Oral History Number: 049-004
Interviewee: Rose Bryant
Interviewer: Pamela Frasier
Date of Interview: September 12, 1978
Project: Montana Women’s Oral History Project

Note: Rose Bryant’s daughter, Jerry, assists her mother throughout the interview.

Pamela Frasier: Okay, this is September 12. I’m Pamela Frasier and this is an interview with Rose Bryant. Okay.

Rose Bryant: Well, we landed in [muffled], in Marmoth, North Dakota and it was so tough there that we, it was so wild and wooly that my father didn’t like to have us there so he asked the superintendent if they would transfer us farther west. So one day they came into Enginen [Enderlin?] and said to mama that they were gonna move us. And mama, my mother was baking bread, and they just came in and pulled out. We had two box cars, there was six of us kids, and they pulled us out and we came to Milestone [ND] and I have a brother who still lives there. My sister goes down there. But I didn’t like it there so I got started in my picture work and I came farther west.

PF: So, your father worked on the railroad and your mom—

RB: He did work on the railroad.

PF: Was your mom, did your mom just cook for the family or—

RB: Yes, she was just a housewife.

PF: What types of education have you had?

RB: Not very much. In fact, I haven’t had a high school education. I only went to a sophomore. That’s all. I hate to tell people that, but I didn’t have the chance that my own children had. They had better chances than that.

PF: Well, experience and natural talent, there’s something to be said about that.

RB: Yes, that’s all it was. And I played at the play and it was...Then when I got to Milestone, I played at all the dances. I played at church and I went into a tent and sang for a funeral when I was just a teenager. And then it got around that I was a silent picture player and they rode up the country, of course, they rode up to Milestone. I told them I was and I wasn’t, but I was. And that’s how I became a silent picture player. But in Ohio they used to have the singing of illustrated songs—the new songs that came out. And they went to the high school and asked if they had people there who could sing well and I was one of them, and I got the job. And I’d
stand aside of the picture in the theater and sing these illustrated songs and there's where I got acquainted with the woman that played silent pictures. And she was quite a, quite a player and they didn't have any music those days for silent pictures. Now, this is one thing about the...You had to use your own imagination when the pictures were shown. You had to put up the music and they didn't have music that went with those pictures. I had to buy it and learn it and work it up myself. And then later on, before the movies went out, they had the bulletins that went along with the film and we got those ahead of time and then we could work up our program for the picture. And this theater I worked in at Three Forks [Montana], one time, the man who was quite an artist himself, he was a band man and he got me an organ, a hand organ. One you play with your feet, and I used that organ on my music for sad scenes. I'd play right, for years, raise my family and play silent pictures in Three Forks.

PF: I was just going to ask you that. Did you marry? When did you marry?

RB: Oh, married. I married when I was 24 years old.

PF: So what you did first is you pursued kind of a career in playing music before you got married?

RB: What?

PF: You pursued a career in music before you got married?

RB: No, I wanted to. I was playing when I got married. I was riding my heights of glory right then there. I was playing and...No, it just come natural for me to do that.

PF: So when you grew up at home, you didn’t...Did you have books or art or music in your house when you grew up? Or was it mainly at social functions that you learned?

RB: It was kind of on Sunday, you know, church music. And I had a nice life as a youngster. Went to Sunday school. Oh, that's right, I studied and played. I went to Sunday school and they had me play the organ for Christian Endeavors and then from Christian Endeavors, I went into the big church, Protestant church, and sang in the choir—in the big choir. And then when the organist would take a day off, some weekend off, I was the one that did the playing on the organ. See, I fell right into it. I was the one that could do it. It didn't bother me any. And that's, I forgot about that, that life of mine and I was an active youngster in the church when I was a youngster.

PF: Was that primarily where your social events were, through the church?

RB: Yes, through the church, that's right. Sunday school, Sunday school parties, and—

PF: Did all your brothers and sisters go, too? Everybody went?
RB: Oh, yes! Yes, my mother dressed us up for Sunday school and when we came home we had to take everything off and put on our play stuff. And we had to go out and be quiet because it was the Sabbath, she'd say. Don't holler, don't yell, this is the Sabbath. So we took our dolls and we went out. We wore big hats. My mother'd take us. That was the big day. By gosh, I never thought of all those things. Isn't that funny?

PF: When you were a child, who did you spend time with? Mostly your brothers and sisters or—

RB: When I was what?

PF: When you were a child, who did you spend a lot of time with? Your brothers and sisters or—

RB: Well, there's another thing; that's a good question. We weren't allowed to run around. We had to stay home so my mother knew where we were.

PF: Did that include for the boys, too?

RB: Yes, we played together. My brothers, they had, if somebody came over to interview, to play with my brothers, I played with them too!

PF: Yes, that's really great.

RB: I was a tomboy.

PF: Did you, were your play clothes dresses?

RB: What?

PF: Did you wear dresses when you were a little girl?

RB: Oh, yes. Yes. And my panties were made out of flour sacks!

PF: Oh, no!

RB: Yes, my mother bleached them out white, the best she could. Put ruffles around and, yes. And I had a brother, my brother Frank, he was older than I and when he was invited to a party where there were girls, I was invited, too. And he always took me, and we went.

PF: That's really great, wow!
RB: Bring me home safe.

PF: Did your parents discipline you, or what kind of discipline did they use when you were bad?

RB: When we were bad? Maybe not to leave the yard and have to stay home for the whole week.

PF: So there wasn’t much physical punishment?

RB: No.

PF: That's rare.

RB: If the boys were bad, though, my dad did take the strap to them.

PF: Did he do that to the girls, too?

RB: And then if we got to crying, he'd say, "If you don't stop cryin', I'll whip you all! I'll get the right one!" Oh, no.

PF: So, basically the boys and girls pretty much played together.

RB: What?

PF: Did the boys and girls basically play together?

RB: Oh, yes.

PF: The girls got to play in all the sports.

RB: Yes, that's right, the girls too. Yes, they kinda didn't want the girls around, you know, they wanted to play by themselves.

PF: Did they have different chores than you did?

RB: Chores. Oh, yes, they had to. I helped my mother in the house and there was a time when our two youngest children of the family were born. It was pretty hard on my mother. She wasn't too well, so sometimes on wash day she'd take me out of school to help her put up the wash and stuff like that. I remember that, too. I've often mentioned that to my family that many of time Mama would start to wash after I came home from school in the afternoon and we'd wash until nine or ten o'clock in the evening because you had these old-fashioned wash machines that went like this.
PF: Was that just doing wash for the family?

RB: Yes, just for the family because there was six kids. It was a big family.

PF: How did you celebrate holidays like birthdays and Christmas?

RB: Oh, yes, we had a tree where you fastened the candles on the tree. We didn't have all this electric fancy stuff. And then my father and mother would stand off and watch when the candle would start to flicker. You didn't know what was gonna happen. And we always had a Christmas tree and my Dad played Santa Claus. And we were afraid of him. We used to be afraid of him. And then those days we'd probably go out and get walnuts and hickory nuts and we had all our own nuts for Christmas, for winter to crack and we had popcorn. My Dad made popcorn balls. It was a great family.

[Break in audio]

RB: He's probably dead.

Jerry Bryant: How old were you when this picture was taken, Ma?

RB: Huh?

JB: How old were you when this picture was taken?

RB: Oh, I was just a youngster. I was just...This is the one they all rave about. This is—

PF: That's a beauty. Okay, now we're going to talk about your teenage years.

RB: What?

PF: Your teenage years, about the time when this picture was taken.

RB: Well, yes, I was a teenager.

PF: Did you, what kind of socializing did you do? Like parties and dates?

RB: Well, we didn't have the parties like they have nowadays. Well, we'd skate, skate, we'd skate. Skating parties.

PF: Ice-skating?

RB: What?
PF: Ice-skating or roller-skating?

RB: Yes, ice skating.

PF: Did you have chaperones at these parties?

RB: No, I don’t remember.

PF: When you, as far as courtship patterns go, when the boys would come to take you out, did your parents chaperone you when they came to your house?

RB: No, just my brother always went along with me. My brother and I went out together. Because we always had our parties in somebody’s private home. We didn’t go out to some public hall. I don’t think my folk would stand for that. I don’t think so.

PF: Did you work during high school? Or did you—

RB: No, I didn’t.

PF: Did you work in a shirt factory once?

RB: A nightgown factory once, yes! During the summer making nightgowns. And I earned my money to buy my clothes for school.

PF: Where was that?

RB: In Galion, Ohio. I did. And we’d sing as we sewed. You know, we’d get to singing different kinds of songs.

PF: Was that generally the kind of jobs that were available to young women?

RB: Yes, that’s it. Then I used to help a lady. They were very well to do and she needed help and she asked my mother if I could help her and I’d come over and dust for her. And, um, do a little odd things like that—wipe dishes for her.

PF: Generally, household work or work in factories.

RB: I was just a young girl and so my mother let me do that—just across the street and up the street a little ways from my house. I didn’t go too far away. I had to get home.

PF: Was there a big desire for young women to get married back then? Did they want to go out and work for a little while and then come back and get married, or how did they feel about that?
RB: They did hire out those days. They called them hired girls. They did hire out.

PF: But was that preferable to being married? Would they have rather have been married than hired themselves out?

RB: Well, I don't know. I didn't do much of that work. My mother didn't leave me go.

JB: She meant, Mom, why did the girls your age...Did they do it because they had to or would they rather have been married than working in a factory?

RB: Well, I think they did it because they could work there at day and come home at night.

JB: Yes, but would they have rather have been married than working, or were they doing it while they were going to school?

RB: Well, eventually, they did get married, you know. They'd just meet somebody and eventually get married.

PF: Were women considered old maids if they didn’t get married by a certain age?

RB: They considered them old maids then. That's true.

PF: About what age did they start to consider you an old maid if you weren't married?

RB: They'd call you an old maid after eighteen years old, everybody.

PF: Were there enough men to go around? Was it hard to find a man if you wanted to get married?

RB: Well, I think it was. Anyone that you'd want to go with.

PF: Well that may be a problem even today.

RB: My folks sure looked them over plenty! Who is he? Or who is he? Where is he? Where does he work? And all this and that. All the questions they could ask you. Where did you find him?

JB: Gee, I heard those before.

PF: Did you have a lot of girlfriends as you were growing up?

RB: Oh, yes.
PF: Did any of those girlfriends—

RB: My folks were strict. They were too strict. And when I went to visit any of my girlfriends, Mama would make me take my sister along and then Mama would question my sister. And she just unload everything that we did, everything that we did she would unload to Mama. "Did you do that? Well, you can't go over there again."

PF: Oh, dear.

RB: That was strict, those days.

PF: When did you meet your husband? And did he go through this whole courtship thing about meeting your parents and all of those things like that?

RB: No. I was twenty-five years old. I just met Mister Right. He was the mayor of Three Forks. He was, yes, he was the mayor of Three Forks and we just got very...Well, he did write my mother a very lovely letter about finding me. And that he would make a good home for me and all this and that.

PF: What was your wedding like?

RB: What?

PF: What was your wedding like?

RB: Well, it was at a ranch. It was my husband's sister's home. She had a big, beautiful house and you know they had a lot of weddings in the home, you know. They didn't go to the churches and have these big, fancy weddings.

JB: What was it like, Mother, where was it?

RB: It was in Pipe Stone Springs.

JB: And that's between Deer, it's now, it's this side of Whitehall, Pam, there used to be a springs, a swimming pool, like Gregson Hot Springs.

RB: And then we had, Ralph Robertson stood up for me and another lady, and all the sisters stood up for me. We just had a home wedding. Had a nice big dinner and everything.

PF: Did you go on a honeymoon?

RB: No, we just went to Butte and spent a few days there and went directly home. No honeymoon, oh, God, no. I don't know if they took many honeymoons when I was young or
not. I mean, when I was younger.

PF: So, after you were married, did you continue playing your music before you had children? Or did you have children right away, or—

RB: Oh, in about three years I had a baby, first baby and that's my daughter right there. And she died when she was 25 years old.

PF: That's a shame.

RB: Oldest daughter, and then I had Jerry.

PF: Did you plan to have a certain number of children? Did you plan?

RB: Well, about two. A boy and a girl. I had two girls instead. Jerry was supposed to be the boy. I think she's kind of a tomboy, anyway.

JB: You bet!

PF: Did you know anything about birth control back then? Or about controlling the number of children you have, or anything like that?

JB: Did you, when you were growing up, or when you got married realize about birth control, how to regulate your family? They just had families, didn't they, Mom?

RB: No, there was nothing like that when I was married.

PF: There was no—

RB: All this stuff has happened since Jerry had hers.

PF: Okay. Where did you deliver your babies?

RB: In the hospital.

PF: You didn't have a midwife or did you have a midwife or a doctor?

RB: Oh, yes, I had a doctor, yes.

PF: Okay, were there midwives in the community that you lived in? Midwives?

JB: Were there midwives in Three Forks?
RB: I had, when Jerry was born, she was born in my home and I had a midwife there because there was trouble in the hospital between the doctor I had and another doctor. The very last minute I had to go to Bozeman, so we decided to call.

PF: Well, it must have worked out pretty well to have her at home.

JB: The birth must have worked out okay, Mom.

RB: Yes, fine.

PF: In your relationship with your husband, who handled the money and who made the decisions?

RB: I did.

PF: You handled the money. Did you make joint decisions, or—

RB: Oh, yes. Yes, we did.

PF: Did you have a lot of economic hard times in your marriage at any time? Did you have any real economic hardships in getting through?

RB: Oh, yes. We went through the Big Depression. It was tough, too.

PF: Did you work during that time?

JB: Did you work during the Depression, Mom?

RB: No, I didn't leave the home. I didn't do anything outside of the home.

JB: Weren't you playing at the theater then?

RB: I suppose I was, sure. I wasn't making a great deal of money at the time. Three dollars a night is all I made. I was glad to get that. I worked all the time. Played dances and plays for everything they wanted.

JB: That's what she wanted to know.

RB: Yes, all the time. I even supervised a study hall in high school during the Second World War.

PF: You did.

RB: And run my hotel. I had a hotel—The Bryant Hotel.
PF: When did you get that?

RB: Oh, it was built—

JB: She wants to know when you bought it, Mom.

RB: Well, I was in it 27 years. And the Bryants built it for their sister, and then they found out that it was a little too hard for her to do the work. And the winters were cold and they wanted to send her to California where she'd be comfortable. So they sold it to the Westfalls and they had it, Mr. and Mrs. Westfall. And then she got old and she couldn't run it and I wanted the Bryant Hotel, so I got it back. And it was a lovely, lovely place.

PF: Did you belong to any of the women's clubs at that time?

RB: Oh, yes. Yes, I did belong to clubs.

PF: Do you remember the names of any of them?

RB: Well, the Three Forks Women's Club and I belonged to the church and all those at church.

JB: Eastern Star?

RB: Eastern Star. Played the piano in the Eastern Star before some year.

PF: Were there a lot of—

RB: And I played at Grand Notch in Helena and I opened the session in Butte, I'll tell you that.

JB: She has another question for you, Mom.

PF: Um, did you have a lot of books, periodicals, and women's magazines available when you were in Three Forks?

RB: Not so much in those days, like you have now. There's a reader. You want to know about reading and books, just ask her.

PF: Did they have a lot of children's books, books you could read children back then?

RB: Oh, yes. I bought children's books for them. They had their junior classics and other books that you had. You still have them, or did you give them to Gay?

JB: Gave them to Gay.
RB: My granddaughter, Libby, has those books. And she's another bookworm, too. Thank God they have a beautiful library for them.

PF: So, did Three Forks have a hospital?

RB: Yes.

PF: And a library?

RB: A very small one. It's bigger now than when I was there. They improved it. And a hospital, a railroad hospital. It was a nice hospital and my oldest daughter was born in that hospital. Then they closed it and somebody else got it.

PF: Did you ever participate in politics?

RB: Did I what?

PF: Participate in politics?

JB: Did you ever participate in politics?

RB: Oh, only to serve on the election board or something like that. That's all.

PF: Did you, do you remember the suffrage movement?

RB: The suffrage?

PF: Yes.

RB: Oh, yes. I read about it, but I didn’t belong to anything like that.

PF: How did you feel when you got the vote?

RB: What?

PF: How did you feel when women got the vote?

RB: Oh, that just suited me fine. Yes, that suited me fine.

PF: So, you voted.

RB: Oh, yes. Yes, I did vote.
[Break in audio]

RB: To my community...A lot, a lot to it. I played funerals. I played weddings. And this gift of music that I have, that put me over with the silent picture playing, is a gift from God. He gave that to me. And I felt if I didn't play a funeral, he might take that away from me. Maybe something will happen that I can't play. So, I was always busy in my community. I gave a lot. It's too bad. Doctor Jimmy Lane from Seattle, he's a Three Forks boy, and he said he don't know of any other woman that has gived their time and their talent as much as I have to my community. That had talents.

JB: Mom, let her answer her question, please, dear.

PF: Okay. I guess what I want to ask you about now are the styles in dress. You know, for women. The styles for women's dress changed so drastically the whole time you were growing up, like the length of your skirts changed and your shoes changed all the time. Did you enjoy all those changes—going through those?

RB: Well, yes I fell in with it. If I couldn't, I couldn't.

JB: Yes, but did you like the changes, huh, Mom

RB: Oh, yes! When they got up here, when they came right up here, and I thought it was about time that they come down a little bit. Now they're down a little bit.

PF: When was the first time you wore a swimming suit?

RB: Oh! That would knock you cold. At Pipe Stone Springs, we had to put on stockings and bloomers could the elastic in. It came around here. When we came out to swim, there we were, all dressed up with this black swimming outfit trimmed in soutache braid, and the pants were connected to the top part.

[End of Side A]
RB: —nothing like what they’re doing today. Oh, my heavens! A little piece of material around it like that.

PF: Can you describe, like, an average day when you were first married?

RB: An average day?

PF: Yes, like what you would do in an average day.

RB: When my children had been born, an average day would be to put them in their buggy, doll them all up, and go for a walk. Go downtown shopping. Go down and get some groceries or something like that.

PF: Did you have help raising your household? Did you have any domestic help or anything like that?

RB: Did I have the what?

PF: Did you have any domestic help raising your children and doing the laundry and the cooking and everything?

RB: No. I just thought I was a housewife, and that was my duty.

JB: It was too small of a home growing up—

RB: To bake and cook and can. My sister-in-law sure impressed upon me that I had to can peas and beans and corn and all that stuff. We got a deep freeze, and we froze it (unintelligible).

PF: Do you remember what the contact between...Were there any Indians around where you lived?

RB: Indians?

PF: Yes.

RB: No, only what they bring in for programs or something like that, no. No Indians.

PF: So were there any other, like were there any China people there? People from China? Or Japan or—

RB: Well, yes there was. You see, the steel gangs on the Milwaukee were mostly
foreigners—Chinese, Japanese. Japanese. In fact the king of the...the head of the Milwaukee steel gang was Japanese, and they had their own cars and they ate their own kind of food. They had it shipped in from Seattle. Because I took care of two Japanese children and sent them to school. When to another place, they wanted to place their children in school where they could be there steady with a nice (unintelligible), so they mentioned me and I took two of them and sent them to school.

PF: So people accepted them being there?

RB: Oh yes, they thought they were lovely. I put them in little programs—

JB: There were two Japanese families around (unintelligible).

RB: In fact, one of the girls was a secretary for the high judge in Saint Paul [Minnesota]...Oh, what do you call it?

JB: Supreme judge or something like that. (Unintelligible)

PF: Did other people live in your house besides you and your family? I mean, when you were a little child, did you have other relatives living with you like uncles and aunts—

RB: I had my sister—

JB: She misunderstood the question.

RB: She came down and she got a big job on the Milwaukee. She served 50 years with the Milwaukee.

JB: (unintelligible)

PF: So this is when you were married, when your sister came to live with you?

RB: But she didn’t live all the time with me. She got a room someplace where she could go out and do what she wanted to. I had her and she was through business college, and she’s trying to get a job and my husband got her a job on the Milwaukee.

PF: What did she do on the Milwaukee? Clerical work?

RB: Clerical work, yes, is what she did.

PF: When you were—
RB: She was their clerk, Milwaukee clerk.

PF: When you were a child, did other relatives live with your family? Like uncles or aunts or anything like that?

RB: No.

PF: It was just the immediate family?

RB: Nobody. They lived close by, but they didn’t live with me.

PF: Do you remember if your...where your parents came from?

JB: Where did your parents come from, Mom? Where did Grandma and Grandpa Sigmiller (?) come from?

RB: Oh, Indiana. Then they moved to Ohio, and my father wanted to be a railroad man so he got transferred out on the new Milwaukee line. That’s how we happened to get out West.

PF: Okay, that’s pretty good.

[Break in audio]

RB: Gandpa Thesser (?) had something to do with building the bridge over Niagara Falls or something like that. Never did get the real down to goodness about that. I don’t know.

[Unintelligible discussion]

RB: Oh, I don’t know. Sometimes I think when kids would ask their parents those things, that they grew crazy or something (unintelligible). Ask them such screwy things like that.

[Break in audio]

RB: When they first came to Ohio (?) coming from her folks, but she never sat down and talked to me about anything like that. She’d tell me about her brother having a big choir in one of the churches and music seemed to come from...We were musical. We were a musical group, and not only me, it came from the Bryants (?) too, you know. Came from the Bryants.

PF: Well that’s—a

[Break in audio]
RB: —because they had those gambling places up the street and the people were tough. They were gamblers. They were trying to get all the money they could get, you know, from the railroad men building the new railroad through.

PF: Were most of the railroad men, were they family men? Did they take their families with them?

RB: Oh yes, they had their families there and kept them, but it wasn’t safe for me to go down the street as a young girl, because you didn’t know what could happen to me. They had these blind-piggers, and they had these girls...What do you call them?

JB: Girls of the evening.

RB: They had houses for them.

JB: Watch your (unintelligible).

[Break in audio]

PF: How do people—

RB: Oh!

PF: That’s okay.

RB: So we weren’t allowed to go...When my dad would go downtown, he’d leave his money at home and just take enough along to buy what groceries he wanted to because they’d just knock him in the head and pull him in under a tent and take all their money! That’s the way...The country was wild. It was tough. We weren’t allowed to go no place at night. Well, I’ll tell you, I went with the Mokers (?). He was the superintendent of the Milwaukee then. We were going to go over to the hotel to a dance, and we had to carry a lantern and he took his gun with him—Mr. Moker did—because maybe they thought he had money. They’d knock him in the head or something. We had to go across railroad tracks the get to the dance. It was tough living. I came out all right though. Nothing ever happened to me.

PF: Did they have things like travelling theater groups or anything like that?

RB: Not in Melstone, but out there...They did in Three Forks [Montana]. They called them the Chautauquas, and they had them under tents. My husband was one that always signed up for them. They’d have to get so many business people in Three Forks to sign up for these Chautauquas. Then if they didn’t make it, if they didn’t make the money, these ones that signed up for it had to dig up the money. They’d have all these different groups come along: colored and music and speeches and everything like that. Oh yes, we had those. We had those.
Then in this theater that I played, they’d have travelling shows on the road, and they would stop at the theater and perform for one week. I journeyed as the pianist.

PF: So that was pretty active?

RB: Yes, that was really active, and it was a good show town too. They’d fill the theater. They had the dressing rooms right there in the theater. I forgot about those Chautauqua shows. Now, they had those too. But I thought, this is all going to be about silent pictures, see. I didn’t think this interview was going to be anything like this. I thought it would be something pertaining to the picture making business.

PF: Well, we could talk about that too, if you want.

RB: Well, I was just trying to find out. I have never been able to find out just how old those silent pictures, when they started or how old they are. I’ve never been able to find out.

[Break in audio]

PF: Did your friends get married, or did they go to look for work?

RB: Did my friends get married?

PF: Or did they go to look for work?

RB: I didn’t catch it.

JB: Did your friends get married, or did they go look for work before they wanted to get married? Your girlfriends.

RB: I see. [pauses] I don’t think I had many, too many girlfriends. I kind of stick to myself. I was working. I had to work on my music during the day, and I didn’t dare chase around. Didn’t dare chase around, I wouldn’t have much of a reputation.

JB: Yes but the deal is Mom, did they go to work rather than get married? Would they have rather worked than get married?

RB: No, I think the girls those days wanted to be married. They, maybe, wanted a home and wanted to be by themselves.

JB: They wanted to leave their home and get a home of their own?

RB: Yes, I did too I wanted to get my own home.
PF: That’s what I meant.

[Break in audio]

RB: If they got a man that was a railroader, they got somebody that could take care of them, who made the money. How do you feel about it? You wouldn’t want to get married?

[Break in audio]

RB: —they had their names and we went...My mother dressed us all up and away my dad took us up there. We entered the building and here was a door with the...showed one big horse and another door showed another big horse. Then when the fire alarm goes off—if it’s at night time—you see the men asleep up above and they all slide down on a post, you know. They come sliding down it and the horses come out of their stalls and they get right in place, right in place, and the harnesses drop right down on the horses. They strap them up, and pretty soon there’s a man up there, he got up there on that engine and he got ahold like this. I can still see him. The doors opened and away they go to a fire. Say, I’m doing that too much, I might have a spell.

JB: Oh you won’t either! (laughs)

RB: The horses would come out, and they’d turn them and they’d have...there’s two on a wagon. Then they’d have the steam power too, you know, and they’d hold them like this. Those horses would just go and the sparks would fly away from their hooves. They’d get there to the fire, and then the men would get out and they’d begin rubbing their horse’s body with something. I don’t know, a rag or something. I don’t know what they had. Get the sweat off of them and cover them all up so they wouldn’t chill. Then the old steam engine, it was there and...you know they did...It’s funny, they didn’t fight fires like they do today, my heavens!

JB: This is what she’s interested in, Mom.

RB: Oh, that’s what she said.

JB: You see, she wants to find out how you came involved in your music and what was your background to get into music.

RB: Oh, I never thought of the fire department, (unintelligible) and I’ve never forgot that. I told it to David and Gay and all of them and they’re...those horses, the sparks would fly away from their hooves. Great big dapple grey horses! All he could do, this man, to hold them.

JB: How many? How many?

RB: Two! Two great big ones to a wagon, and they’d have three wagons. But the care they gave
those horses when they got there, they’d be really wet, you know. They’d rub them down and put blankets on them and then they’d walk slowly home. They’d walk them back to the thing again, and they had their names. But the harnesses were all up here and the minute the horses got in place [smacking noise] down they’d go. They strapped them up and the fellow who was up on the wagon, doors opened up and away they went to the fire.

JB: How about the band? Bands you used to (unintelligible).

RB: Oh yes, on Saturday night you would go downtown and hear the band play. That was a big treat too.

JB: In the city square?

RB: What?

JB: In the city square?

RB: Yes and my dad would buy us popcorn. The farmers would be in with their watermelon, and he’d pick up a nice big watermelon and take it home. These are boughten cookies, I’m sorry to say.

JB: Tell her how you kept your watermelons cool.

RB: Oh yes. Then, they didn’t have refrigeration like they’ve got today, just plain ice boxes with the ice in it. But to cool the melon, he would roll it in the garden under the cabbage leaves for the night on the ground, and it did cool it—cool the melon.

My mother was a religious woman—

JB: Mother, you would tell me about going to ball games.

RB: Oh yes. That’s right, we went to ball games, but we all had to be home in the house in a certain amount of time. Sunday was the Sabbath, and there was to be no hollering around or playing the running games or anything. We had to go out and sit on the grass, on a piece of carpet or something she gave us, and play with our dolls or neighbors kids or whatever, but we weren’t allowed to romp and play on Sunday.

JB: Did Grandma—

RB: And (unintelligible) said, that he got so sick of church work when he was a kid, because Sunday was devoted to singing hymns, reading out of the Bible. (unintelligible) used to get so tired.
PF: Did you just sit down and start playing the piano one day, or did you have access to a piano when you were a little girl?

RB: Oh, yes.

PF: Your parents had one, or did you go to the church to play?

RB: I went to the church to play too.

JB: Did you have a piano at home, Mother?

RB: We had an organ, then we got a piano.

JB: Pump organ?

RB: Yes, pump organ, with your feet.

PF: Did your parents both play?

RB: My mother sang (unintelligible) hymns.

JB: What did your dad do?

RB: What did Grandpa Sigmiller do? Did he sing or—

RB: I don’t know about my dad. He maybe just listened. I don’t remember. Mama was the singer. She would sing those hymns, and we’d sing with her. “I Love To Tell the Story”, “Sweet Hour of Prayer”—those were her songs.

PF: Was there a favorite movie that you liked to play the music to the most that you remember?

RB: Oh yes, I liked... Nelson Eddy, (unintelligible), and the Talmadge sisters—they were all beautiful singers. You’d have to throw yourself into the music too, you know, sing right and play it right along.

PF: Did you have some favorite silent movie actors? Or actresses?

RB: Oh yes, I liked Jeanette MacDonald—

JB: No, silent, Mother, silent.

RB: Well, they were silent! Weren’t they?
JB: No. Did you ever see *The Flapper*, *The Goldiggers*, or *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*?

RB: Yes.

JB: Well, that was about your first—

RB: *The Vampire*, in movies when I first started to play was... Wait a minute... *The Vampire* was—

JB: Theda Bara.

RB: Theda Bara! Now she was a vampire, oh I can still see her, laying on the couch—

JB: Do you remember Broncho Billy Anderson?

RB: No.

JB: That was the first Western star and then John Bunny?

RB: Oh, yes.

JB: And Flora Finch?

RB: He looked like a bunny too! He did, he did! He was fat, and he looked like a bunny.

JB: Flora Finch?

RB: Yes, Flora Finch. She had beautiful eyes. She was known for her beautiful eyes. I didn’t know you had anything like that!

JB: (unintelligible). You can read this. Mary Pickford, who played little girl parts. Charlie Chaplin.

RB: Did you know Mary Pickford is an invalid, has been for a long time? For years, yes, she’s an invalid. (unintelligible)

JB: (unintelligible) The *Birth of a Nation* was about the first silent movie. *The Birth of a Nation*.

RB: No! That was the first one?

JB: About the first, it was filmed in 1950 and it marks the founding of the modern film. It cost almost 4,000 [dollars] to complete, compared to what they pay now (unintelligible). It proved to be one of the great (unintelligible) of the screen.
RB: Will Rogers and Marie Dressler used to be a team.

JB: No, no, no, no, not Will Rogers. Wallace Beery. Wallace Beery. Wallace Beery and Marie Dressler.

RB: He was a lazy old devil. She was washing for a living, and he'd be laying in a hammock and it was a lazy picture. Good for nothing.

JB: (unintelligible) I guess they call them.

RB: Well you know, I consider this a great honor to be asked. Yes, I do!

PF: We consider it, really, a great honor to even interview you. We do. Because we need...we've gotten interviews from women all over Montana, every single (unintelligible).

RB: Say, what is the woman’s name that called you?

JB: Claire Rhein.

RB: Is she going to college?

PF: She works for the archives at the University of Montana. She's probably in her early 60s.

JB: Her daughter and my daughter. Her daughter, Jona (?), gave her my name. (unintelligible).

JB: See, they take this tape, Mom. They'll take the pictures that we give them—

[Break in audio]

[Piano music]

RB: It’s old, isn’t it beautiful?

PF: Yes!

RB: I haven’t gotten the lid up yet!

PF: Oh, it’s beautiful, yes!

[Piano music resumes]

PF: Oh that was great!
RB: What do you think of that?

PF: Oh, I think it’s beautiful!

JB: Mother, would you explain to Pam about the music you used in the silent movies?

RB: They want what?

JB: Explain how you used your music in the silent movies with the pictures.

RB: Oh, with the picture. Well [plays piano].

JB: Wait a minute, when the (unintelligible) came.

RB: [plays piano] Wait a minute...[plays piano] I was trying to think of that, that Smiling Through (?). I can’t think of it.

JB: Yes, I can’t think of it either.

RB: Well, the thing is this. Maybe, here comes the lover, he’s coming to the house [plays piano]. Now, his wife is sad [plays piano]. She’s telling him about what’s happened, see. [plays piano] He’s going to leave her again [plays piano]. Somebody’s sneaking up on him [plays piano]. She’s going to bundle up the baby, and she’s going to leave him [plays piano]. Now, here he comes back [plays piano]. Well, that’s the way the thing goes, but I have nothing to go by.

PF: Oh that’s real good. That gives me an example of all the different kinds of action that goes on and what you play for it.

[Piano music]

[End of Interview]