

Maureen and Mike

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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

**Oral History Number: 221-001**  
**Interviewee: Ann Nelson**  
**Interviewer: Gladys Peterson**  
**Date of Interview: April 10, 1988**  
**Project: Nelson Family Oral History Project**

*Note: Ray Nelson, Ann's husband, is also present and participates in the interview.*

Gladys Peterson: This is an interview with Mrs. Ann Nelson on April 10, 1988. Ann, I've been told that you have lived in Missoula a long time. I'm not sure whether you were born here or not.

Ann Nelson: No, I wasn't born here. I was just a baby when I came here.

GP: Why did you come? Who brought you?

AN: Well, my grandmother was here, so my mother and dad came out here.

GP: Your grandmother was here already?

AN: Yes.

GP: What year did she come? Do you know?

AN: Oh, dear, I don't know. I really don't know.

GP: About when do you know when your grandmother came?

AN: Oh, 1900-some. It must have been 1900 and something.

GP: After the turn of the century?

AN: Yes.

GP: Was she married when she came out here?

AN: I don't believe so.

GP: Where did she come from? What state?

AN: North Carolina.

GP: North Carolina? Did she ever say why she came to Montana?

AN: No, I was just little. Of course, I talked with her a lot, but she just thought she'd come out west. Her husband died and she came out here then.

GP: Oh, I see. Did she have children when she moved out here?

AN: Just my mother.

GP: I see. You mean your mother was born back there too, in North Carolina?

AN: Yes.

GP: Well that's interesting. Well, what did they do when they got here?

AN: Well, they lived right down there across the street. The house is torn down now, of course. So, then my father and mother came out here and I had another brother that's older than me, but he died. First this was for sale, you know....

GP: First of all, were your mother and father married when they came out here?

AN: Oh, yes.

GP: I see. So, your grandfather was not a young man when he died, but your grandmother came out here? Did she come before your mother and dad came?

AN: Yes.

GP: Ok. And did she buy land when she got out here then?

AN: Yes, she owned a place down there. She had five acres. I think it was five.

GP: Was it on what we would call Rattlesnake Drive today?

AN: Yes, Rattlesnake. Yes.

GP: What did she do with the land?

AN: Well, she slipped and fell and hurt her hip, and then that was about - do you remember, Ray, when it was? 19... I saw it on the stone, but I - and then, she died. And then, my mother and father - of course, they bought this land before - this is part of the land they bought ....

GP: Oh, the original land?

AN: Yes.

GP: Getting back to your grandmother, before she slipped and fell what was she doing when she first came out here?

AN: Oh, she just raised a garden and sewed.

GP: I see. And it was right along here. Now, you live at 3715 Rattlesnake.

AN: Yes, it was about the first, second, about the third house down ....

GP: From the corner of Rattlesnake Drive and where Lincolnwood starts here?

AN: Yes.

GP: I see. And then, your father and mother came out while she still had that property?

AN: So they lived there for about a year and then they bought this place. And then, there's fifty acres here.

GP: Fifty acres? So, did you grow up on this property right here?

AN: Yes, I grew up on it.

GP: You've certainly seen a lot of changes in Missoula!

AN: Oh, I should say! There didn't used to be any houses up here, except the rendering plant. That was all that was above here. And nothing above up there except one house. That was ....

Ray Nelson: Ray's place.

AN: Ray's place.

GP: The Ray place, yes. How old were you when you moved here?

AN: You mean, when I moved here?

GP: Yes, from North Carolina.

AN: Oh, I say I was about seven months old.

GP: Oh, you were just a baby! So you spent your whole life here!

AN: Yes, that's right - pretty near!

GP: Well, that's unusual, isn't it? To find somebody who's lived here so long! Did you go to the Rattlesnake School?

AN: Yes, but first I went to the Prescott School - the old Prescott that they tore down - the old Prescott School. And they built a new Prescott, that's there now. I went there until I was in about the fourth grade, and then, they built the new school - Lincoln School. And then I went to the Lincoln School.

GP: So, you never went to the Rattlesnake School?

AN: No, no.

GP: The Rattlesnake School that I am thinking of is up in the Rattlesnake Creek canyon you know.

AN: Oh! Way up there, you mean? No, no, I didn't go up there!

GP: You never went to that one, but you went to the Prescott School. What do you remember about that school? Was it a little school?

AN: It was a one-room school.

GP: A one-room school?

AN: Yes, you know, like the old schools used to be - just one room. And they had I don't know how many students. I think they had about seven students up there. Then, afterwards, I knew some of the girls that went up there - the Poe girls, they went up there.

GP: Oh, the daughters - the Poe daughters?

AN: Yes. And, of course the others, I wasn't too well acquainted with them.

GP: Do you remember the names of any of those who were in school with you at the Prescott School? What families were there?

AN: I don't remember who was at the Prescott School, but can remember who was at the Lincoln School. There was Eva MacGregor and the Clapwick girls....

GP: Oh, yes - Clapwick - I've heard that name a lot.

AN: Yes, they were going to school there. And Cleary's ... they had two boys and they were going to school there.

GP: Were you an only child except for your brother?

AN: I was the only girl. I had three brothers.

GP: Three brothers - I see.

AN: Two of them have died.

GP: Now, they all went to the Prescott School and the Lincoln School too.

AN: Well, I was older than they were. They went to the Lincoln School when they started. They went through there.

GP: Would you happen to remember what time that was when you went to the Prescott [School] and Lincoln School?

AN: Oh, dear!

GP: Just roughly?

AN: I was six years old when I started - between six and seven - my birthday was in October. I can't remember whether I went the first year or not, because they didn't have so many kids, so I guess I did go when I was six.

GP: Would that have been in the teens or the '20's, or when?

AN: It would have been in the teens - well, I don't remember just how old I was then. Anyhow, I was ten years old when I went there.

GP: I see ... to the Lincoln School?

AN: Yes.

GP: Well, do you remember your teachers?

AN: One name was Kellogg and the other was Brunner - B-R-U-N-N-E-R - Brunner. And then, we had a man teacher. I forget what his name was. Those are the only ones I remember.

GP: I suppose they were not modern at time. I mean, you probably had outdoor toilets and no running water.

AN: Oh, yes, they had outdoor toilets. No, we had water pumped from the creek down to the house.

GP: To the schoolhouse?

AN: Yes.

GP: You walked to school every day?

AN: Oh, yes, I walked to school.

GP: That's a pretty good walk, too, from up here?

AN: We lived right down there, you know, where ... and I walked to school and walked home and sometimes we'd meet some wood chopper that had been delivering wood and we would get a ride up this way with him on a wagon (I guess they had).

GP: Do you remember whether you got sick very much when you were in school? Was there a lot of sickness at that time?

AN: No, not very much.

GP: Because they didn't give kids shots for all the contagious diseases.

AN: No, we didn't have shots. I don't think we had any shots going to the Lincoln School.

GP: I'm sure you didn't.

AN: None of them got sick as far as I know of.

GP: You don't remember having the childhood diseases either?

AN: Well, I had the chicken pox and the measles, but that was just something that we all got.

GP: You all got them and you all got over them?

AN: Yes, we all got over them, all right. And that's about what I had.

GP: Are there any memories that stand out in your mind about those school days?

AN: Oh, yes. We used to play ball a lot. We used to like to play ball.

GP: Baseball?

AN: Yes, baseball, and the boys and girls all played together.

GP: That was your "gym," I suppose - your gym period?

AN: Yes. That's about all we did.

GP: Did you have music lessons in the school?

AN: Well, we had Music. We had Music at certain times of day and we'd have about a half hour, sometimes it would go more. We'd sing - a bunch of us.

GP: Did you go to the high-school? Missoula County High-School?

AN: No, I didn't go to high-school. I thought I would stay home and help the folks. They were ...

GP: Well, I'm sure they needed a lot of help, judging from the size of this place!

AN: Yes.

GP: What were they raising then?

AN: Oh, just vegetables of all kinds, and they raised a lot of fruit. They had cherries and apples and apricots, plums and they sold them.

GP: Who did they sell them to? Stores or individuals?

AN: Dad went down to the stores. Sometimes he'd go around and just peddle them - just peddle, you know. They called it "peddling."

GP: Sure! I remember, they called them "peddlers." They'd have their trucks ... sure.

AN: Yes.

GP: I should ask you what their names were - you're parents' names.

AN: My dad's name was Jackson C. Sain and my mother was Heddie V.Sain.

GP: S-A-I-N?

AN: Yes.

GP: And are they still living?

AN: No.



GP: Are there any Sains nearby?

AN: I have one brother that lives down here and that's all I have. Then, I have my daughter, of course.

GP: Sure. Well, it must have been tough work, keeping up all this farm property.

AN: Well, mother raised a lot of tulips down there by the - she had that whole front in tulips. Then we'd go to take them ... we had a greenhouse. Maybe you don't remember the greenhouse.

GP: No, I don't. I'm not that familiar with the Rattlesnake.

AN: And Decoration Day they had the tulips and they put it in the storage in the basement - they had a place to store them, and Decoration Day they'd have the green house and they'd stand out there and sell the tulips. Well, that's about what we had Decoration Day for the people who would come up.

GP: They would come up to buy them?

AN: But, they knew that we always did have them, and they sold them. And then, we went to Butte every Saturday – sometimes twice a week.

GP: With what?

AN: With flowers and vegetables.

GP: That was a good trip too.

AN: Yes, it was.

GP: Did you have a truck or a car?

AN: Yes, we had car. My mother and I went.

GP: Oh, you went? Well, I don't imagine it was a very good road either, was it?

AN: No! I remember the roads. I remember my dad went one time and it wasn't paved or nothing then and it was muddy. It had rained the night before or something like that and he got out to push and I was driving, and he was all muddy, so we got out and went on, and then he stopped at a stream and washed it off.

GP: It must have taken a long time to get there.

AN: Well, let's see. We started out in the morning about 5:00 and we'd get there about 9:00.

GP: What kind of a car was it? Or was it a truck?

AN: We had a GMC truck.

GP: A GMC truck? Even back then they had GMC trucks?

AN: Yes, well, I don't think we went until we got that truck.

GP: Oh, I see. Did he ever use a horse and wagon around the Missoula area?

AN: Oh, yes. He used the horse and wagon around here. That's before he got the truck, you know. He used the horse and wagon to peddle around Missoula.

GP: Now, what actually did you do? Were you picking the apples and the beans and all?

AN: Oh, yes! I'd pick apples and beans and cherries. We had a lot of pie cherries. This whole place was nothing but pie cherry trees and we pulled them up and we built this. And they took them to the cannery there at Stevensville. They had a cannery there.

GP: Oh, you had to go that far with them?

AN: Yes.

GP: You say you had three brothers and they were younger than you, and they all worked on this property, then?

AN: Yes, when they weren't going to school.

GP: Did any of them go to high-school?

AN: Well, the year that my youngest brother - he went to high school. But then, my older brother, he was going to high school but it burned down that year that we was supposed to go. The school burned down.

GP: The old Missoula County High-School?

AN: Yes. And then...so, he went to Ellensburg over there at the brewery and started working in the brewery.

GP: Well, I suppose I should ask you before I forget it. I know one brother stayed here, so one went

to Ellensburg? Did he stay over there, or did they ever come back?

AN: He stayed here, then he came back - you know, back and forth. Then, he got married over there ... and he moved here (I don't know how many years it has been) but he came back and then he built down here on the farm.

GP: But he left Missoula because he had a job in Ellensburg?

AN: Yes. He had a job in the brewery there.

GP: And he spent most of his adult life over there, then?

AN: Yes, after he got out of high-school.

GP: Why did he come back?

AN: Well ...

RN: The brewery closed.

AN: Oh, yes, the brewery closed. I guess that was the reason.

GP: When would that have been? About when?

AN: You mean, when the brewery closed?

GP: Yes, when he came back. Has he been back here a long time?

AN: Oh, they lived downtown for a while. Oh, dear ....

GP: Well, was it as if he retired?

RN: He was back shortly after the war.

GP: I see. So, he's been back a long time?

AN: Yes.

GP: Was he able to get work here when he came back?

AN: No, he didn't work here.

GP: He never did? Do you remember the 1920's?

AN: Somewhat.

GP: Well, I should back up. Do you remember World War I in Missoula?

AN: Oh, no! One? No!

GP: What about the 1920's? What do you remember about them?

AN: Oh, let's see - that's when I went to school.

GP: Maybe I should ask you a different question. In some parts of Montana, it was tough to be raising crops because there was drought, and it was hard to make a living.

AN: Well, one year they had a drought here and it was hard to make a living. The creek almost went dry.

GP: And that was in the '20s? The early '20s?

AN: Yes. But we got by all right, but just did. You know, with no rain, no water, no nothing.

GP: You lost a lot of crops, I suppose?

AN: Well, they were dry crops, but the trees - they lived through it.

GP: They made it?

AN: Yes.

GP: Well, then, let's move into the '30s. Now, how do you remember the '30's? Do you remember the Depression in Missoula?

AN: Well, yes, I remember the Depression. I remember we had to buy sacks of flour, you know, and you could only buy so much of everything. But we managed to get by all right.

GP: Do you know people who were having a tough time during the Depression?

AN: Well, I was home mostly working. I didn't go very much. But some people did. I know some people did.

GP: Do you know of any that had to move away because of the Depression?

AN: No. Too many of them wasn't here but, new houses are being built since they were here. They

managed to get by all right.

GP: Well, what do you remember about Missoula about that time? Did you get into town very often? You said you worked pretty hard, I know.

AN: Yes, I went to town once in a while, and they used to have parades - you know, the 4th of July and that was big parade and they had firecrackers and everything downtown. They don't now, but they did then.

GP: Where did they collect? Where did they meet? Where did they have the firecrackers?

AN: They used to have them around town, just anyplace.

GP: Just anyplace? Oh, you mean the individuals? The city didn't do it? I see.

AN: No, they didn't have any fireworks like they do now.

GP: Well, let's see, then ... it sounds like you were growing up during the Depression years. Is that right?

AN: Yes, that's right.

GP: And how long, then, did you stay on this property? Eventually you got married?

AN: Yes, I got married. This is my second husband.

GP: Yes, I knew it was [?]....

AN: And then I moved back to Iowa.

GP: Was your husband...?

AN: He was a railroader.

GP: I see, and you met him in Missoula?

AN: Yes.

GP: And he is from Iowa?

AN: Yes.

GP: So, he took you back to Iowa?

AN: Yes. I was there about two years and I came back.

GP: You didn't like it there?

AN: Well, I did, but I didn't like the way he did one thing and another.

GP: Oh, I see. So, was Lillian born back there?

AN: No, she was born here and then she was just a baby when we went back there. And then, we came back here, and then he came back and we lived a while and then I left him and got a divorce.

GP: Well, those things happen, don't they? They don't all work out, do they? When that happened, did you move in with your folks and continue what you were doing so much of your life?

AN: Yes, right here.

GP: So Lillian grew up with...?

AN: She grew up here on our place. She grew up here with me.

GP: With her grandparents?

AN: Yes.

GP: So, she probably did the same thing you did, is that right? She worked on the farm?

AN: Yes, she did, but I sent her to school and she took swimming lessons and dancing and you know, things like that when she was little.

GP: What about World War II? What do you remember about World War II in Missoula?

AN: I was going with Ray when World War II broke out and then we went together for about a year and he went to the war then - I mean, he went to California to the war. And, before he was going overseas I went there and got married.

GP: But you met him in Missoula?

AN: Yes.

GP: What was he doing when you met him?

AN: Well, after I met him, he worked for the Forest Service.

GP: Oh, I see. Well, I'll find out more from him about his life, but I'll find out what you remember first, though. Well, you went down there. Did you stay in California, then?

AN: No, we stayed down there and then, after he went overseas then, to India, I came home.

GP: And you've been here ever since?

AN: Yes.

GP: Do you have some memories of World War II that stand out in your mind?

AN: Oh, I know I worked at the Mommart, and I worked at the Missoula Hotel as a waitress. And I worked at the Mommart.

GP: Now, the Mommart - do you mean the Missoula...?

AN: The Missoula ... I guess that's the Missoula Hotel, now. It used to be the Florence.

GP: The Florence Hotel?

AN: Yes. That would be the Mommart, there.

GP: Oh, is that right? Was that a restaurant in there?

AN: Yes, it was a restaurant. They had a [?] rest in there, and then it was a hotel.

GP: Was that during the war that you [worked]?

AN: And then, I worked at the Mommart, that's down in the Missoula Hotel. I'd work there. I'd go there about eight o'clock and I'd work in the morning, then I'd go to the Mommart and I'd work until mid-night and then I'd come home.

GP: One was in the Florence and one was in the Missoula Hotel?

AN: Yes.

GP: Well, you were working hard, weren't you?

AN: I was!

GP: Was your mother taking care of Lillian at the time?

AN: Yes, and she was going to school.

GP: Now, were most of the women going to work at that time the women you knew?

AN: Yes, the women that I knew - some of them did and some of them didn't, you know.

GP: Was it hard to get jobs, or did they want women to work?

AN: During the war, there were jobs, all right. If they wanted them, they could get them. And then, it got so that it ...now, women and children all get jobs. If they can find it, they can get work.

GP: So, you did that for how long? Until your husband came home?

AN: Yes, until he came home and then he started working at the mill. I'll let him tell that. And then, I stayed home and worked here.

GP: Well, you certainly spent a lot of time on this property, haven't you?

AN: Oh, yes, I've picked cherries, picked apples, hoed weeds ...

GP: Did you do a lot of canning?

AN: Yes, we did a lot of canning for fruits and vegetables. We had all the fruits and vegetables we needed.

GP: For the whole family?

AN: Yes.

GP: Did your brother go to the war?

AN: No. Oh, Ted worked over there at the ship yard during the war - that ship yard. He worked over there during the war. Archie must have worked at the mill. He was working at the mill, then.

GP: I see. Out in Bonner?

AN: No, down here at the White Pine.

GP: White Pine. I see. Then, when the war ended, and your husband came home, was it your choice not to work? You wanted to stay home then?

AN: Yes, I stayed home and he went to work and then I found a lot to do around here.



GP: I'll bet you did! I'll bet your parents really needed your help!

AN: Yes, they did. And my parents both died. My mother died in 1950. She had a heart-attack, and then, my father died - I think it was a couple years later, two or three years.

GP: And they had spent all their lives on this property, then, after they arrived in Montana?

AN: Yes.

GP: Well, then, after the war, do you remember any big changes that came along in Missoula?

AN: Yes, they started building ... they started building a lot.

GP: Out here, you mean?

AN: Yes, up the Rattlesnake. They built this all up since the war.

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

GP: You still have just as much land here as you did forty years ago? You haven't sold any of it?

AN: We sold - what was it, twenty-five acres, Ray? We sold twenty-five acres. You know, they were building those townhouses.

GP: The Brookside?

AN: Brookside, yes.

GP: Oh, that was your land, too?

AN: Yes, and Ted used to live right down here and then he sold that, and....

RN: McDonald.

AN: ... McDonald.

GP: Well, do you like it better now out here than you did?

AN: Oh, I like it out here. I like it.

GP: You don't mind the changes that have taken place?

AN: No, I'm the one who has the deed, so ... you can't stop progress.

GP: You can't stop progress.

AN: No, so, they cut some of our land out and made a road. So, I don't care. We have plenty to take care of.

GP: Yes, you still have plenty. Do you have any help at all?

AN: No, no, we decided to do it ourselves or not.

GP: Or not do it?

AN: Yes.

GP: And, what is it that you sell now?

AN: Well, right now we just sell gladiolas to the Bitterroot Market.

GP: You sell the bulbs?

AN: No, I sell the flowers, I plant the flowers every year and then we sell the flowers. Oh, we had some apples to sell when the crops were good, and pears, and one thing and another.

GP: Mostly fruit? Fruit and flowers?

AN: Yes. And then, he rents some of the pasture over here for horses.

GP: Oh, I see. Did you ever have chickens?

AN: Not while we've been up here - since we moved up here, we haven't had chickens. We did down home. I miss the chickens.

GP: Down home, meaning where your grandmother owned the land?

AN: Yes. That's about all. I can think of some things while I'm not thinking about it.

GP: Do you like Missoula the way it is now, with the shopping the way it is? Is it more convenient?

AN: I guess I better say yes. They have it here, so I like it. It's getting to be too big a town for me.

GP: It has changed, hasn't it?

AN: Yes, it has changed and it has grown.

GP: Well, we'll wind this up, then. You've certainly lived here a long time, and I can tell that you have had a happy life on this property. Ann, is there anything else that you would like to add? Any remembrances you have of all these years you've spent on this land?

AN: Oh, my mother and I used to go huckleberrying way up there in the hills. You know where the falls are?

GP: Yes.

AN: We'd go pick huckleberries up there. We'd take the wagon and we'd take the horse and the buggy and we'd go up there and we'd go to Franklin Ranger Station, and then we'd unhitch the horse and take the horse up from there and then, sometimes, we'd stay overnight. We had kind of a tent and we'd stay in there, and the next morning we'd pick ... we'd get a lot of huckleberries, too! I know we used to go on those huckleberry trips. And then, [?] and the kids - I used to walk up there with them a lot of times - up in the hills and we'd come back. We used to enjoy that.

GP: I don't imagine there are many huckleberries up there anymore.

AN: I don't know. We were up there, but we didn't find too many.

GP: They'd probably go pretty fast with all the people who live around here.

AN: That's right.

GP: Well, unless you have something else you'd like to add, I'll just say thank you.

AN: Well, you're welcome.

GP: There's some room left on this tape.

[End of Interview]