend your childhood. I never was hungry. We were poor people and we didn’t have a lot of luxurious. We didn’t have any cars or anything; we didn’t even have cars at that time. I saw my first car when I was fourteen years old. I wouldn’t have got in it for anything. I was scared to death of it (laughs). You got in it from the back and sat down on each side but I was scared to death of it I wouldn’t have got in it. Of course the older girls did but I was only about fourteen. We were raised up on an eighty acre (unintelligible) farm. There was a big family of us. There was 9 of us and we walked to school, two miles and a half. Grade school and high school too. But we went barefooted during the summer because shoe leather was pretty precious. We started to the Sunday school, we carried our shoes under our arm until we got about a block from the church, and then we sat down and put them on and walk in fully dressed, you know. We were never hungry although we were hard up. I don’t remember luxuries, but you know we had an apple orchard and we had peaches and plums and cherries and all wild berries, blueberries and blackberries and mulberries and hazelnuts and walnuts and all that stuff, so I’m sure we never were hungry. I can never remember being hungry in my life.

KW: You said there were 9 children in your family?

SH: Yes.

KW: Boys and girls?

SH: Yes.

KW: Who spent most of their time...When you were a child, did your mother spend most of her time with the children or did an older sister or an aunt?

SH: Oh, I don’t know. My mother was with us, but then the older ones worked with us too, I presume. I was about the third or fourth one from the bottom, from the youngest. My mother, I always thought she was kind of mean to us. When she sewed, she always made us do all the cooking and the dishwashing and the housekeeping. I thought she was kind of ornery, but now when I sew I don’t want to do anything else either. I don’t want any household chores to
interfere so I know she couldn’t be everywhere and of course, it was...we were taught to work. We never played. Oh, I don’t mean we never played. I mean we weren’t idle. We played lots, and my sister and I we used to make our houses under an oak tree. We outlined the rooms with rocks, and we had moss carpets on the floor. We had wall to wall carpeting, (laughs) and we had big great vines. The vines were maybe as big as your arm, and they’d go from maybe from one tree down to and up to another and that may have formed a swing. We’d swing, or we’d just have one hanging down and we’d grab it and swing like we wanted to so we could swing to my sister’s playhouse and to an adjacent tree. We carried our doll papers (unintelligible) on our back, and we thought we were having a great time, you know. I think we did have a great time. My mother taught us lots of responsibilities, how to cook. Of course we washed over a washboard and hung everything out in the sun to dry. We didn’t have any of these conveniences like we have now. We didn’t have a radio or a telephone or things like that, you see. But you know, we didn’t have cars. We walked to school until we started high school, then dad let us drive one horse with a buggy. We were just as happy. We were probably happier than people are now with all the cars and conveniences because I can’t remember that we were unhappy ever. Course I guess we kids fussed like all kids do. For entertainment mostly we went to Sunday school and church. On Fourth of July, I was given a quarter. That was my allowance for the Fourth, and I was also advised if I possibly could to bring some of it home. But I guess most everything just cost a nickel. I know we had Fourth of Julys and things like that. At Christmastime we had a few little presents, but they were pretty scarce.

KW: How did you celebrate Christmas?

SH: Well, I don’t think we celebrated in any particular way. I can’t remember that we ever even had a tree. I remember my mother going to town to buy Christmas presents, and she rode side saddle. When she came home, why, she stopped down the road half a quarter or something and hid her presents, and then came on home, you see. Now I think I was about twelve years old before I had a lovely doll, and then I was almost too big to care anything about it. My aunt gave me a lovely doll and gave my sister and I one. But at that time I didn’t really care much about dolls.

KW: You had a lot of brothers?

SH: I had...let’s see...1, 2, 3, 4 brothers and 5 sisters, I guess.

KW: Did the brothers and sisters have really different chores to do on the farm? Did you do different things?

SH: I can’t remember. We all had to learn to milk. I know my youngest brother learned to milk when he was 4 years old. We all had to milk when Dad was gone and all like that. We had an apple orchard. We had to gather apples and help pedaling. We pedaled all around town. We took them in with...I don’t know if we’d bring buggy or the wagon. We’d pedal from house to
house with these. But I know Mother paid for my music lessons with produce that she sewed off of the ranch.

When I was seventeen years old, I went to the State Normal [School] in Springfield, Missouri. Mother wanted me to be a teacher. I didn’t have any great desire, but I went up there and got a job to earn my tuition before I’d go to school. There was an older women that was head cook, and I was helping her. Well, after a couple weeks or three—I can’t remember—they dismissed her and promoted me to her job. She cried about it, and I know now that she needed that money. They probably, I think, worked mine out, and they were having to pay her cash. I don’t think they had any keep on the women. I cooked for sixty students at the State Normal when I was seventeen years old. One day I made an awful mistake. The matron’s name was Johnson and she had traveled quite a bit in Mexico, but she told me to serve stewed pumpkin. So I did. I stewed it and I sweetened it and spiced it and sent it to the tables—the dining room. Well, she came to the dining room and found it, and she ordered it taken off the table and brought back. She swarmed all over me for doing such a fool thing. Today I can’t understand how anyone can eat stewed pumpkin without spices or sugar, but I was to stew, just stew it, and put on the table.

KW: She wanted it like squash with butter?

SH: Well no, she didn’t say put anything on it. So after that the kids—my help—I had helpers in the kitchen, girls who were working too. They’d peel the potatoes and set the table and things like that, and they called me Allspice for a long time.

KW: What was your maiden name?

SH: Clark.

KW: Clark. When were you born?

SH: The ninth of January, 1890.

KW: You finished grade school through eighth grade?

SH: Then some high school, then I worked there, then later on I took a sick sister to Kansas—to Garden City, Kansas. Well, I taught a couple of years. After I got out of school, I taught a couple of years in (unintelligible) then I took the sick sister to Garden City, Kansas. Then from that I drifted to California, and I was married in California on the fourth of February, 1914.

KW: All right, now let’s back up a little bit. You said that you went through eighth grade, as most schools went through eighth grade. Then you had a high school in your town?

SH: Yes we did, and I went to high school.

KW: Is normal school different from high school?
SH: Oh yes, normal school is teacher’s college, but I cooked there and then later on I taught school two years in Missouri, in the country schools. Then I went to Kansas—Garden City Kansas. In the meantime I forgot to tell you in 1907, I went Tyro, Kansas, with my sister. I went to some high school there but that’s not important.

KW: Why did you go to Kansas with your sister?

SH: Well, because she needed me, and my mother let me go.

KW: She was married?

SH: Yes.

KW: And needed someone around?

SH: Yes.

KW: So after you got out of normal school and you taught two years, then you went to Kansas?

SH: No, I went to Kansas before I finished my high school. I went to Tyro before I finished my high school but after I taught in Missouri two years, then I went to Kansas, to Garden City, with the sick sister. I lived there a year or so and then went to California.

KW: How come you went to California?

SH: Well, I knew Harry, my husband to be. I had known him in Tyro, Kansas and I’d gone with him when I was there, you see. I went out there. I lived in San Diego about a year and then was married and then we came up and homesteaded.

KW: Did you teach in San Diego?

SH: Oh no.

KW: What did you do out there?

SH: Well, I visited and I worked, I did housework and I worked in a candy factory. But I could make lots more money doing housework than I could in the candy factory. When you worked in the house, you had your board and room paid for and when you worked in factories, you didn’t.

KW: What did your parents think of that, that you’d taken off across the country like that? Was that a daring idea for you to do that?

SH: Oh I don’t know, I don’t think so.

KW: Of course you were you a girl then. How old were you?

SH: Well, I must’ve been about twenty-two or twenty-three when I went to California because I was twenty-four when I was married. I was only out there about a year until I was married, you see.

Susie Huston Interview, OH 049-026, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
KW: What kind of activities did teenagers have in Missouri? Did you date and court?

SH: Not very much. People did, a lot of people dated. I didn’t date as much as some of them do. But you know the funny thing about their dating was, everybody went to church. We had country churches and we had town churches. Usually the boy stood outside the door, and he would speak to some girl as she came out and say, “May I see you home tonight?” She might say yes and she might say no. Some of them were pretty impudent when they were refused, too. They were kind of sassy about it. If you told a boy he couldn’t see you home, you sacked him. That was the expression.

KW: Teenager in Missouri, the girls said they sacked a boy?

SH: If you turned them down, that was sacking them.

KW: Was that mostly the social life? You went to church and then you went out?

SH: Well yes, but they had picnics, and they had Fourth of Julys and things like that. I can’t remember if we played ball. I played lots of baseball, and I was a girl and loved it.

KW: Did you only play with girls?

SH: No, we played a mixed bunch. There was about five hundred who went to this school, where I went, and we played mixed teams.

KW: So the girls and boys didn’t separate?

SH: No, not then. No doubt they had some separate things, but that’s a long time ago to remember, you know about eighty years (laughs).

KW: Some things you remember better than others, right?

SH: Well, my daughter always said if something happened a hundred years ago, I could remember it, but anything happen yesterday I can’t (laughs).

KW: Were there dances?

SH: There were a few dances, but I wasn’t allowed to go to them. I remember one time we had a party at our house. They played a game where they had kind of do-si-do, and I know that was considered...that was a sin. When we went to high school, our high school was all in one room. We had a great big upstairs and a great big hall. All the girls—lots of the girls—would dance with each other at noon, and I’d stand back and watch them and wish I could. I must’ve been a pretty obedient child. My folks didn’t believe in dancing. So I didn’t dance, and we played no cards. Up to today, I can’t play cards. I don’t want to either. But we played authors. Now I don’t know if you ever played authors or not, but it was a card game. So many of Emerson, so many of Longfellow. We could play authors, but we couldn’t play cards.

KW: Probably was more fun anyway.
SH: Well, I don’t know. My folks thought it was wrong, but I have had children in school who played cards with their parents at home. I always thought it helped them. It made them more alert, and they could count their scores and things.

KW: Concentrate—

SH: Yes, so I didn’t think it hurt them all. I don’t think dancing was wrong either, but my folks thought so and I must’ve been an obedient young kid.

KW: Were they Baptists?

SH: Yes, they were. But my mother had danced in her young days, and she could play a mouth harp. I had one brother who that played a mouth harp really well, and I couldn’t play one at all. Wish I could.

KW: You said you had music lessons though.

SH: Yes, I had piano lessons. We had a piano.

KW: Did somebody come to your home, or did you go to town?

SH: I think we must have gone to town to take our lessons.

KW: Did your sisters have piano lessons too?

SH: Yes, my sisters younger than I too.

KW: Did the boys?

SH: No.

KW: Did they not want to or—?

SH: I don’t think they wanted any.

KW: Was it only for girls?

SH: Well, I don’t know. I think at that time not many of the boys did take them. Our boys didn’t.

KW: Did you have books or magazines in your home? Art?

SH: We didn’t have any art that I remember. I remember how I pestered my family together, reading aloud to them. I don’t know how we learned to read. You know, the kids can’t learn to read now. They can’t read the classics such as Evangeline or The Courtship of Miles Standish. Oh, that’s too hard for kids to learn today, but we learned to read them. I can’t remember what method we learned by. I can’t remember that we had the word phonics at all. The thing today that hurts these kids is they don’t read aloud enough, especially in first grade. Every first grader should read several times a day and read aloud. Now the teachers are lazy, and they give them too much silent reading. That’s the reason our kids can’t learn to read today. They let them...
point to their words which is the worst thing in the world you can do. So I know I’d read aloud to my folks, and they were annoyed about it I’m sure lots of times. Then I just insisted.

KW: So you had lots of books around your house to read from?

SH: Well, it must’ve been mostly school books. I don’t remember. We had such things as Companion [Woman’s Home Companion] and things like that—magazines. I don’t remember. We didn’t read Jack London or Zane Grey or any of those books that we didn’t have. I have just recently reread The Girl of the Limberlost [A Girl of the Limberlost]. I enjoyed it almost as much as when I read it the first time, and my daughter said, “I want to read that before you send it back.” I ordered it from Miles City and I thought that was the best book I ever read, and I don’t know if they publish them now. I don’t know where you can buy them.

KW: I have a leather bound copy of that that was my grandmother’s and I read it. Beautiful.

SH: Yes and I would like to get hold of Freckles. I have got to return Freckles (unintelligible).

KW: Those were books you read when you were a young women?

SH: I guess. It’s been a long time ago since I read things. I read a lot of things. I read Les Miserables when I was about twenty-two years old. It took me four months of pick up time to read it because I was working at a hospital in Garden City, Kansas, and my time wasn’t always mine. But with pick up, just when I could pick it up and read it, it took me four months to read Les Miserables by Victor Hugo. Of course was very impressed with it, and I’ve read several of Victor Hugo’s books but I can’t remember much about them. I remembered every story I read—the author who wrote it. But I never paid attention to authors anymore and I used to remember the story and the author who wrote it.

KW: There’s a lot of them these days.

SH: Did you know that...Wilcox [Ella Wheeler Wilcox] is her last name? I think there’s so many poets. They think are more important today, but she’s not given in any encyclopedia, not in the world books anyway. Well this minister quoted this poem to a graduating class. “One south sables will blow, seldom the way to go (unintelligible) like the winds of the sea (unintelligible)”.

Now he told us this at graduation in Lewistown, and he didn’t know who wrote it. So I tried to find it for the girls, and I couldn’t find it. Finally I called the library in Miles City, and they sent me this book.

KW: Did you remember reading that when you were younger?

SH: No, I didn’t read this when I was a kid, (unintelligible) and Wilcox... but she’s just not—

KW: Not read today?

SH: Well, evidently they figured there’s more important ones. Maybe they just can’t put everything in these books.
KW: People go in and out fast. When you were a teenager during let’s see—

SH: I’m born in 1890.

KW: So you were a teenager during the early 1900s?

SH: Yes but I sure remember the election of [William] McKinley and [William Jennings] Bryan in ’96 because we kids at school. I was a Democrat because my dad was a Democrat, so I had to be one. We kids argued the fitness of McKinley and Bryan just as ignorantly as our grownups did. We’d holler at school at the McKinley kids, “Ride, ride your high horse, McKinley rides a rail. Ride your high horse, McKinley lives in jail.”

KW: Did you ever see Bryan? Did he ever come through there?

SH: Yes, yes we turned out of school on time and they marched us to depot. It was about a mile, I guess, and we listened to Bryan speak from the back of the train.

KW: You remember hearing him speak?

SH: Yes, of course.

KW: I suppose you couldn’t forget him speaking.

SH: No, he was a silver-tongued darter all right. But I liked him then. My father (inaudible). I must’ve had some inborne feelings about my country because I went to those meetings with my dad in Springfield to see...I was still in high school when dad took me to Springfield to listen to Eugene Debs speak. One time to listen to [James Beauchamp] “Champ” Clark, and he was Speaker of the House for a number of years. I must’ve been interested, or Dad wouldn’t have taken me.

KW: Was your dad a fan of Eugene Debs?

SH: I don’t know. My dad was a Democrat. Then I think he did pretend to be a socialist, but I don’t know how long he carried that on.

KW: He was interested in labor things, though?

SH: I suppose.

KW: That’s interesting. Did you ever do any political activity in your youth? Did you ever work for women’s suffrage or any of those things?

SH: Oh, no.

KW: Did you ever talk about women’s suffrage?

SH: No, not in that day and time we didn’t. I think women are belly-aching too much now.

KW: You do?

Susie Huston Interview, OH 049-026, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
SH: Well I think women are. I’ve been liberated for years. I can do everything there was to do on the ranch. I can chop corn, and well, I didn’t plow and I didn’t ride machinery because my husband didn’t believe any married woman should ride machinery. But I know that the ladies’ sons, my first baby, I shocked fooder all day, but lord, we got everything that was to be done. We were liberated in this sense. Our name was signed on all ranges and debts. I guess we were liberated.

KW: Let’s see...When you came to Montana, you came in—?

SH: 1914.

KW: 1914. That was before women’s suffrage passed in Montana. Were you aware of women’s suffrage campaign?

SH: I don’t think so. I’ll tell you when we homesteaded out there...We built our cabin on a stump patch clearing you know. Housework was really light. I was outside an awful lot. I’d go and carry when he was cutting posts or doing this and that. I had a pony. Not the first year, we walked, but the next year we had saddle ponies and we did a lot riding. I’d ride for the mail. We lived in one place for forty-four years and got our mail in three different counties, and we never moved. See Garfield [Garfield County, Montana] at that time was part of Dawson [County], and then for a year or two, Harry rode twelve miles across the river and got our mail in Phillips [County].

KW: You said that you got a pretty good education. Was that very common for women to go on and finish high school and to go on?

SH: I can’t remember too much about that.

KW: You don’t remember whether or not you were one of the brains or one of the outstanding ones?

SH: No, I don’t think so. I got an awful lot of mileage taken after I was married. When I started teaching school, I took an awful lot of correspondence courses, and if you think that’s easy, you’re mistaken because it’s hard. I probably took twelve or fifteen subjects before. One winter I taught twenty-seven youngsters and 3 of them were my own. I had all the grades from one to seven inclusive, and I was taking Principles of Education after school. The kids and I—my kids—did the janitor work, and then they played and I napped for an hour. Then they’d come in and we’d have supper, and they went to bed early and I sat up and studied sometimes till eleven o’clock. There was one week I got up at four o’clock in the morning and studied because I had just six weeks to take Principles of Education. I couldn’t have done it without the help that the kids gave me, but I made an A on my test. So I never quit studying, I think that’s why so many people get senile. They just are not interested in anything. I’ve studied all my life.

When other people came out to Montana to visit, they were amazed at how well-informed the homesteader was. Well, we didn’t have nightclubs to go to so we read and discussed things like

Susie Huston Interview, OH 049-026, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
that and helped each other. We were an independent bunch and neighbors were precious. If we needed help we got it, and if anybody was sick and in trouble, why everybody knew it and everybody pitched in to help you. You would have been amazed at the people that you would see that you’d think, “Well, here’s an old grizzly. Well, he don’t know anything but he’s pretty well read.”

KW: Where did you get the books and magazines?

SH: Well, some of our folks would send us books and then we would pass them on to each other and things like that because we didn’t have access to a library, I know that. Our folks were pretty good to send us things. When my kids were little, my husband’s mother...She worked somewhere where they gave her about ten or 12 dresses for little girls, and she sent them out. My mother sent me things that she made and so forth. We lived pretty humble with eats and all like that, and still we didn’t really go hungry. But I sat down many mornings to dry hot cakes or dry oatmeal. We didn’t have any cream, and we didn’t have any butter. I don’t think that it hurt us any. We survived.

KW: I guess so. You didn’t have milk cows?

SH: Not at first. Not the first year we didn’t. We walked everywhere the first year, but the second year we had ponies.

KW: Well, let’s go back and talk about your courtship. We’ve got you here in Montana studying, but we haven’t got you out there in Kansas courting. How did you meet your husband? First of all I wanted to ask you...You were a teacher and you did a lot of other things. Was there any pressure on you to get married?

SH: Oh no. No, there was no pressure on me. In 1907 when I lived with my sister in Tyro, I met Harry. In fact he was at the train when I got off, and he told me about that.

KW: What did he tell you about that?

SH: Well, he said he made the remark to one of the boys like, “I’m gonna marry that gal” or something. Well anyway, Harry was Irish, and there was another boy there who was interested in me. They called me their “partnership girl,” but I never did go with them. Then that was 1907...Well, I don’t know what year it was. Harry came back from Missouri and wants to see me.

KW: When you were going to normal school there?

SH: No, no I wasn’t in school that I know of in the summertime. I can’t remember what year it was either. Then of course we corresponded for several years and then they moved to California that’s how come I went out there. So I went out there, and we did do a lot of things in California that were lots of fun. We’d go to the beaches every weekend, and we’d take a lunch. Harry’s mother would fix the best beef sandwiches and things. We’d go to Coronado Island and
La Jolla and all those places. Harry’s father and brothers could have homesteaded Coronado Island, but they just didn’t have gumption enough at that time to do it when they were there.

KW: His family was from there?

SH: No, they weren’t. They were from Kansas, but evidently they were there when they were younger because they could have homesteaded Coronado. But we loved going across the channel there to Coronado. And we’d go to La Jolla and those different places, but every Sunday we’d go to the beach or something you know. Harry had a brother and his girlfriend, and there was always a group of us.

KW: How long did you know him before you married him?

SH: Well about seven years I guess. I knew him in 1907 when I went to Kansas and we were married 1914.

KW: Why did it take so long to marry?

SH: Well I don’t know, I wasn’t in the mood to marry him, and I don’t know that he was at that time.

KW: Did you want to make your own way or just...

SH: I can’t remember that.

KW: Did you have saved up some money?

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

SH: He came out with a wagon, and some people who were moving out there that became some of the best friends I ever had. She was the first woman that I met in Montana, and I knew her for years and years and she was a lovely person. Then two months later—I think it was in August maybe—Harry met me at the railroad in a wagon. We came out and we stayed at a cabin the first night. Nobody lived there in this little cabin. The next night we made it to this friend that Harry made friends with, and the next night we made it down to where we would homestead you see.

KW: So where was that exactly?

SH: Where we homesteaded?

KW: Yes.
SH: Well, it was in the Missouri breaks. That’s about all I can tell you. We were about 12 miles from the reservoir. Well the way the crow flied, but the crow had to walk it’s about 12 miles. I should know exactly the section in township, 32-, 33-something another section of township.

KW: So he had that claim filed before he came from California? Had he built a cabin there?

SH: Oh yes, yes.

KW: Did you then file a claim?

SH: No, I don’t think you could do that when you’re married.

KW: Not when you’re married, that’s right.

SH: But you know what they can do now, they can get a divorce and file their income tax and then get married again, ha!

KW: Have to do that every year though I guess. (laughs)

SH: Yes I suppose. But when people used to get married, they married for keeps. There’s lots of times...A fellow said one time to another, “Did you ever think of divorcing?”

“No, but murder lots of times.” (laughs). You had your ups and downs, but by golly you never thought of...I was out on the ranch by myself. He’d work out, and I was out there most of the time for three years before my son was born. So of course I had my saddle pony, and we had neighbors fairly close, two or three miles or a mile and so forth. So it wasn’t just like you were coming home. You had a pretty free life.

KW: You had close women friends then?

SH: Yes. Then after son was born, I was cabin-bound for a while, and the girls they came along pretty quick. Then I was house-bound.

KW: You had three children? One boy and two girls?

SH: Yes.

KW: How long was it before your first child was born?

SH: Well we were married in ’14 and he was born in ’17. I was pretty free the first three years. I rode with Harry, and I rode anywhere along the gallop. He’d be off working, and I’d stay alone at the ranch and hike and didn’t think anything about it. I never did.

KW: Were there horse thieves up in the breaks in those days?

SH: No.

KW: That was long after that?

SH: That was (inaudible)
KW: That was all legend.

SH: But Granville Stuart’s son lived as neighbor to us about a mile and a half away. Charlie Stuart told us a lot about the early days with his dad and I read a lot about him too.

KW: So you had three children. Did you do a lot of ranch work before your children were born? Did you have a farm, or did you have a ranch?

SH: We had a ranch. We made hay, and I did more of herding sheep than anything else. We bought sheep, and so we herded them for several years and the kids herded them. But we didn’t get sheep till ’24 so that means we were here ten years before we had sheep. Finally we bought enough wool re to wood wire a 600-acre pasture. So when the kids and Harry and I wanted to go anywhere, we could all go instead of always someone having to stay home while the rest went and that isn’t any fun.

KW: To watch the stock?

SH: Yes. When son was about 15 years old, he was out herding one day and Harry rode through the sheep and he said, “Ray, stop you having trouble; you pull the lamb.” So he came back in about 20 minutes and he pulled another one. She had twins. Son came to the house, and we’d never discussed this but he said, “Mom I don’t blame you on not having more kids either.” (laughs)

KW: Was that the first time he’d seen—?

SH: No, but I suppose that’s the first time he’d seen one suffer so.

KW: Oh I see.

SH: One morning—he was older than that, probably about 17—he came to the house and handed me a bucket of milk. He, “Oh Mom, I wish you’d...Oh never mind I’ll do when I turn the cows through the packed gate.” When he came back I said, “What did you want me to do, son?”

He said, “Oh, I was gonna ask you to separate the milk, but then I thought you’d probably separate milk for 40 years and probably didn’t like to do it any better than I did.”

KW: That was nice of him.

KW: Did you have a doctor when you had kids?

SH: No I had all three of the children at the ranch without a doctor.

KW: Did you deliver them yourself?

SH: No, I had a midwife.

KW: Was she a real midwife or was—?
SH: Well she wasn’t educated in the schools to be a midwife, but she probably had a school of experience.

KW: She delivered a lot of babies?

SH: Yes. And I don’t know with the way they talk now, they’re kind of wanting to go back to this midwife deal. But if you want to get sick, go to the hospital and visit them, and you’ll pick up a germ down there anytime.

KW: So you’d just as soon have them...Did you have any trouble?

SH: Well, I didn’t have any different trouble outside from when the last one was born. I was sick for about 48 hours and I would...If I had to walk off the floor, my pains would hurt me in my knees, if I went to bed they quit.

KW: But you were in labor for 48 hours?

SH: Yes, off and on you know. But you know after a child is born, your suffering is just like a half-remembered dream. Now with son...He was a pretty quick birth. It wasn’t very long, but then your child is just a blessed reality and your suffering is just a half-remembered dream.

KW: That’s very poetic. Did you have any kind of painkiller that your friend helped you whip up?

SH: Oh no, no. But your husband was there with you, and he used to take (unintelligible). You know I had heard about this “mother love” and I thought it was just something that just rushed over you in a big gulp, you know, a wave. Where of course it just grew with you as the baby grew. I said to Harry one day when the baby was about three days old, “You know I’ve never kissed him.”

He said, “You haven’t?! Why don’t you?” He’d carry him around with one hand on his head and one head on his rump and just talk to him like an old granny would.

KW: So he wasn’t afraid to hold a new born baby?

SH: Oh lord, Harry was crazy about the kids.

KW: Did he help you take care of the kids?

SH: Oh yes.

KW: Change their diapers and all that stuff?

SH: Oh yes, and he’d say lots of times to me, “You know the Lorsen Ride don’t like this.” That’s a neighbor who down ten miles to get the mail. Now they’d go get the mail some days and then we’d get them then, “I’ll take care of David and just stay and visit.” I’d stay most of the day and he’d stay and take care of David. That was in the wintertime when he wasn’t busy, you see. The first year we were here I never got breakfast. It wasn’t that I couldn’t, but in California we’d sleep late and I’d get breakfast and Harry would get breakfast while I fixed his lunch and set the

Susie Huston Interview, OH 049-026, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
table. Then when we came up here it was cold, and he wouldn’t let me up till the house got warm, so he’d get breakfast.

When Carol was born—that was the last one—I was awfully weak after those 48 hours. Harry would get up and go wrangle his team and harness them and milk the cows, and get breakfast and be sitting there eating before I’d roused. Yet we lived in a cabin. But if I’d been a movie queen, I wouldn’t have known he could have or would have done it for me. Only one thing he refused to do. He would not scrub the floor. I don’t know that I blame him. Our floors were rough boards, one step away from punching you know. But that’s the one thing he wouldn’t do for me—scrub the floors.

KW: Sounds like you had a very good relationship.

SH: Oh we did. Harry was Irish, and he had lots of...he was happy most of the time.

KW: Did you ever have conflicts in your marriage?

SH: Oh I imagine we did. I told you where I’d go sometimes, “You ought to get murdered.”

KW: But never did worse. How did you handle your conflicts? People today have marriage counselors or...You didn’t even have a minister nearby, did you?

SH: No, we didn’t have any counselors. We just sulked a little while probably or spit it out and went on.

KW: Didn’t bother you too much then?

SH: Not much, no.

KW: How did people that you knew around...Did you know anybody that had serious conflicts in their marriage that they would’ve needed help with?

SH: No.

KW: Did you help each other out when you had troubles? Did you talk things over?

SH: Well, I don’t think we did very much. You know, I still think that the easiest way in the world for a man and women to have trouble—if they have any trouble—is for the women to go to another women and fall on her shoulder and tell her all of her troubles. Now for me that’s...Then of course they grow and they get bigger, and of course someone sympathizes with you and pretty soon you think you’re abused. No, I don’t think people did that. I think they just weathered their own storms.

KW: One thing I wanted to ask you is...I wanted to talk about your teaching, how you started that. But you said you only had three children, and it was three years before you had your first child. Did you ever use birth control?

SH: No. Well, we did, but we didn’t have any pill.
KW: No pill. (laughs) It wasn’t invented then.

SH: We used common sense but we didn’t have any pill. I’m glad we didn’t. I don’t think much of this pill from what I read about it. What it does to people.

KW: But did you know...This was before the 1920s so...

SH: We knew a few things, yes.

KW: You knew about rhythm method and—

SH: Well, we never practiced really much like that, a joke too most the time.

KW: Well, a lot of people did fold that’s for sure.

SH: But, we had our mothers or someone helped us a little. My mother always said that she had too many children.

KW: So your mother gave you sex education?

SH: No, Harry’s mother gave me, Harry’s mother was a practical nurse, and she gave me some information.

KW: Was that about the only information you got when you were a young women?

SH: Yes.

KW: So that’s really what prepared you for your marriage, or was that after?

SH: No that was after. Well, she probably told me some of it before too.

KW: What did she do, say, “Here come over and sit down. Let me tell you something.”?

SH: No, I can’t remember, but she could talk. She’d been around people enough that it didn’t bother her to talk to me.

KW: Did she help other women with problems...with having too many children?

SH: I don’t know.

KW: I’m thinking in the 20s, the Margaret Sanger controversy. Did you know anybody that met Margaret Sanger?

SH: Well, I know all about her, of course, but I didn’t have any connection with her or anything. But I know how she worked and so forth.

KW: You heard about that in the ‘20s?

SH: Yes, and I know there are women who had...Now my mother always said that her children were weaker than they should have been because she had too many children herself.
KW: Quickly then why don’t you tell me a little bit about how you started teaching and how life was when you were a teacher. You had to live away from home quite a bit of the time?

SH: Well, yes. You had to live away from home most the time. But when I taught in Missouri, I boarded. When I taught after I was married, why we had—

[Tape interrupted]

Well when I taught in Missouri, I boarded at people’s houses, but after I was married and started teaching up here, we had teachers’ quarters to live in and so that’s the way I lived. When I was away from home, I didn’t go home nights because you’re too far.

KW: When did you start teaching in Montana?

SH: Oh, let me see if I can think.

KW: Just approximately.

SH: I taught my first term in ’24. I finished a term for a woman from Sprang Creek. I taught about four months, and then I took correspondence and then I taught mostly from then to ’37. Then I quit in ’37 during the war years and went home and stayed for seven years and helped Harry with the son with the service and helped Harry with the sheep and everything. Then in ’44 I went back to teaching again.

KW: Now how many different places did you teach? When you went to Spring Creek...where is that?

SH: That’s out by us, just a little school out in the country.

KW: Did you live at the teachers’ quarters?

SH: Not at Spring Creek. I was at home because I was only 15 miles from it, but the rest of the times I lived in teachers’ quarters and I was quite a ways from home. I taught all over the county.

KW: So you taught in Garfield County exclusively.

SH: Yes, two terms in Missouri and the rest in Garfield County.

KW: Somehow I had the idea that you were teaching somewhere between here and (unintelligible).

You had to live away from your husband for nine months a year?

SH: Oh well, no I’d go home weekends if the distance didn’t...One time I was 40 miles from home. County superintendent sent me down there to grade that school. It’d never been graded. The children were from foreign-born parents, but they were wonderful to me in the community.
KW: What was that, a German community?

SH: Well, yes.

KW: How did your husband react to you being gone so much?

SH: Didn’t make much difference to him in a way, I guess. He had to put up with it. If I was home, he’d probably be with the sheep camp most of the time anyway. It got to the point where he didn’t like it.

KW: He got lonely?

SH: Yes, he got lonely or just got tired of cooking for himself.

KW: When you first settled out here, you said you weren’t particularly lonely because you had pretty close neighbors

SH: Yes.

KW: What did you teach when—?

SH: All the grades, and I didn’t have a grader never.

KW: Nobody to grade your papers?

SH: No sir.

KW: You didn’t even get your kids to grade them for you? (laughs)

SH: No, I didn’t. So I’m not very sympathetic with this aide business.

KW: How many kids did you have in a classroom?

SH: Well I’ve had from ten to 25 or 26, and so forth.

KW: And you had to teach every subject?

SH: Yes, but you learned how to combine, use your heads. You didn’t just waste your time.

KW: This was after World War One of course?

SH: Oh, yes this was during World War Two that I stopped for seven years. I quit in ’37 for 7 years and stayed and helped at the ranch, and then I went back in ’44 and taught about seven years more. Well, I taught till ’59. I taught till I was 70 years old and then I substituted for...what was it, 14 years. Then I’ve tutored every year since.

KW: Let’s talk a little bit about your social life then. What happened to the social life out here? You lived here from 1914 till present. Did you have any social life in Montana when you first came up?

SH: I told you we just went to dances and things like that with our social life.

Susie Huston Interview, OH 049-026, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
KW: So you started dancing then after you moved here? (laughs) You left your mother behind?

SH: Yes, left her behind.

KW: Did you correspond with your family a lot?

SH: Of course!

KW: Did they ever get to come here to Montana?

SH: Yes, my mother was here, and Harry’s mother was here and his father was here, yes.

KW: Was there any little community? Was there a town or a store?

SH: Yes, there was a store about 20 miles away. That’s one thing I didn’t tell you. We usually went to railroad 85 miles once a year and hauled our food out.

KW: (unintelligible)

SH: Well no, we went to the railroad and got it. It came in on the railroad. But we’d go in about once a year and get it. Then later on when they had a store out here—I don’t remember when that store started—well, we bought things out there. But I didn’t come to Jordan [Jordan, Montana] for three years after we came out here. It was in 1917 before I would go to Jordan.

KW: But Jordan was established though?

SH: Yes, well the county was organized in 1919, but Jordan was here a long time before that.

KW: Was there anything around here...work available for women other than teaching? Do you remember any of the single women who were living around this?

SH: Well, we lived on the ranch. There wasn’t any other kind of work.

KW: Did you ever have anyone help you on the ranch, any help?

SH: When the kids were little, yes, I had help, and a time or two when I got hurt. Why Harry turned away, one time and had set bunch of fence posts in it, and I had a girl in for a while. Then I had to learn to push a chair in front of me and walk.

KW: What happened to you?

SH: Well these 18-foot fence posts, some of them hit me on the back, but they didn’t pin me down. Harry said, “Oh my god, what will I do?” He finally got us, he told me to look out and he jumped but I didn’t have sense enough to jump. We were just long edging coolie note. The upper part was and the lower part was turned over in the wagon. And he just got a pole and cried up in the wagon bed and I cried out and then he went to the house and a sledge with a team and kept me in the house.

KW: Did you ever get a doctor up here? Why wasn’t there a doctor?
SH: No, we didn’t have any doctors. Well, one time there was a doctor who came over, and he rode horseback to see if I had pneumonia. He came to the house to see me once, but not when the children were born. We didn’t have doctors.

KW: I noticed there’s not many doctors around here even now. I saw your advertisement for a doctor in (unintelligible).

SH: Well did you see what happened to Roundup recently?

KW: What happened to Roundup?

SH: Well, they have threatened the doctor until he left, and they have closed the hospital. They did that several years ago too. They bombed the doctor’s car or something over there. He quit and finally they got a fellow who stayed for five years, and he’s gone to Florida. They had another doctor just recently, and they threatened him till he’s left and they’ve closed the hospital.

KW: Were they not good doctors?

SH: No, the doctors were all right.

KW: Roundup just doesn’t like doctors.

SH: I just don’t know what it is.

KW: We were talking a little bit before...I don’t know what happened to the drift of our conversation. We were talking about the women’s suffrage movement, women voting. Did you vote then after?

SH: I voted as soon as I could. Yes, I believe in voting but I can’t remember when the first time I voted was.

KW: See that was 1918 when it passed. Jeanette Rankin was elected in ’16.

SH: Well, I don’t remember, but we had precincts called “home” and we’d go and vote. We had precincts at ranch houses and things like that.

KW: Were you very active in politics around here?

SH: No, not particularly.

KW: Boards or anything?

SH: No, I’ve never been on the school board.

KW: How long before it was there were churches and hospitals and clubs and stuff around this part?
SH: You’ll have to find out somewhere else. You can probably find out. Have you ever read the golden books, (unintelligible)?

KW: I haven’t read very much around this part of the country.

SH: Well, that will. I know the county was organized in ’19. It was cut off from Dalton. But the first church I’ve asked about that from an old timer and he couldn’t tell me. He said he never went to church anyway.

KW: Where did you go to church?

SH: I didn’t.

KW: There wasn’t?

SH: I used to once in a while go out about 20 miles to church at a neighbor’s house or something. Once in a while a minister would come into a ranch house and preach. We went over about ten miles one time to hooks to a place like where they would have a church, and the minister passed out song books. Peg was about three years old, I guess, and when everybody started to sing, she took her book and she sang, “Mary had a William goat, William goat…” She sang the whole thing, wasn’t a bit embarrassed. No, we had church every once in a while at the neighbors’ that way, but not very often.

KW: If you had a bit of advice that you wanted to tell young women 100 years from now, what would you tell them?

SH: Well, I don’t know. I’d tell them not to get married as young as some of them are doing and attempt to make marriage a success instead of deciding to get married one day and leaving the next day. I would tell them to stay out of bars and stay home and have some other kind of entertainment. This thing of going to the bars and leaving their babies, I’d tell them not to have a baby and drop it off to some babysitter the next day or two and then start back to work. I don’t believe in that. I think a mother should be with her young baby. I don’t think they’d listen to me. (laughs) I doubt it.

KW: So you’d have them not marry so young?

SH: Well, I think they’re making mistakes when they’re getting married 15 and 16 and 17. It used to be some of those marriages were successful, but they aren’t so much anymore.

KW: Do a lot of the girls around Jordan get married real young?

SH: Well, some of them have to get married, and that’s too young.

KW: You were married fairly late and you seem—

SH: I was married when I was 24, and I had my first youngster when I was 27. Well one fellow told me, I almost missed the boat. (laughs) because I didn’t get married till I was 24.
KW: What? He thought that was a little late?

SH: Well that’s just one thing one of these smart alecks told me that when he asked me how I was when I got married, and I turned 24 and he said, “You almost missed the boat.” So he said, “How old was David”—that’s my son—and I said, “28.”

He said, “I don’t believe it.”

I said, “Ask him. He’s just driving into the station.” So he asked him, and David said...he said, “Tom, I was 28. You know the world’s round. You just well start at one end or the other.” So he didn’t gain too much there.

KW: The clothing styles were changing about the time...

SH: Yes we didn’t have any slacks. We wore dresses.

KW: When did you first shorten your dress?

SH: Heavens, I don’t know.

KW: You don’t remember?

SH: I remember we wore riding skirts at first. When I first came up here, we didn’t take pants. We did always ride stride. We didn’t ride side saddle like I did when I was a girl.

KW: So did you wear split skirt then?

SH: Yes, we did for a while, but we didn’t wear pants all the time like we do now.

KW: I noticed you’re wearing pants. When did you first start wearing pants?

SH: Two years ago. I don’t wear them all the time but I wear them when it’s cold.

KW: You don’t remember what you thought about wearing shorter skirts or—?

SH: Well, I didn’t like those real short skirts that they wore.

KW: But you never shortened your skirts?

SH: Well, some, but I never shortened my skirts till I saw the crack of my...(laughs)

KW: Not that short? (laughs)

SH: No.

KW: That was just a couple years ago.

SH: I know. I thought they’d run it to the ground with them too short but I don’t like them too long either.
KW: Yes right. It’s always one thing or another. Well, thank you very much we’re getting close to the end here.

SH: You better stop and visit with—

[End of interview]