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Summer 2000
Kathy White: Juanita, you and Florence were telling me earlier about how your father and mother happened to come to Montana, and I thought it was a very interesting story. Can you start with their home in Missouri and what brought them to Montana or how they decided to make this trip and how they did it?

Juanita Officer: Well, I think their circumstances were very scarce or scanty in Missouri, and my dad wanted to see if he couldn’t do better, and he came to this new territory—at that time it was.

KW: Do you know what year that was? 1883?

JO: Eighteen eighty-three. He worked on the railroad.

KW: He helped to build the railroad across the state?

JO: Well, as far as Bozeman.

KW: As far as Bozeman. So he worked on the railroad and then just made enough money to just file a homestead?

JO: That paid his way out on the train.

KW: So then, what did he do after he quit the railroad at Bozeman?

JO: Well, he worked for wages in Bozeman for a while. And then, he and his brother, Dimes Kenny (?), who had come in ’84, they both worked in Bozeman. And then, they decided to file on a homestead. And they came from Bozeman, both from Bozeman, through Bigajup Pass (?).

Florence Cowan: No, we’re not sure. I think Brackett Creek (?) because he came on the flats.

KW: Nevertheless, they decided to file on a homestead. Now where was that?

JO: And that east of Clyde Park on Rock Creek.
KW: On Rock Creek?

JO: Uh, huh.

KW: And your mother was not with your father?

JO: No, no. She had a baby and was expecting another, so she stayed until he could send for her, which he did.

KW: And he sent for her after he filed on a homestead?

JO: Yes.

KW: And how did she get up here then?

JO: She came on the train.

KW: By herself with—

JO: By herself with her two babies.

KW: Did she ever talk about that trip? Was that kind of a scary thing for her to do that?

JO: Well we thought so, because when she arrived she had just had one dollar left in her pocket.

KW: So nothing could have happened to her on the way. She had to have good luck. They then moved to the homestead on Rock Creek. Is that correct?

JO: Well, there was a house built. They had the house built. But my dad and my uncle had a contract to make a ditch at the head of Shields River (?), so they moved up there into a tent with those two babies, and she did the cooking and took care of those two babies until the ditch was made.

KW: And what time of the year was that? Was it summer?

JO: Well, it must have been in the summertime.

FC: June.

JO: It was in June.

KW: And then after they spent that summer working on the ditch?
JO: They moved then to the homestead.

KW: And your mother eventually had how many children?

JO: Nine.

KW: And she lost one?

JO: Yes, the last one at birth. But the eight were raised to maturity and almost old age. They all lived. And we were very hard up. We hardly had enough to eat, but my dad was a wonderful gardener and raised lots of vegetables. And that’s the way we bought our groceries. We sold fresh vegetables and then stored them in a cellar to sell in the wintertime.

KW: What kind of work did you kids do on the homestead?

JO: The kids?

KW: Yes.

JO: We helped with the garden. With all the kids, we raised a wonderful garden with us hoeing and pulling weeds and helping take care of the garden and harvesting it.

KW: Did the boys and girls both work out in the garden?

JO: Oh, yes. Yes, we all worked.

KW: Did you have other chores? Did you do haying and plowing and any of the kind of field work that is associated with a ranch?

JO: Well, the boys did, but we girls didn’t do any of that. We helped plant potatoes, and he raised a big garden of potatoes. And cabbage—set out cabbage plants and then helped to harvest them. He couldn’t have done all of that if he hadn’t had all of the children to help him and Mother. Mother helped in the field too.

KW: Your mother did do field work then?

JO: Oh, yes, she did.

KW: She helped him with the plowing and the harvesting?

JO: No, I don’t think she helped any with plowing, but planting potatoes and harvesting them and things like that she did.
KW: How about taking care of livestock? Did you have livestock?

JO: We didn’t have much. We had some horses. That’s the way we farmed, with teams.

KW: Did you learn how to ride?

JO: Oh, yes. Yes, we all loved to ride horseback.

KW: What was your main sport’s activity as a child? Was it horseback riding or did you do other things?

JO: Yes, that was one of the things. On Sunday a bunch of the neighbors—young people—would get together to ride.

KW: Did you have other games and sports that you played?

JO: Oh, we went dances. We did lots of dancing, I know.

KW: You did do lots of dancing?

JO: Yes.

KW: Did you start doing that at a pretty young age, or did you wait until you were a teenager?

JO: Well, a teenager.

KW: Yes, Florence.

FC: These dances that she’s talking about...My two brothers and herself...my three brothers, they all helped play for.

KW: Oh, you were all musicians, I understand.

FC: All of were, except the one brother. He didn’t learn anything.

KW: But you learned how to play an instrument. I mean, there was lots of music in your home.

JO: Guitar and banjo and organ or piano. I just learned a chord, I didn’t learn to play the piano.

KW: But you learned all those instruments?

JO: Yes.
KW: Did you start learning quite young?

JO: Oh, yes. Yes, we all started just as soon as if we were old enough to finger an instrument.

KW: You played for the dances?

JO: Then we played for dances?

KW: So how did you work that? Did you play some sets and dance some or trade off?

JO: Yes, that’s right. That’s the way we did. Thoreau (?) and Floyd played violin and banjo. They were the main musicians, and then we accompanied them.

KW: It seems like there was a fairly active social life for young people up there.

JO: Yes, there was.

KW: Did you do other things besides dancing with boys?

JO: They had a literary society that my mother and dad and uncle took part in. They put on programs. My mother and dad and uncle all sang. Had good voices, and they sang at these entertainments.

KW: And so you went to those? I’m wondering if you—when you were a teenager—if you dated boys the way girls do now?

JO: Oh, yes.

KW: Go on formal dates, and they boy pick you up. Where would you go for a date?

JO: Dances, mostly. They had spelling bees and what else? Then more dancing.

KW: Mostly dancing?

JO: Yes.

KW: You went to high school?

JO: I went, I quit in my junior year and took the teacher’s examination, and I wasn’t old enough to get a certificate so in my first school I had to teach on a permit. Then I took the second grade examination and passed and then the first...I had a first grade certificate.
KW: So you taught first and second grade?

JO: No.

KW: Oh, I don’t understand. What’s a grade?

JO: The first one, you see, was a permit and then third grade certificate and the second and then first.

KW: Okay. So what grades did you teach?

JO: I taught all the grades in school.

KW: Elementary school?

JO: Yes.

KW: You didn’t teach high school?

JO: Oh, no, no. I taught in the country of course.

KW: Where was that?

JO: Well, my first school was at the head of Shields River (?), and then I taught on Bracketts (?).

KW: Where did you live when you were teaching? Did you live at home?

JO: I lived at home. I would go home when I wasn’t teaching.

KW: Did you ride? How did you get to school every day?

JO: Some of the schools I rode horseback. I taught on Duck Creek in Sweet Grass County my last two terms, and I rode horseback from the ranch.

KW: How far away was it?

JO: Four miles. The first year, of course, I was just married. No, I wasn’t married, and I boarded in the neighborhood—in the Duck Creek neighborhood.

KW: You boarded out the first year you taught?

JO: Yes, the first term. And the next term I was married and taught from home.
KW: You were married—

JO: I was married the last year I taught.

KW: And you continued to teach after you were married. Was that common for women to do that?

JO: No. No, it wasn’t, but it was necessary.

KW: Did they have a hard time getting another teacher?

JO: Well, teachers were scarce in those days. That’s why we could teach, because teachers were scarce. And we couldn’t begin to do that in these days. They objected to married women teaching, because teachers were more plentiful.

KW: Why did they object to married women teaching? Do you know why?

JO: Well, because there were enough teachers—single teachers—for the schools, and they just thought they should be favored, I suppose.

KW: Did they think that the single women deserved more of a chance?

JO: Yes, and I think so too. I think that is right.

KW: You taught the one year. Did you quit teaching because you wanted to or—

JO: Well, because I had a baby.

KW: You did have a baby. Did you quit teaching right after you got pregnant?

JO: No. No, I taught for a while.

KW: While you were pregnant?

JO: Yes.

KW: Was that uncommon at that time?

JO: Yes, I think it was rather. I didn’t have to quit, but I just thought I shouldn’t be teaching. So my sister Georgie (?) came down and finished the school.

KW: There wasn’t any talk about having you quit teaching because you were pregnant though?
JO: No, not that I ever heard of.

KW: Well that’s interesting. I know that in some communities that was a problem for women. And, of course, we know that now up until just recently women who were teaching and pregnant were asked to leave. So it’s interesting how one of those things have changed back and forth over the years. What was your courtship like? Where did you meet your husband? How did you meet your husband?

JO: Well, when I came down to Dog Creek to teach I met him at a dance at Hunter’s Hot Springs.

KW: Did you continue to go to a lot of dances while you were teaching and live an active life?

JO: Yes.

KW: And what was he doing at the time?

JO: He was ranching. He was on a ranch. He and his brother were in partnership, and they raised grain, hay, alfalfa.

KW: How often did you see each other? What was your courtship like? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

JO: Well, I fell in love with him right away. (laughs) I met him in the fall, and we were married the following June.

KW: Did he come to see you at the—

JO: Where I boarded.

KW: —when you were on Dog Creek you boarded. Did he come to call on you?

JO: Oh, yes.

KW: What did a young couple do when they were engaged or courting in that part of the state at that time?

JO: We either took a ride or went to a dance or just sat and visited and talked.

KW: And you went for a buggy ride or a horseback ride?

JO: He had a spring wagon or a buggy. I don’t remember whether we had a buggy.

KW: Florence.
FC: I want to say something in there. The people that Juanita boarded with were very good friends of her husband. She went with two brothers, Wilbur and Lawrence. When Wilbur came they didn’t have much kerosene in the lamps, so he had to go home early, and when Lawrence came the lamp was full.

JO: (laughs) I don’t remember.

FC: You told that yourself, Juanita.

KW: That’s a charming story. They were definitely favoring Lawrence. They were rooting for him. Did you ever have any aspirations when you were a girl to have some kind of a career? Did you have hopes of doing great things?

JO: Oh, yes, many, many.

KW: What were they?

JO: I wanted to be a violinist. I wanted to be a nurse. None of them panned out. In those days, you couldn’t get nurses’ training like you can now, and that’s really what I wanted to do. And I suppose that’s why I was interested in helping childbirth, because I enjoyed that. I liked it, and I wanted to do it.

KW: Had you thought about going to college or going on in school?

JO: Oh, I did when I was a girl, but we had no chance. We were very hard up. A man with eight children, he did well to feed them let alone to give them an education.

KW: Did you feel that it was necessary for you then to marry and settle down?

JO: No. Oh no, I didn’t feel that I...I just fell in love and wanted to get married.

KW: Had you planned that, perhaps, you would have a career as a teacher for quite some time?

JO: I don’t know. I don’t know whether I did, probably I didn’t. I just don’t know.

KW: What was your wedding like?

JO: Oh, we just had a very simple wedding at the parsonage. My brother and Lawrence’s sister stood up with us in a very simple wedding.

KW: Did your parents come?
JO: No. No, my dad was in Canada and my mother was at home. I don’t know, I suppose it didn’t occur to Mama to come to the wedding. Anyway, it wasn’t a wedding. Then we just got in our spring wagon and drove to Hunters and attended a dance there that evening and then went to where I had been boarding—they were good friends of ours—and spent the night. The next day was Sunday—we were married on Saturday—and then we drove home. He started in showing me how to cook. I didn’t know too much about cooking, but I learned. He had big woodpile that he had sawed up, he and his brother, and later he said I used up that whole big woodpile learning how to cook.

KW: So he did teach you how to cook. That’s funny.

JO: Well, not much.

KW: Had your mother not given you the background?

JO: Well, I had just been away teaching, and then I guess, I wasn’t interested in learning to cook much. I really didn’t know very much about cooking.

KW: Florence.

FC: You know, the girls in those days taught summer schools, and they really weren’t home very much. They taught a regular winter school, and they would have to teach a three or four month summer school. And they weren’t home hardly any. I wasn’t, but neither of my sisters were home.

KW: So you were gone from home quite a bit. Were you prepared in other ways for marriage? Had your mother told you about sex, about what was to come?

JO: No, she hadn’t. My mother just, she just said she couldn’t talk about it.

KW: Did she tell you to go to someone else and find out the information, or did she just never say anything?

JO: No, she just didn’t.

KW: What did you do as a young bride? Did you have anybody to talk to?

JO: Well, the lady I boarded with talked to me a little bit.

KW: Before you were married?

JO: No, after.
KW: Afterward? So she waited until afterward, too? Was that too late?

JO: It was just trial and error.

KW: Was the man expected to know how to handle things on the wedding night?

JO: I suppose. I think he was pretty ignorant too when I stop to think about it. He hadn’t had too much experience.

KW: I know you had a fairly large family. You had seven children and you lost one, so you raised six children. Did you ever give any thought to family planning or to birth control? Was that something that you were aware of or concerned about?

JO: Well, I had just one daughter. I don’t know. I probably didn’t teach her too much either.

KW: When you were having your family did you want a large family?

JO: Well, my husband did. He said when we were first married, he says, “We’re going to have six children.” I thought that was overdoing it, but we had seven, but we raised six.

KW: Did you ever practice birth control of any kind?

JO: I tried to. Yes, I did. I tried to.

KW: And how did you do that? Did you have information about controlling family size?

JO: Yes. Oh, yes. Of course, you could read, you know, you could get things to read to control. But we didn’t live up to it very good...very well.

KW: Did you know about people like Margaret Sanger then? Do you know who Margaret Sanger was?

JO: Who?

KW: Margaret Sanger.

JO: Oh yes, yes.

KW: Did you read about her in the newspapers?

JO: I remember reading articles by Margaret Sanger.

KW: Is that where you got some of your information about family planning?
JO: No. I probably did. I probably did some.

KW: Was it in ladies magazines that this kind of information was found?

JO: Yes. Well, I don’t know, it was just in whatever magazines we had. There was a *Comfort* magazine. That’s been long, long ago. It was a cheap magazine. I mean, it wasn’t expensive or we couldn’t have had it. Then the *Youth’s Companion* was another magazine that...I don’t know how long it’s been since that was published either. But that was an excellent magazine for young people.

KW: Were those about the only magazines that you had?

JO: That’s all I know of that came when we were young people.

KW: After you were married did you get other kinds of magazines?

JO: Well, we had some, yes—the *Woman’s Home Companion*. It hasn’t been so many years since that was discontinued.

KW: So, that’s where you read about things. Besides doing a lot of ranch work and work around your home, you had sort of a voluntary career as a midwife. How did that all get started?

JO: Well that’s what I wanted to be was a nurse, and I was interested in it, and we always tried to be good neighbors. We had good neighbors. And any time that I could help out in any way I was always glad to do it, and that was one of the ways. There didn’t seem to be anyone else in the neighborhood that was, and the doctor and I were good friends. And when a pregnant woman would ask who they could get, why he’d say, “Get Mrs. Officer.” So that’s how I started.

KW: Did you go alone or did you always go with him—with the doctor?

JO: Well, I have been there before the doctor got there. My husband would take me any place I wanted to go to help out or the man whose wife was having the baby would come and get me.

KW: Did you deliver any babies yourself?

JO: There were one or two that came, but the doctor got there before I had to tie the cord or do anything like that. I never did have to tie the cord. I could’ve done it had it been necessary, but the doctor got there.

KW: Was there any such thing as prenatal care or for you or for the other women who were having babies? Did you take on the role of pregnant women about taking care of themselves? Did anybody ever tell you about taking care of yourself when you were pregnant?
JO: I don’t remember that I ever had any.

KW: Was there anything in particular that you did for yourself when you pregnant that you remember to keep yourself healthy?

JO: Tried to keep myself clean. No, I was healthy. I’ve always been healthy.

KW: Did you have trouble with any of your pregnancies?

JO: No, they were all natural.

KW: Did you ever help deliver in a very bad situation?

JO: No, I never happened to have anyone that had any serious trouble.

KW: No breech births or anything peculiar?

JO: No breech births.

KW: Nobody in the hospital around that part of the country?

JO: Well, there was in Big Timber. But the women in those days didn’t go to the hospital to have their babies, most of them didn’t. They couldn’t afford to.

KW: In your marriage, you had a ranch. Did you take care of any of the work on that ranch besides the housework?

JO: Oh, yes.

KW: You did do the housework by yourself is that right? Did your husband ever help you in the home?

JO: Oh, yes. He was very good to help.

KW: He helped with the children?

JO: Yes.

KW: In what ways was he helpful?

JO: Well, he would help get them to bed at night if I were busy at something else. He was a very good father. But I helped with the milking. We milked cows, sold cream to the creamery, you
know. And I don’t think anybody ever told me that I should, but I felt that I should help with the milking.

KW: How many cows did you have?

JO: Well, sometimes six or eight.

KW: Did you do field work?

JO: Yes I did.

KW: What kind of fieldwork did you do?

JO: Well, when we were mowing hay I ran mower with a team. I ran the rank, and I ran a binder, and mostly the derrick team (?) when they were stacking.

KW: Now what is that?

JO: Jackson Forks is what you used for loading from the wagon.

KW: Now this is for stacking hay?

JO: For stacking hay. You drove a team that pulled the hay to the top of the stack.

KW: And then it flipped it over?

JO: Yes. And my husband would do the stacking. He was the stacker, and then they had men that brought in the hay in the wagons. I drove the team. Many of time I had my little boy on a blanket on some hay beside the stack while I was driving the team.

KW: Was that sort of dangerous to have that going on?

JO: Well, I watched them. He was right there where...We never had any trouble.

KW: Florence.

FC: I think she should tell the story of Beth getting lost. When Beth was 19 months old she got lost.

JO: Eighteen.

FC: She was working in the hayfield then, and I was cooking for the men.
KW: I was going to ask about that. When you were working in the hayfields who did the cooking for the men?

JO: Well, one summer she came down and took care of Max and Beth. I had the two children then. And the hayfield was quite a ways away from the house. And we all got on the hay wagon and rode to the field, and Beth had seen me leave. And she put the two to bed for their naps—

KW: Florence put the two to bed?

JO: —while she washed the dinner dishes, and Max went to sleep and Beth crawled off the bed and started after me. She knew where I had gone or saw me go. Later on, she came down on the saddle horse, and she says, “I can’t find Beth.” Well, that just stopped the whole hay crew. We all started looking. She was gone four hours, I think, before we found her. She was about a mile and a half from home, lying all curled up. One of the hay men found her.

KW: Was she sound asleep?

JO: Sound asleep. And rattlesnake country, you know, and of course, we were all terrified. And they were just getting ready to rake the water holes to see if she might have fallen into a water hole.

FC: They had two hay crews out.

[End of Side A]
JO: Is that shut off?

KW: No. I wanted to finish up what you were saying about Beth. That the men were about to rake the water holes to find her.

JO: Yes, to see if she might have drowned.

KW: Did you worry a lot about rattlesnakes?

JO: Yes, I did. I was so deathly afraid of snakes of any kind.

KW: What did you do to protect the children from snakes, anything?

JO: They were just warned to be aware.

KW: Did any of them ever get bitten?

JO: No, no.

KW: Did you?

JO: I had medicine for snake bites. Kept it up in the upper part of the cupboard always.

KW: What medicine was that?

JO: Well, I can’t think what it was. What was it they used for rattlesnake bites? I can’t remember, but I went to the doctor when my babies were little and got this.

KW: You got it from the doctor? It wasn’t a home remedy kind of thing?

JO: No, it was a drugstore something. I can’t remember what. But I never needed it.

KW: So you did a lot of the ranch work besides just the housework.

JO: I helped. I tried to help in any way I could.

KW: Who handled the money and made the decisions about what was to be done on the ranch?

JO: Mostly Lawrence. My husband, he handled the bank account whenever we had a bank account.
KW: Did you have any conflicts about that? Did you feel that you didn’t have enough to say from time to time?

JO: Oh, no. My husband was always reasonable and willing when we had anything, but we had a tight schedule.

KW: So you didn’t argue about money.

JO: Oh, maybe we did some.

KW: Did you control the household finances or did he give you an allowance or how did you work out how you spent the money?

JO: Oh, no. We just lived as cheaply as we could, and I tried to manage so that we didn’t waste anything.

KW: So you had your priorities and that was what came first, right?

JO: I don’t think so.

KW: Did you have to take out loans to buy equipment or any of those kinds of things?

JO: Yes. We’d borrow money in the spring to put in the crop, and we’d pay it back in the fall when the crop was harvested or when the sheep...You see, my husband raised hay—lots of hay—and he fed lambs on contract every year. And sometimes it paid well. Mostly, it paid well. But this last time, the bottom fell out of the market, so that the people who had contracted to take the lambs refused to take them.

KW: They didn’t take the lambs at all?

JO: No.

KW: What did you do with all those lambs?

JO: Well, my husband had to ship them himself, and they weren’t anything. We got nothing for all of the hay and all of the work—the whole year’s work. Well, we were just broke then.

KW: How did you manage when you had periods like that, that you were broke? Did you take out a loan?

JO: Yes. Yes, always another mortgage on the place. We had paid off the first mortgage, and then when this happened, why, we had nothing.
KW: How long did you stay on the ranch?

JO: I think I was on the ranch about 36 years. Now, I can’t remember for sure, but I think it was about 36 years that I was on the ranch, and my husband ranched for two or three years before that—he and his brother.

KW: I’m interested in finding out whether or not it was pretty common for women in this part of the state or in the farming communities that you were from. Was it pretty common for those women to work out in the fields and to do field work? I’m asking this because many of the women I’ve either read about or whom I’ve talked to did not do the field work. And in some cases, it was not thought well of if women did that.

JO: Well, I don’t know what people thought about me working. I can’t remember. I think I was about the only one that did go out in the fields and work. But you see, it didn’t hurt me. I had good health and have always had, and I’m still alive, and most of these people I’m talking about are gone. So the work didn’t hurt me.

KW: What kind of clothing did you wear when you were on the ranch? I’m interested in that whole thing.

JO: Well, I wore a dress all the time, except when I was milking I’d slip into a pair of coveralls.

KW: Did you put the coveralls on over your dress?

JO: Yes, usually. Yes, I think I always did.

KW: When you were running the mower and all those kind of things, you wore a dress?

JO: No, I wore coveralls. I raised bum lambs too. The children and I raised bum lambs year. My husband had a small bunch of sheep, and any lambs that had no mother or she had too many lambs we would take them and raise them on a bottle. One year, we had 50 bum lambs. That was quite a job to feed all those lambs.

KW: And it was your responsibility to feed?

JO: Yes. But they were worth saving, and we did. But the children helped with that. They helped feed the lambs.

KW: I bet they liked that.

JO: Well, I don’t think they complained about it.
KW: Were you able to do anything in terms of following the fashions? Did you start shortening your skirts when fashions changed? When did you first raise your hem line up? I want to find out about that whole area of fashion and clothing. Rural women often couldn’t keep up with the fashion in the way that city women did.

JO: We didn’t. I didn’t try to. I just tried to have clean clothes. No, we didn’t try to keep up with the fashions.

KW: You did raise skirts. I see you in a raised skirt, so I know that at some point you did change your mode of dress. For instance, did you wear a corset when you were on the—

JO: Yes, and I still do.

KW: You still do. So you never threw that away?

JO: No. I just felt I needed it. I always wore a combination, and I still do.

KW: When did you start wearing one? Did your mother have you wear it when you were small?

JO: Oh yes, when I was a girl.

FC: You were fat. You wore it tight.

JO: No, I didn’t. I don’t think I—

FC: Oh, yes you did. You broke those staves and have sores on you. Oh yes, you did. I remember.

JO: I don’t remember.

KW: Did your mother want you to wear one when you were young?

JO: Well, it was just the custom. We all did.

KW: And you never did get rid of it. Were you glad when dress styles changed, when women were able to raise their hem lines? Did that help you out on your farm work?

JO: Yes, I liked the skirts just below the knees. That’s the way I’ve always worn them. I don’t like short skirts. I detest the way the young girls wear such short dresses, but just a sensible length I like. And, of course, now I wear pantsuits quite a lot of time, especially when I’m traveling.

KW: When did you wear your first pants?
JO: Well, it hasn’t been many years ago when I first started.

KW: So you didn’t start in the ‘30s?

JO: Of course, I wore coveralls on the ranch, but when I came in the house, I always took them off. I didn’t like them in the house.

KW: Did you find it more comfortable to wear shorter skirts when you were doing your farm work?

JO: Well, I don’t know. I hadn’t thought about it. My husband was in Big Timber. He was taking a survey of some kind over the county. I don’t remember just what it was, something about ranch work or farm work. He was working at the court house on these papers. I had cleaned the upstairs. It was on a Friday, and I cleaned the upstairs on Friday and the downstairs on Saturday. I had been upstairs all morning. When I came down—we burned wood and coal—and I was eating lunch, the fire had almost gone out in the heater. We had a great big heater in the living room, and I had built up a quick fire to warm it up downstairs. It was chilly when I came down. I was sitting there eating a sandwich and reading. I’ve always been a great reader. I never sit and hold my hands, I read. I could hear like somebody breaking twigs in the kitchen. I just came too, and I thought well I’d better see who that is. And I got up and started out and looked through the dining room window, and there was smoke just pouring down to the ground from the chimney—or I thought from the chimney. Well, I thought the house was on fire, and I grabbed the water pail. We had a pump in the house, but we didn’t have running water. There was water in the water pail, and I grabbed that and ran upstairs. There was smoke pouring down over by chimney. No, it wasn’t right by the chimney. It was farther away from the chimney. I just threw that pail and rang Sheldon Sharps (?). That was the general alarm for the telephone. I said, “Officer’s house is on fire. Come quick.” Then I started moving things out of the house as fast as I could. We didn’t have any way to put a fire out.

FC: When did Max come?

JO: What?

FC: When did Max get there?

JO: Well, Max was up fixing a telephone pole at the upper end of the ranch, and he looked back and saw the house burning, and he came tearing back with his team and wagon. It was too late though to do anything, there was no way to fight it at all. So we just moved everything out that we possibly could. There was too much. The fire was too strong upstairs for anybody to get back up there.

KW: Was it a fire in the chimney?
JO: Well, we think that it was...I ran outside and looked up, and there was a hole through the roof close to the chimney. So it was a faulty chimney we figured. The neighbors just came, it seemed like they just got there in no time. But there was nothing they could do but help carry things out and let it burn.

KW: Did you save quite a bit of your belongings?

JO: We saved the downstairs, most of it. My silverware and table linen and dishes were all in a built-in cupboard and none of us thought of saving, getting the things out that; we lost all of that. Even the telephone on the wall, they just jerked that off the wall. Lawrence was right there and some of the men from the court house came out there to the fire. They didn’t know Lawrence was there, you know. He didn’t know it until after he went down on the street and somebody said something about his house on fire. He didn’t know anything about it.

KW: How old were you when you first voted? You were married in 1908, and you were 21 at that time. So it was quite a number of years after you were married—

JO: Before I could vote.

KW: —before you could vote.

JO: Yes. I can’t remember when we had women’s suffrage. I don’t remember the year. Do you?

FC: 1915. It was 1915. No, it was ’16. That’s the year I was married. The first year I voted was ’22.

JO: Well, I didn’t remember.

KW: Did you know about the suffrage campaign and that this was going on in the state of Montana?

JO: Oh, yes.

KW: Do you remember what your opinion or your feelings about this was at the time?

JO: Do you mean being able to vote?

KW: Yes.

JO: Well, of course I was for it. I thought it wasn’t fair at all that we couldn’t vote. I was in favor of Women’s Suffrage.

KW: Was your husband?
JO: Oh, yes.

KW: You didn’t have any conflicts about that?

JO: No.

KW: You retired from ranching after having ranched about 35 years?

JO: Thirty-six years.

KW: When you retired did you completely retire?

JO: No.

KW: Your daughter-in-law said you haven’t retired yet. You moved to Livingston and took a house in town.

JO: Well, no. My husband and I, after we left the ranch, we worked for wages for several years.

KW: Why did you leave the ranch?

JO: Because we went broke.

KW: And what year was that? Do you know?

FC: 1942.

KW: And that was after a series of very hard years?

JO: Yes. And my husband’s health was not good.

KW: He had kidney trouble, is that right?

JO: Well, yes he did.

KW: So where did you work for wages and what did you do?

JO: I was cook for a crew of men on a ranch.

KW: For how long?
JO: About five years. And then we went to Salt Lake. We worked there for awhile, but my husband didn’t like it, so we quit and came back. And I got a job cooking for a banker and his wife. I didn’t know a thing about cooking for that kind of people. You know, I cooked for hay men always.

KW: How did that go?

JO: Well, I told her. I called her up the next day after I got the job. I called and said, “I can’t take that. I don’t know anything about it.”

She said, “You let me worry about that. You just come out.” She tried to get me to stay, even when my husband was leaving she wanted me to stay anyway.

KW: Did your husband work for them too?

JO: No. He and his brother were working in the war plants building—

FC: At Tooele.

JO: —at Tooele. At Toole, Utah.

KW: In Utah.

JO: But they didn’t like. They weren’t in Montana. Then we went down to Wyoming and worked on a ranch, and I did the cooking there. But my husband didn’t like it, and we quit again.

KW: You became homesick?

JO: Yes. Well, he did.

KW: So then you also spent some of your time working, sort of continuing in your practical nursing.

JO: Well, yes we bought a home on Eighth Street. And I had a lady to take care of—an old friend. And I had her for several years, but her mind began to fail, and I couldn’t keep her because she was starting to run away. So then, they put her in a home. Didn’t they, Mary Hunter?

FC: Oh, Mary.

JO: And then I had another elderly lady that I kept for several years. I went to the employment office to get a job, and they told me about a woman that wanted a housekeeper, somebody to stay with her. But she had already called me and wanted me to come, but I didn’t want to go to
Jessie (?). But I took it and stayed with her until they got her to go into a nursing home. That’s what they were trying to get her do, but she wouldn’t go. I just stayed until we finally talked her into doing it, and then she just lived a short time. Then I got another job taking care of another old lady. They were all in one family, really.

KW: And you worked up until just recently then. Is that correct?

JO: Well, it’s been several years since we left...since my husband passed away, and I had to sell the home on Eighth Street.

Daughter-in-law in background: She still cooks and cleans.

JO: What?

Daughter-in-law in background: She’s still hired.

KW: You’re still taking care of yourself and your family?

JO: Now, I’m retired. I don’t do anything anymore.

Daughter-in-law in background: Mother! You don’t do anything.

JO: I bake cookies once in awhile or bread.

KW: That you Mrs. Officer. This has been a nice interview.

[End of Interview]