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Summer 2000
Kathy White: Florence, before we get started, how old are you?

Florence Cowan: Eighty-two and I’ll be 83 next, this month, in a week.

KW: And your sister Juanita is how old?

FC: Ninety, going to be 90 on the 23rd of this month. No, next month, next month.

KW: And your parents homesteaded this area?

FC: Yes, on East Clyde Park on Rock Creek and my dad and my uncle each took up homesteads on Rock Creek and I think the first men on Rock Creek. I think they were and that was in ’83 or 4. I think ‘84, it had to be ‘84.

KW: While Montana was still a territory?

FC: Oh, yes.

KW: Yes.

FC: Yes and there was lots of vacant land at that time but they settled on, and that’s where they went. And their mode of traveling, they walked from Bozeman over there so they didn’t have a very good way of traveling.

KW: And your mother didn’t come until later? She was from, she stayed in Missouri while your father came out and homesteaded?

FC: Yes, she stayed in Missouri because she was going to have another baby.

KW: She was pregnant at the time that he came out here?

FC: Yes, yes and she had another boy and he was six months old when she came to Montana.

KW: Do you remember your childhood up on Rock Creek?

FC: I was four years old when we left our homestead on Rock Creek and we went down into the Chadborn neighborhood and Mama filed on a desert claim down there. She bought the
relinquishment from a man by the name of Schaeffer and at one time this Schaeffer had run a post office and it was called the Brian Post Office and that’s one of the early post offices in Montana, in this part of the state.

KW: In this part of the state.

FC: Yes.

KW: Now, your mother went down and took up, bought the rights to that desert claim herself. Why was that?

FC: Oh, Dad was with her, oh, yes.

KW: They both went down together?

FC: Yes, yes, but she had a desert claim right left and she filed on that and then my dad filed on a mile above there was some vacant land and he filed on that as a desert claim for him but he didn’t have to live on it he just had to get—

KW: Get water to it.

FC: Get water on it.

KW: What was your family life like? You stayed on a homestead kind of situation until, did your family prove up on those homesteads that they took out?

FC: Oh, yes, yes, proved up and sold them, yes.

KW: And sold them.

FC: In fact, I was born on a tree claim, they moved off of the desert claim, off the homestead onto this tree claim and that was where I was born. That was still on Rock Creek but up a few miles higher on Rock Creek and then they came back down to, I think they’d sold my dad’s homestead, and they came back down to my uncle’s homestead and lived there a few years and then is when my mother filed on this desert claim and the Schaeffers went to California and Mama filed on the desert claim and then Dad filed on a desert claim about the same time but he had problems with his.

KW: What were his problems? He didn’t get enough water?

FC: Well, it was contested. He didn’t get the water on it and we gave you that in Juanita’s history yesterday.
KW: How many children did your mother have?

FC: She had seven, nine. Nine but one died in infancy.

KW: And most of those children were born in Montana?

FC: All but two were born in Montana.

KW: The oldest boys, was it, that were born in Missouri?

FC: Yes, were born in Missouri and the third boy was the first white child in the Rock Creek community, that’s where the homestead was and he was the first white child, I don’t know anything about the Indian part of it.

KW: What kind, do you remember the birth of any of your brothers and sisters? Did you, you had one younger sister?

FC: Yes, I have. I remember two, the girl that died, I was 13, 14 when she was born, and my brother Cecil is eight years younger than I and I remember when he was born.

KW: Did your mother ever have any kind of care when she was pregnant and giving birth? Did she have a doctor?

FC: She didn’t have a doctor for any of her children excepting the last child and that’s the one that died, she had a doctor with that one and she got infection and died but the other children, she had a neighbor lady that was good at that kind of thing that came and helped her through her problem, for the birth of the child. But she never had a—

KW: And so a neighbor lady, the same neighbor lady, served as a midwife?

FC: Well, it was most of the time with the same lady, a midwife, that is, she took the place of a midwife.

KW: And helped.

FC: But she was just a neighbor lady.

KW: And your mother never had any problems with those births?

FC: Not many of them excepting that last baby and it got infection from the navel and I can remember that she turned dark on her stomach and that was that infection and she died.

KW: Did your mother blame the doctor for that?
FC: I don’t know if she did or not. My Mama was kind of, that was right after she and Dad had separated. Mama was evidently pregnant when she separated and didn’t know it. I think she, I don’t know whether she really felt the doctor was to blame but she often thought the kids that she had without a doctor lived. Now we don’t know about the two boys that were born in Missouri, she might have had a doctor there. We don’t know about them. But the Montana children she never had a doctor with, except that last child that died.

KW: But your parents did separate and didn’t stay together after the children got to be what age?

FC: Well, I was 13 and no, 14, no 13, I was 14 when this baby was born but I was 13 when they separated and my younger brother was five when they separated.

KW: Did you ever know why your parents separated?

FC: Well, just due to many things, just many things. They weren’t kind. He wasn’t kind to Mama or understanding. And neither was he to his children. He didn’t have the love for his family that a man should have in order to put up with the burdens you have for being father.

KW: He didn’t run around with other women or that kind of thing?

FC: No, no, he never did that and he wasn’t a drinking man. He was just ornery.

KW: Had she been unhappy in her marriage for a long time?

FC: I think so. She never complained much about it. She used to talk to Juanita because Juanita was the oldest child. Juanita really settled her pretty strong, more so that my sister older than I am or myself. But he just wasn’t kind and understanding and it was just things that grew and kept growing and she, I suppose, felt that her children were getting big enough, she had grown children that were married at that time, and they finally separated.

KW: Was that a scandal in that neighborhood? Was it really uncommon?

FC: Oh, I don’t know whether it was a scandal or not but I remember one neighbor said she sure felt sorry for Jack, that was my father, and it made us all kind of mad. We heard that on the telephone. At that time we had a rural telephone with a lot of people on it and we kids, I don’t remember Mom and Dad ever did, but we kids used to rubber and listen to our neighbors, that was a dirty deal but we did. But everybody else did the same thing.

KW: Do you think that people blamed your mother for the fact that marriage didn’t make it?

FC: I doubt it, I doubt it very much if they did because my mother was very well liked and Dad
was very apt to blow up and say things if people were around if he felt that way.

KW: So it was, perhaps, just this one women who had those feelings, it wasn’t general?

FC: He wasn’t a man to run around with other women, and not that, I don’t think that kind of things went on and they didn’t have divorces then either and they just separated and when they found that they could carry on their business without each other and they didn’t have to have signers and so forth, and at that time they didn’t have to, well, they just got along just like they were. They never tried to get a divorce.

KW: And your mother was able to handle her own financial matters without your father’s—

FC: Yes and Dad never signed them or anything and Mama had her bank account and had her ranch and sold her ranch, had a sale and sold all the stuff on the ranch and moved to town.

KW: She moved to Livingston?

FC: Yes, she moved into Livingston.

KW: And that was right after they separated then?

FC: Well, no she run the ranch. I had two brothers that lived with Mama on the ranch, my oldest brother, next to the oldest brother, Floyd, he stayed with Mama a year or such a matter and then he kind of wanted, he wasn’t married and he didn’t want to settle down, and so the next brother took over, his name was Ralph. And Ralph never married for, well, he didn’t marry until 1914 they were married and they, he run the ranch. Ralph run the ranch for a long time.

KW: Who handled the financial matters at that time? Did your mother do it?

FC: Mama and Ralph together. They talked things over. They got along beautifully, and they talked things over and decided on things. Ralph milked cows and Mama made butter, and they sold it. But I never heard my mother or Ralph have an angry word with each other, they never did. They got a long just beautifully.

KW: When your parents were together who made the decisions about things?

FC: Oh, my dad. My dad made the decisions.

KW: Did he go against your mother’s will on a lot of things or not consult her when she felt he should?

FC: Well, Mama just didn’t say anything. She just kept still. She just didn’t say anything. I don’t know what her will was, but he was the one that run matters, yes. That was one thing that
made it hard for Mama to make this separation was she had never, never run things. But she
and Floyd got along fine, too. But Floyd just got dissatisfied and he kind of wanted to be out on
his own.

KW: So you think that your mother, I guess what I’m trying to get at is did your mother
experience a lot more controlling interest in the ranch and in her own affairs after the
separation? Was she a lot more involved in making decisions about the ranch and—

FC: Yes, she signed notes and she did that sort of thing that—

KW: Do you think that she enjoyed that kind of decision making freedom and power?

FC: Yes I think she did. I think that as long as Ralph wasn’t married I think they got along fine
because they always lived together until Ralph was married and then Mama...Mama had two
places, you see, she had this desert claim, and then she had her homestead that she went to
and lived on in order to hold it. She lived there on the homestead until Ralph was married.

KW: Now, she lived there on the desert claim with Ralph?

FC: No, not on the desert claim—

KW: She lived by herself?

FC: —on the homestead. On Mama’s homestead. You see, Mama moved up there in order to
prove up on that place and Ralph liked that place the better of the two so they always lived
there until Ralph was married. Well, then she gave Ralph that ranch if he would pay 1,000
dollars off her mortgage on the desert claim. She had a mortgage of 1,000 dollars she put on
there when Dad was alive. Dad always wanted to mortgage property. Mama didn’t, but he did.
They lived a little better for a while but it was gone. They didn’t invest it or anything like that,
they just had a little better living. Ralph paid the mortgage off on the desert claim and Mama
went back down there and stayed. My brother Robert stayed with her a year or such a matter,
and then the First World War was coming on and he went to war. Mama didn’t have anybody
else then to run it so she said she was going to sell it and she did. She sold it and moved into
town and she bought three houses here in Livingston. One to live in and two to rent.

KW: So she did end up investing some of her money at one point.

FC: Yes, yes she did but then I imagine, I imagine Ralph advised her because they were always,
always very close and I imagine that Ralph, and then the wife that he married is just like a sister.
She’s just quite lovely and she was always, you know, just one of the family.

KW: How about you during this period? You were 13 when your parents separated?
FC: Yes, yes.

KW: You lived at home all this time so you lived with Ralph and your mother all this time?

FC: Yes, yes.

KW: Who else was around?

FC: My brother Robert was home until he got old enough to work out, and then my brother Cecil was there, in fact he was a kid at home still when I was married in 1916.

KW: And Georgie?

FC: No, well, Georgie was home, she came home between schools and weekends and things like that but Georgie taught school and she started teaching school when she was—

KW: Georgie was older that you, wasn’t she?

FC: Oh, yes, she was four years older.

KW: I had that mixed up, I thought she was younger.

FC: No, I was, I was the one that was just eight years older than Cecil. No, she was four years older than I and Juanita’s seven years older.

KW: How far did you go in school?

FC: Oh, I went through the 9th grade.

KW: Did you change schools quite often while you were—

FC: No, no I went to the Cowan School, it was called the Cowan School.

KW: It sounds like you did a lot of moving around but it really wasn’t this great distance that you were moving.

FC: No, no we didn’t. We just, we lived right in the same district. But my mother did have a desert claim and a homestead and she moved up to there and then she moved back to the desert but they were only a little over a mile apart.

KW: Yes, so you went to the same home and then, same school and you became a school teacher?
FC: Yes, yes after, after, I had to study to beat the band which I did, in order to take teacher’s examinations and then that fall after I quit school, it must have been the spring that I was 18 that I quit school because I went to teaching that fall.

KW: Did you have any desires as a young girl to be, of being a school teacher? Do you remember what you wanted to do with your life?

FC: No, my desire was to, I wanted to play, I always played the piano. I had had lessons and I played a lot and I wanted to play, at that time they had just a piano for music in a moving picture show and I wanted to play in a moving picture show. That was my desire. But I’d be coming home at about 11:00 when the show was over, and I of course lived here in Livingston, we didn’t have a car, and my mother said, “No, you are not going to be walking home alone at that time of night!” Now, that, we even had that fear that many years ago.

KW: That something would have happened to you.

FC: Yes, that something might happen to me. But that’s what I wanted to do. But so I taught school because my mother thought that was what I should do.

KW: Your mother thought that you should teach school?

FC: Yes, well, that was a way of making a living and as long as I could pass the examination I’d have a certificate and I did.

KW: Was school teaching, pretty much then, one of the only choices that young women in your generation had to make their own living?

FC: No, you could wait tables and there were different things you could do but our mother felt that teaching school was elevating and she wanted her kids, her girls, to teach school, which we shouldn’t, we didn’t have the education, but we did. I taught the eighth grade three year. I taught four years, three years I had the eighth grade and they all passed, not, didn’t any of them fail. I worked hard with my kids because I knew I didn’t have the education that I should have.

KW: So you worked harder.

FC: I think I really tried harder than I would have had I had a better education. But I was bound that those children weren’t going to fail.

KW: What did your friends do, other girlfriends that you had?

FC: Some of them were school teachers. We had had school teachers in the neighborhood and that seemed to be mostly what the girls would, as I think of the girls that I ran around with,
most of them were school teachers.

KW: You didn’t know anyone who went to the big city to get a better job or to do something other than be a career, have a career as a school teacher.

FC: I don’t think so. I don’t. Not in my childhood. No, I don’t think I know of anybody that did that.

KW: I know from talking from both you and Juanita yesterday that you had quite an active social life as a teenager.

FC: Quite a nice what?

KW: You had a nice active social life?

FC: Yes, yes dances. We went to lots of dances but they had decent dances, they had. We never drank, either one of us, not any of the three of us ever drank or anything of that kind. And there might be somebody at the dance drinking but we, I wasn’t even supposed to dance with anybody that drank and I don’t think my sisters did either but I know I wasn’t supposed to and I couldn’t tell if they were drinking or not.

KW: You were naive enough that you wouldn’t even have known?

FC: No, I didn’t, I really didn’t know much about it.

KW: If there was drinking going on with the dancing, where did it take place?

FC: Outdoors.

KW: Outdoors, outback?

FC: Yes, yes, yes. It was, we never had a dance hall, as far as I know they didn’t go to a saloon but there was, they’d have a bottle and they’d go outside and have a drink.

KW: Was that only the men, strictly?

FC: Yes, I, just one or two dances that I remember where the women went out and drank. But I remember one dance when I was young that they did. They went, they went, but they were bad women, they weren’t our type at all. We were all country girls and our friends were all country girls, too. Anyway, the city girls didn’t do it either.

KW: Where were these bad women from?
FC: They came out of Livingston.

KW: They did?

FC: Yes.

KW: Were they girls that you knew?

FC: No, I didn’t know them at all, I just, I just knew they were supposed to be bad women. But I didn’t know them.

KW: What did bad women mean in those days?

FC: Well, immoral, immoral, they came from a sporting house.

KW: They were prostitutes?

FC: That was what we called bad women. Now there were a very few in my youthful days, very few girls had to get married but there were one or two or three but they kept it away from me. I was around 15 before they’d even tell me anything about it.

KW: You mean your mother?

FC: Yes, my mother and see, my sisters were older and they talked things over but they didn’t let me know about it [laughs].

KW: Did any of your girlfriends have to get married?

FC: No, no, none of them.

KW: Did your mother tell you about sex and prepare you for—

FC: No, not one thing. I never had anything told to me before I was married or afterward we just went into it blind that’s all. We didn’t either one of us really have any advice to amount to anything.

KW: Did you talk things over with your sisters, then, after you were married?

FC: My sister Georgie did talk to me some about how to keep from having children but I never had but one child and I practices, I didn’t practice, oh, what do I want to say?

KW: Birth control?
Birth control, hardly any.

Because you wanted to have more children?

Well, I wanted more children, yes. But then when I was operated on in when I was 39 and they said that I had been torn in childbirth and that evidently had prevented me from having children because I never had anymore. I just had this one child, my daughter.

Did you have miscarriages later?

No, no, never got pregnant, no, just couldn’t.

What did Georgie tell you about birth control? Do you remember?

Well, I can’t just remember but I, it seems to me that, I think we used suppositories, I think that’s what we used when we were first married and—

You mean condoms?

Well, maybe so, yes, that’s what they are. That’s what they are. Suppositories are for your rectum [laughs]. Yes, that’s it. But I used them a very short time.

Could you buy those at drug stores in town?

Yes, yes, we did, we bought them at drug stores.

Did you have to send Mark in for them?

Yes. I never bought them, ever in my life. I don’t think I ever bought them ever in my life, I don’t think I ever did. But Mark, Mark bought them. And I only used them a few years and then after that I just didn’t have any youngsters.

Now, when you and Mark, well tell me about your courtship with Mark? We’ve gotten into your marriage before we discussed your, how you met him and all those things.

Before birth control.

You were teaching—

Well, yes, yes, no. I first met Mark when I was, I went to Clyde Park for school and after I finished the grades I went to Clyde Park School. I went up there a couple of years and I was, I was home. It was Christmas—New Year’s time—over the holidays. I always went home. Mark
came up—he was staying with his uncle, Andy Cowan. Ray Cowan was a boy that I’d grown up with. I’d played with him for years. They came up to watch the New Year in, and Mark came with him and that’s the first time that I ever saw him. We watched the New Year’s in. That’s the first time. I didn’t go with him for quite a while. It must have been close to a year before I ever went with him. Oh, we just happened to...He didn’t have a girl and I didn’t have a boyfriend, and we just started going together.

KW: You were sort of through together in social activities?

FC: Yes, we were together a lot and knew each other real well and because we were living in the same community and went to the same dances and our place, when I was a girl, that’s after my dad was gone, was just kind of a place where all the young people hung out and Mark, of course, came along with these other boys. See, I had brothers and we all ran around together. And then my brother Ralph, until he was married, he took me to dances and things like that. He was awful good to me. He was just, just tops.

KW: And you kids played at dances too, played music at dances, isn’t that right?

FC: Well, now that was after I was married, I don’t think I played, but after I was married we had what we called a social center and we met once a month but that was at Meyersburg and we moved up and that’s about the time we bought our ranch and a little before.

KW: Now, who was involved with that social club? Was that married people?

FC: Yes, mostly, well, married people and their families, we all went and we took lunch, either sandwiches or cake and we made coffee—it was at the schoolhouse—and we made it, and we had a teacherage connected with the schoolhouse and we made the coffee there and we took cake and sandwiches and we had lunch at noon. We had country dances, that’s all, and we had them once a month.

KW: What kind of dancing did you do?

FC: Oh, we danced square dances some but nothing like they do now, they do lots of square dancing now.

KW: Fancy square dancing.

FC: Yes and well, we had maybe two or three a night, square dances, but we didn’t have—

KW: Did you waltz and schottische?

FC: Yes, well maybe some but not a great deal. I think before I was married I used to dance those dances. Mark never would dance them, but I used to dance them with other people and I
liked them. I loved them. I loved to dance. All of us did. Our mother never wanted us to dance, but we all danced.

KW: Now, your mother never wanted you to dance?

FC: Oh, no, no she didn’t. She was, she thought it was sinful to dance.

KW: She did?

FC: Yes.

KW: But you went to a lot of dances—

FC: Oh, we went to lots of dances.

KW: How did you manage to get around her like that?

FC: Well, Juanita broke the ice. She was the oldest girl. The boys just went because you don’t have control of boys after they’re very old and so they just went to the dances but the first dance Juanita went to Mama and a cousin of ours—she was a minister’s wife—worked all day to get a dress for Juanita to wear to the dance. Mama kept saying, “Well, remember, daughter, I haven’t given my consent yet for you to go.” Here she was working to beat the band on this dress. So she went but she had to give her word that she wouldn’t dance. She’d go to the dance but she wouldn’t dance. So she went. She went to the dance with her new dress on, but she never danced at all. When she came home, she says, “I’ll never go again if I can’t dance!” Because the boys all wanted her to dance and she couldn’t. So, after that she started dancing. Well, then when Georgie came along, why, Georgie started going to the dances. But neither my mother or father wanted us to dance, oh, no. But we were all full of music and we loved that dancing sort of expresses that music that’s in you. Anyway, we did it whether our mother or not. But that’s just the same thing as the kids doing things now, they do things their parents don’t want them to do and we did too.

KW: Did your parents get angry with you? Did you have fights and disagreements about it?

FC: No, no, not really. I never did anyway and I don’t think the others ever did. No, Mama never did. Mama never. Dad would get mad and blow up about things, but Mama never did. Mama was an excellent mother. She was a good mother.

KW: Where did you and Mark live after you were married?

FC: Oh, we rented, we rented a ranch. We rented one, two, we rented three ranches, two of them around Clyde Park and the third one was up in the Meyersburg neighborhood, that’s above Wilsall, and then’s where we bought our ranch. The ranch we bought was just across the
road from the ranch we rented.

KW: How long did it take you before you bought your ranch?

FC: We’d been married seven years when we bought the ranch.

KW: Your little girl had been born?

FC: Yes and she was five years old and that’s how I know.

KW: While you were renting this place, were you saving money to buy your own ranch, was that part of your master plan?

FC: We were trying to, we were trying to, yes.

KW: To get your own place?

FC: We were hailed out the year that, well that was the year we bought the ranch, that winter we bought it and there was, it was one of the best ranches on Flathead and Mr. Evans owned that ranch and he wanted to sell it and Mark had offered him 500 dollars for the ranch and take over the mortgage and he couldn’t, Mr. Evans did want to take that small amount of money for it, he wanted some money, and in the wintertime, we were still in bed, he called up early one morning and told Mark he could have it for 500 dollars and that’s what, now that isn’t the price we gave for the ranch but that’s the price we paid Mr. Evans, was 500 dollars and we, and we took over the mortgage. It was a federal land bank mortgage.

KW: So your down payment was 500 dollars essentially.

FC: Yes and that was to Mr. Evans. And then but Mr. Evans had, hadn’t paid his taxes and he hadn’t paid his interest so we had that to make up, the taxes and interest. And we moved onto the ranch then and lived there until we came to Livingston, which was 27 years ago this spring.

KW: In your marriage, did you make decisions about the farm and the ranch was to be managed between each other or did one or the other of you make most of the decisions?

FC: Mark run the ranch. I never run the ranch with him. I run the house. But I never run dollars—

KW: Were you interested in running the management of the ranch?

FC: Oh, yes, I always wanted to talk things over, maybe more so that he did [laughs].

KW: Did he often go ahead and do something without having discussions?
FC: Yes, yes, he always asked.

KW: Did you have conflicts about that?

FC: No, no, we never, I was like my mother. I never, I just never said anything but there were some things that I didn’t want him to do that he did that turned out good and there’s other things that he did that he shouldn’t have. But it’s just life, that’s all. But I never made any, well, we talked things over about the ranch, all right and that kind of things but Mark run the ranch but I run the house, Mark never has run the house, I've always done that.

KW: Did you handle all the financial matters having to do with the household?

FC: No, not necessarily.

KW: Did you have, how did you have money to run the household?

[End of Side A]
FC: Yes, I bought my groceries mostly with egg money. But I did use free money some if I’d run out of egg money. But I very often have left things off of my list like nuts and things that were not essential. I can’t remember of ever doing without food but those non-essential things, I very often would just cut them out until next time maybe I’d have more eggs.

KW: So, what you bought for groceries depended on how many eggs you had?

FC: Yes, it did.

KW: How many chickens did you keep?

FC: Oh, I kept around 80, 80 hens. I didn’t have roosters because I bought my chickens but I’d keep around 80 hens.

KW: Where’d you buy your chickens from?

FC: Oh, dear. Right here in Bozeman. I bought them a lot at Legern’s from a hatchery up on, in Bozeman, not Dry Creek but—

KW: But you did buy them from a hatchery?

FC: Yes.

KW: Some people ordered their chickens from Sears these days.

FC: Yes, but usually I got mine from a hatchery. I often got them from that place in Bozeman.

KW: Mark used the milk money to buy equipment for the ranch?

FC: Yes, the most of the cream money would go that way but, oh, there’s lots of things to buy. Oh, I can’t think of things now, but you even have to buy things for your chickens. We had the feed for our chickens but we had to buy mash and all the stuff to make shelves with, I can’t think of the names of anything.

KW: Limestone?

FC: And then he has things to buy for the ranch like that. There’s lots, there’s lots of things that you have to buy. So he needed that and then after we had a car, why, our cream money helped buy our gas too.

KW: How many cows did you have?
FC: Oh, we had, at one time we milked about eight. But often times we’d have five or six. But we always milked cows.

KW: Was it your job to milk the cows?

FC: Yes, I milked the cows when Mark didn’t have a man and he was alone I milked, I learned to milk. I didn’t learn to milk until after I was married. My mother didn’t want me to learn to milk. She says if you learn to milk then you’ll have to milk the cows and she didn’t want me to learn but I did but Mark, after he was alone I felt I should and part of the time he would be alone, he wouldn’t have a man and then I’d go out and milk. And then I got to where, when if they’d stay and eat their supper at the trashing grove, when we trashed, Why, I’d run the cows in there and have the milking all done when they got home and I kind of liked that. I didn’t have to cook supper.

KW: Oh, now you didn’t cook supper if you did that?

FC: Not when there was—

KW: Who cooked?

FC: There wasn’t any if they trashed. If there was trashing at the neighbors not at our house.

KW: Oh, I see, at the neighbors.

FC: Oh, yes, when they trashed at our house I didn’t go out and milk, no.

KW: You cooked when they trashed at your house.

FC: I cooked. I had lots of men to cook for.

KW: Did you cook by yourself or did another woman come in and help you?

FC: Most of the time I had neighbors that helped me but a few years I hired a girl to come help me, two or three or four years in the time we were on the ranch, and then they got to where we didn’t have thrashers, we had combiners and I could cook for the combiners alone, there’d only be four, five of them, there weren’t very many.

KW: What was it like cooking for a crew like that?

FC: Well, it’s quite a job. It takes you a long time to do the dishes. And of course the dishes, you had no dishwasher or anything like that. You did it all. It’s quite a job and then you’ve got to get the next meal started because you’re cooking for around 12 to 20 men.
KW: And what did you cook for them?

FC: Oh, just the sub...I always had meat, of course, and potatoes and a vegetable and I think most of the time a salad, I always had a dessert. I don’t suppose I ever had a meal in my life, that is, not for a crew like that, that I didn’t have desert.

KW: How many gallons of coffee did you make for them?

FC: Oh, people didn’t drink coffee in those days like they do now. I never any, I still don’t, I never anymore think of giving of giving anybody a cup of coffee then I do, Mark don’t drink coffee and I don’t drink coffee.

KW: Did you give them lots of water or lemonade or something like that to drink?

FC: Well, we would have coffee for dinner, always had coffee for dinner, but not, they didn’t have coffee hours and oh, I never even thought of such a thing. And as we’ve gotten older we’ve quit drinking coffee and we just don’t drink it at all.

KW: Did you cook for the thrashers in your own kitchen or did you build, did you have like a summer kitchen that had a bigger stove?

FC: No, we had, right in our own kitchen and our living room was a, it wasn’t this big, but it was a long slim room and I just made the table all big in there and we had a bare floor, hardwood floor, bare, but it was bare, and I cooked for the thrashers there. And we just, it all would happen it our own kitchen, yes.

KW: Do you, you must know what the expression “slaving over a hot oven” means?

FC: Oh, yes.

KW: You women who cooked for thrashers. How hot did it get here in the summer during harvest time?

FC: How hot? Well, I don’t think it would get...it’d get maybe pretty warm, but I can’t remember. Usually, when you have thrashers is maybe in September and October and your weather’s getting cooler then. I can’t remember of suffering any, a great deal from cooking for thrashers.

KW: So you didn’t mind having the wood stove, did you have a wood stove or did you have gas stove or coal?

FC: No, I had a coal stove. Coal and wood, mostly wood. Wood don’t throw off the heat, the
coal does—not nearly so much heat. Oh, yes, I always kind of, I kind of liked to cook for thrashers, but I’d have them three, four days, you know. But always kind of liked the trash time, you had to work hard, yes, but it was always kind of fun. Your crew was mostly neighbors and of course, a lot of them went home, didn’t come back for breakfast, they ate breakfast at home. They’d do their chores and I’d only have a few for breakfast but I’d have a crew for supper and dinner.

KW: Did you do any of the work in the fields?

FC: Yes, many times I, we didn’t used to have a man all the time and yes, I’ve driven the mowing machine, hay raked some, not very much, and I drove the tractor after Mark got a tractor with rubber, I didn’t before, and that was the drill, I used to drill, and I drove a bull rig many years.

KW: And what’s that?

FC: Well, that’s when you stack hay and you bring hay in on the bull rig and I kind of liked that, that was, but it’s kind of hard to do that and then you have to go home and you have to do the cooking too because Juanita wasn’t big enough yet to cook.

KW: Juanita’s your daughter.

FC: Juanita’s my daughter, yes. And so I’d have to take her and go to the house around, sometimes I wouldn’t go, I’d have things ready for dinner and then for supper they’d milk the cows while I had time to get supper.

KW: Did a lot of the women around this part of the state do work in the fields and participate in outdoor ranch work?

FC: Quite a lot of them. They’re all farm women in the neighborhood that I lived and quite a lot of those women worked in the field, yes they did, they worked in the field and came in and cooked just the same as I did.

KW: Did you ever start taking over the, the financial matters in your house, did you ever have your own checking account or anything like that?

FC: No, I never did. We just had the, and still do, we just have the checking account with Mark’s and our name on it and I can write a check if I want to but I write very few checks just once in a great while if I need to write a check for something I can and do. But I write very few checks. Now, here in town, we’ve been here 27 years, I get the rent money. That takes the place of my egg money at the ranch. And the rent, and Mark pays for the groceries and all that kind of stuff but I get the, I get the rent money, and I mostly buy birthday gifts for my kids and my grandkids.

KW: When you moved into town did you buy a couple of houses in town like your mom did?
FC: No, we just bought the, no, we still had our ranch. Oh, I never, I never told you about that. And then after we got, well, in about '65 I believe it was, we sold our ranch up on Flathead and our son-in-law wanted to go down in Big Horn County, he wanted to buy a ranch down there which was a peach of a ranch. It's one of the best ranches I've ever seen but it was around a reservation and they lived down there about five years and my oldest grandson, my grandson Jim and his wife Bonnie and Wendell moved down to this ranch in Big Horn County and they lived there about five years and my little granddaughter Sandy, she went with them, she was only seven years old, and they lived down there about five years but they weren't, well, on the reservation you aren't too happy, that's all and they moved, they moved off the, they sold that ranch and Jim and his wife Bonnie came, bought them a place up the Yellowstone and my son-in-law he worked for a firm for a while but he finally married a girl up on Flathead that had lost her husband and, Pearl Dehnert, and he's married and lives there now. So we don't have any ranch property anymore but we did have up until then. We had a ranch.

KW: You rented it out?

FC: No, we didn't, we sold it when they left, oh no they didn't.

KW: What was this rent money that you had?

FC: What was what?

KW: What was the rent money that you had?

FC: Well, we didn't have any rent, we have an apartment upstairs.

KW: I see, okay.

FC: And I get the money from that. Of course, that's just a little apartment. That isn't a lot of money but it's money enough that keeps me going very nicely, most of the time.

KW: Did you have books and magazines in your home after you were married? What magazine would you have had?

FC: I took Ladies, McCall's magazine for years until I got quite disgusted with them that they had so many sex articles. I get sick and tired of that sex stuff. It's a normal, natural thing and I don't think we ought to make a big deal out of it and that's what has been done and I don't believe in it.

KW: And so then you stopped taking it?

FC: And I quit taking it because I always liked the articles. I never have been much for stories but I liked the articles in McCall's. Well, when they got to having so many sex articles I quit, I
I just got, I just get sick and tired of those things and I don’t take that anymore.

KW: Tell me about, about the flu epidemic. I understand that you had quite a bought of it around here, of the flu in 1918.

FC: Well, when my daughter was 18 the flu was very bad that fall. It was not only that fall it was the next fall but not, but that was the top year, 1918, when it was so very bad. Then the fall of 1919 it was bad too, but the fall of ’18 was the worst. That’s the year our world war was over and that ended, we didn’t take a daily paper at that time but I read the daily when I was there in bed, they kept you in bed till your baby was about ten days old in those days and I read the, I read the daily and every day we were progressing in Europe, which made me very happy because I knew our war was coming to a close. But the flu epidemic was very bad in Park County at that time and they, they took, they closed the schools and they used the Lincoln School building was a new building in Livingston at that time, only two or three years old and they made that over into a nursery and had nurses there taking care of people and they run that as a hospital that fall and I think that’s the only time in my lifetime that I remember that being done. Oh, no, it was very bad then. We lost, in our own neighborhood, we lost as many boys at home with the flu as we lost in the world war. Boys that didn’t go but they died of flu.

KW: Who did most of the caring for people that were sick? Were there enough doctors to go around?

FC: Well, they were just worked to death.

KW: What doctors were there? Was there one doctor, two doctors in this town?

FC: Oh, there were several. There was Dr. (?), and Dr. Green, and Dr. Leard.

KW: And how about the nurses?

FC: Maybe Dr. Safely. Well, I just know what the nurses’ names were, but there were nurses.

KW: Did you remember an Ellen Robinson?

FC: Yes, Ellen Robinson, but she had a private home where she took maternity cases, Mrs. Robinson did and there was another lady had a hospital here in Livingston, I can’t remember her name and she took—

KW: Shiplet? [Shipley?]

FC: What did you say?

KW: Was her name Shiplet? [Shipley?]
FC: No, not Shiplet [Shipley?]. I knew a Mrs. Shiplet [Shipley?] but she wasn’t, she might have been a nurse. I don’t know...she could have been a nurse. I don’t know.

KW: Who did most of the nursing of the sick?

FC: Well, I presume, I never was in the hospital, I didn’t have the flu and I have a, I wasn’t there, but I think it was the nurses and of course the doctors.

KW: The women, I wondering if the women in the community volunteered to nurse people?

FC: Well, if they did I didn’t know of it. Of course, I lived up in Clyde Park at that time.

KW: Now, Juanita did though, didn’t she? Your sister Juanita?

FC: Well, now, Juanita was pregnant at the time of that flu epidemic. I believe it was 1919, yes it must have been, and she gave birth to that child but she had the flu before she gave birth to it and her husband had the flu and I think they all had it, and he crawled up that stairs to get up to her room to see how she was because he wasn’t able to walk and he was scared to death that she had the flu and that she had the flu when she was pregnant but she got over it and but that child died when it was six months old and that’s the child she lost and she always thought that had weakened him so that he didn’t have the strength to go on and live.

KW: Did you participate in the suffrage movement at all?

FC: No, no I didn’t, the voting was done in 1916, you said and of course I didn’t vote on that measure, it was after we had woman suffrage that I voted but I thought I voted when I was 21 but I was 22 when I was married and that was in the spring of 1916.

KW: So that was before?

FC: So that had to, couldn’t have been passed. Maybe it was 1918 when I voted but I know I voted just as soon as I, and I think it was right and I think everybody else thinks it was right now. No reason why women can’t vote.

KW: Did you follow the suffrage campaign in the newspapers and interested in it?

FC: No, not necessarily, no I was a farm woman, a farm woman, as a rule, there are some farm women that go into that sort of thing but I wasn’t one of them. I’m not that type at all.

KW: Was it mostly because you were just too busy taking care of things at home to be interested in politics?
FC: Well, I’m not that type. I’m a follower, I’m not a leader. I’ve always said, I like to work and do things, or used to when I could.

KW: Had you been active in politics or in your church, community affairs at all?

FC: No, not necessarily. We did have a Sunday school in our schoolhouse for maybe two, three, four years, I don’t remember how many and I know I taught a Sunday school class but that’s—

KW: You did keep playing for dances after you were married?

FC: Well, yes, we had these neighborhood dances and I never got any money for it, we didn’t charge but there were three of us women who played the piano and I was one of those three and I took my turn, I’d play about a third of the time. But there was a Mrs. Carroll and a Mrs. Sanders and myself. But it was just a neighborhood affair. We paid the violinist and there we got to where we got a banjo player and we paid him and he came out of the Chadborn, he was my nephew, and he came out of the Chadborn neighborhood and we’d pay him but we women never got any pay. We just enjoyed it.

KW: What was your clothing like?

FC: Oh, now, as far as styles are concerned, we weren’t these extreme stylists but, yes, we wore our dresses short when they had short dresses and long when they had long dresses, I don’t like long dresses, they’re a big nuisance.

KW: Did you like them at that time?

FC: No, I don’t think I did. I wore them and I can remember, I could wear a little split, not very much split but a little. I remember we did that when the dresses were long.

KW: Now, what does that mean?

FC: Well, they were them yet split, split up and most of the time—

KW: Split for the ankle to the knee?

FC: Yes, up like to the knee. Well, they weren’t split near that high when I was a girl they just were split up a little ways.

KW: Did that help you get around better?

FC: Well, you could get around better, yes, you couldn’t walk in those long dresses without you did that. They were kind of close fitting and you couldn’t walk, you couldn’t get around, and I never wore long dresses but a short time, I never liked them. I didn’t like long dresses.
KW: How about hobbled skirts? Did you ever wear the hobbled skirt?

FC: Yes, now that must have been when the splits started, must have been, I hadn’t thought of it but yes, you couldn’t hardly walk in those hobbled skirts. I don’t think mine were, I was mediocre, that’s really what I was, and I imagine they were not split and not hobbled too much.

KW: Did you ever wear pants on the ranch?

FC: When I rode horseback I did. We had divided skirts to begin with when I was, our means of travel was horseback because we didn’t have cars and everybody learned to ride horseback and had a horse but when I was a young person in, before I was married, I had divided skirts of blue corduroy, we wore those all the time but later, and I don’t know what time in life, though I got some pants and that’s what, they were much better for riding horseback in and when you worked out they were better and that’s what I used. And we wore middy blouses, middy blouses and some kind of pants, we didn’t wear men’s pants. I can remember having, it wasn’t overalls but it was something on that order but it had a suspenders and I bought me some of those that I used to ride horseback in and also when I worked outside. I’ve always, I never wore dresses when I worked outside, never.

KW: Did you mind if people saw you dresses like that?

FC: No, no, I never.

KW: Did you get embarrassed or—

FC: No, no, not in my day, no, I don’t think anybody did. We had divided skirts all right to begin with—

KW: I have talked to women who—

FC: But that grew into these other kind of pants and they were the far most practical, they’re more practical now, the kind of clothes they wear, they could ride horseback anytime they wanted to and it wouldn’t make any difference. They are practical.

KW: Makes it easier to get in and out of cars and everything.

FC: Well, it does everything, sure it is. And dresses are just, I still wear dresses but I don’t like pants suits. I have three pants suits in there and I wear a dress. I don’t wear, I don’t like pants suits.

KW: How about a corset?
FC: I never did wear a corset. I’ve worn sort of a garter belt and that kind of stuff but I never did wear what you’d call a corset. They used—

KW: Did your mother—

FC: Yes, my mother wore a corset and my older, both of my older sisters wore corsets, but I never did.

KW: Did your mother want you to wear a corset?

FC: No, the first thing that I had was a garter, it was a, I was getting kind of fat when they first put, they wanted me to wear some kind of a girdle all right and that’s what I wore was something on the order of a girdle but I never did wear a corset.

KW: Why did women wear corsets, do you know?

FC: Well, they wore corsets because they laced. In the days of the corsets they wore them too tight and they, in the back they had those, those laces and they laced them up and then they’d pull those laces, they got them tight and often times I’ve seen them broken and I never wore one but I seen those stays broken and slip a pad in there to keep that broken stay from digging, why they’d make regular sores, they were a terrible thing.

KW: Was it modesty that was the reason for women to wear those?

FC: No, I think it was the desire to not be so fat, same thing you have right now. Try to keep that flesh down and you lace it in here and you push it out of here, you push it out of here, that’s what you do but you, it’s, now I have suspected, I have a hiatal hernia and I have suspected that I’ve had it for years because I used to go to the field I’d put on a middy blouse and pants and went out to work and I just loved it, I was so comfortable and then I’d wear a garter belt or more of a girdle when I came, but that’s just what they wore. But I never wore a corset and I was never comfortable in them.

KW: The role of women had changed quite a bit since you were a young woman, would you agree with that statement?

FC: Yes, I do, I definitely do.

KW: In what ways have you seen things change?

FC: Well, we’re getting so many little pregnant girls in school, that was never heard of at all and rarely ever did anyone, without marriage, become pregnant when I was a girl. In fact, of course, I was among the younger ones in the family and they kind of kept things from me but my
grandson was being born, that was Juanita’s oldest child and they wouldn’t, they did away with
the letters, I didn’t know it, but they didn’t let me see the letters and finally I read one, a letter,
and she’d made a bunch of diapers and I said what’s she making diapers for and then they told
me and that’s the first I ever knew and that was almost time for the child to come. No, they
kept...I was kept in the dark. I was young for my age.

KW: Oh, Juanita. Your sister Juanita.

FC: There was eight years, seven years between us and they just didn’t tell me she was and I
was plenty old enough.

KW: And so you think especially things have changed a lot for women?

FC: Well, I wonder. I don’t know too much about sex relations now but I’m afraid, I think they
even perhaps have changed quite a lot, yes, I feel like they have.

KW: How about in other ways with women having more jobs, do you think that women have
more economic freedom than when you were young, for instance?

FC: Oh, yes much more, much more. I never missed it because I, that was the way of life and I
never, I never fought against things but, oh, yes, there are lots of different, appear to be, much
different.

KW: Do you think that the quality of life has changed for the better of for the worse? What
would you tell to young women 25 or 30 years from now about the way the quality of life has
developed?

FC: I’m not too sure it’s for the better. We have lots more sin, now by sins I’m going by the Ten
Commandments and we certainly have a lot more Ten Commandments broken now. We’ve
always broken our Ten Commandments, I don’t mean that we haven’t, we have, but there’s lot
more of it going on now than there was and as far as the sex life is concerned I don’t know too
much about it. But I sometimes wonder if it isn’t being abused more than it should be, more
than, yes, I think it is.

KW: Florence, thank you very much for this interview. I enjoyed it very much.

FC: Well, I didn’t have much to tell you. I said, I told Mark this morning you were coming and I
said, we never had any house burn down, we never had any family of kids, and we haven’t got,
oh, I haven’t got all that story to tell, I just don’t have it.

KW: Well, yours is still a story that’s going to be, well, that is history at this point. And your
mother’s life too.
FC: We’ve been married 61, 61 years.

KW: I appreciated you telling about your mother’s life.

FC: Yes, well, she was a real pioneer, our mother was. She was a real pioneer.

KW: Yes, she was and that’s, that’s history that’s gone now.

FC: Oh, yes. She died in ’29 so she’s been gone for years and years. I was quite a young woman and it was four years after she died with cancer and she died right down there in that house you were at yesterday where Beth lives. Right there in the living room is where she died. I thought that was nice that they bought that house and we could always go back to it.

[End of Interview]