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Interviewee: Esther Allen McDonald
Interviewer: Winnifred West
Date of Interview: March 19, 1991
Project: Winnifred West Oral History Collection

Winnifred West: My name is Winnifred West. The date is March 19, 1991 and today I am interviewing Esther Allen McDonald. Esther, can you tell us how old you are?

Esther Allen McDonald: I'll be 85 on August 20.

WW: Where were you born?

EM: In Marco, Indiana, 1906. Came to Montana in 1910.

WW: When you were born, were you born in a hospital or did your mother have a midwife?

EM: I was born in the same cabin that my dad had been born in. There were 11 children in my grandparent's...my dad's family and six of them lived. My dad, when he married, moved into the same cabin that my grandparents had lived in. All of us, there were six of us, were born in the same cabin with a midwife.

WW: You said that there were only six in your father's family that survived. What caused the death of the other babies?

EM: They died in infancy. I think most all of them did. I know my mother lost two children. She lost a girl and boy. But whether they were born dead or just what happened...

WW: How were most of the births back then assisted? Were they with a midwife or did they have a doctor in the area?

EM: They were mostly with a midwife. Sometimes a doctor didn't make it in time and so the midwife delivered.

WW: How far away was the doctor?

EM: We lived just one mile out of Marco, but, after coming to Montana, my mother was a midwife for several children. The doctor was in Fort Benton, which is about seven miles away. He had to get a team and buggy to come out.

WW: Do you remember the doctor's name in Fort Benton?

EM: Dr. Porter.

WW: Who were your parents?

EM: Arthur and Burta Allen.

WW: Where were they from?

EM: They were from Indiana. They all came out. My dad took up a homestead at Fort Benton. He took up the homestead in 1909 and then in 1910 he moved the family out. We were on an immigrant train that brought several families to Montana. There were ten from northern Indiana where we were from. We brought our belongings out; lived in a tent until the house was built.

WW: How were your things transported?

EM: By train and my dad brought out four head of mules. We had two cows and some chickens and a sow. When we got into Chicago, they said that the mules had chewed the chicken crate and when they opened the door about half the chickens flew out the door. (laughs). We got to Fort Benton and they had to assemble the wagon. They hauled all the belongings out to the ranch, about seven miles out. They called it Kelley Flat. We lived in a tent. There were five brothers and myself, six of us, mother and dad, and there were two boys that came from Indiana with us. There were ten of us and we slept in three beds. So you know how crowded it was (laughs) until the house was built.

WW: What time of year did you get to Montana?

EM: In the spring of the year, about in April.

WW: You had all summer then to construct your dwelling.

EM: Yes, got the house built in the summer time.

WW: Did your dad start building your own dwelling first or did he start building shelter for the animals first?

EM: He built the house first.

WW: What was your house like? Can you remember that?

EM: Oh yes, I can remember. It was built into the hill because dad thought, with the north winds and all, that it should be built facing the south, cut into the hill for warmth. The bottom part was all underground and there was a door on the second floor that walked right out onto the ground, onto the hill.

WW: How many rooms did you have in the house?

EM: We had four. Let's see, two bedrooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs.

WW: The boys that came out with you, how long did they stay with your family?

EM: They stayed with the family quite a while. The brothers went out and looked for jobs, but the other boys stayed at home pretty much and helped Dad. He had to farm the hard way with a team and plow where he walked behind the plow. Things were pretty tough because, about the time we got a wheat crop started well, either the grasshoppers or the hail would come along.

WW: Tell me a little about your mother. Did she help with the construction of the home at all?

EM: No, she didn't do that. The men did that. Mother had all she could do just preparing meals for that many in the family.

WW: Did she have a garden?

EM: Yes, they raised a garden. She had a garden and we had chickens. She raised turkeys. I remember raising turkeys. Of course she made the butter and we had eggs in the summer time and she had to preserve those for winter.

WW: How did she preserve the eggs?

EM: They called it water glass. It was just a liquid that they added water to and poured it...put the eggs in a crock and poured this water glass over them. That would keep them. Keep them all for a long time because in the wintertime the chickens wouldn't lay eggs. We managed somehow to have eggs in the wintertime.

WW: What would the eggs be like when you took them out of this liquid?

EM: They looked all right. I can't remember them being discolored or anything, but I often wondered why it would preserve them. It was just that they got away from the air. The water bath must have sealed them. They were fine. Of course, they were pretty pricey. You didn't want to use them...only for cooking and special occasions. You didn't eat too many of them at that time. Dad always cured all of our bacon, hams, and things like that. The neighbors would all come in and they would just have a day of butchering. They did everything. They even made their sausage. They scraped the intestines and stuffed those with sausage. They'd always bring their hogs and things that they had to butcher too. They'd have this one big gathering. The men would do the work, work with the pigs and all, and the women would do the cooking, visiting a lot, or sewing.

WW: When things like this happened, what did the children do?

EM: The children always found something to do. I don't remember. We played outdoors most of the time. We played games and things like that outside because we didn't have that much room inside. Our entertainment was just made up. We never had a phonograph until we got

an Edison that had the cylinders grafted on it. That was the first, with the big horn on the top. That was the first that we had.

We didn't have a telephone for quite a while. We went to the valley in 1910 and I think we didn't have a telephone until about 1914. That was just on the fence, on the top wire of the fence. When they would come to the gate, they'd have built the poles up and put the wire across the top. Then about a year they got it into Fort Benton so we could call Fort Benton. Before that we just had a party line. Everybody would get on the phone.

WW: Everyone was on one line then?

EM: On one line and we had a certain rings. You would have a long and a short or you'd have two longs. Then when there was an emergency, there was a six...five shorts I think it was. Everyone got on then. You always wanted to know...somebody needed help.

WW: What kind of games did you play?

EM: Outside?

WW: Yes.

EM: Well most of them were just running around, drop the handkerchief, farmer in the dell, London Bridge, and all those kind of games that we'd play at school, but we'd all get together. Because I had so many brothers, the boys always had their own games. I was a terribly tomboy I guess because I always had to get into them too.

WW: Well you didn't have much choice.

EM: No (laughs). I didn't have much choice.

WW: Tell me a little about your mother and father's education.

EM: My mother was a school teacher. She taught in Ohio then her folks moved to Indiana. That is where her dad met her...I don't know how much education dad had had. I think just an eighth grade education is all.

WW: How much farther beyond the eighth grade did your mother go?

EM: I am not sure of that. I know she taught school, but I never did hear her say. I have some of the school books that she used and those were some...She taught up to the fifth grade.

WW: Did she teach school after your parents were married?

EM: No. She was pretty busy keeping house. She didn't have time to teach after that. She taught Sunday school and that. We had a little Sunday school out in the valley. We had Sunday school in the tents for a while until we got a home built. One tent belonged to a newly

wed that came to the valley. They had a bigger tent than the rest of us had, so we'd have our Sunday school there.

WW: Was farming your father's only occupation?

EM: Yes, just farming.

WW: Let's talk about you a little bit. Where did you go to school?

EM: I went to school in the valley until I got to the seventh grade. We went to school in the seventh grade, but we had to take our state tests in Fort Benton from the county superintendent. That is two of them: we had to take geography and hygiene. We had to pass those tests before we could go into the eighth grade. Then I went to the eighth grade in Fort Benton and I started high school there. Dad got an apartment and I had to go in and cook for my brothers because they were all in school too. There were three of us in the same class.

WW: When you say, "in the valley" do you mean in the Highwood?

EM: No. That is where we lived, north of Fort Benton. I didn't move to Highwood until I was married.

WW: During the winter months, when you were home with your parents, what did you do in the evenings?

EM: My mother would play the organ. We had one of those little pump organs we'd brought from Indiana. She'd play the organ and everybody would get around the organ and sing. That was our only entertainment. That was all we had. We just never knew anything else. When we got the school house built, we started having school. We'd have our Sunday school and church at the school house. We'd have literary meetings where everybody would be expected to do something. What else did we have? We really used the school house all the time for potlucks.

WW: What year was the school house built?

EM: In 1911. We built our house in 1910 and the school house was built in 1911. One room, as I remember. It wasn't very big, but it that was all they could afford in those days. They didn't have the money to buy lumber for it. Later on, they built another room on as they needed more room.

WW: Did they have a teacherage on the school?

EM: No teacherage. They had to live...at first they didn't have a teacherage. The teachers were usually some of the people that lived there, that had taken up homestead. They taught at the school. At first, before the school house was built, they had to teach in their homes. They taught their own children along with some of the others.

WW: Who instigated the building of the school?

EM: We had a carpenter who come to the valley; there was an architect there. They kind of helped out. The men just all got together and they worked together. They had to haul the lumber from where the team and wagons...everything had to be hauled with a team and wagon. I remember my dad going into town after we got there. He went in after lumber and couldn't understand because the stores were all closed. They said, "Mr. Allen, this is Sunday. Didn't you know this was Sunday?" He had forgotten. I don't know whether they had forgotten a calendar or what, but he forgot what it was. Everything was closed up. He couldn't get what he was after.

WW: How long did it take them to make the trip to Fort Benton?

EM: Seven miles and, with the mules, they didn't go very fast. I think it took us about an hour and a half near as I can remember because we did go to bed at the church then later on. We had a spring wagon then, which is a narrower rimmed wheel with two seats on it. It seems the wheels would go faster with that than they could with the log wagon (laughs). Sitting there on that, we had to sit right down on the planks in the bottom of the wagon. It wasn't very comfortable.

WW: Then it wasn't too difficult to make a trip to Fort Benton and back in one day?

EM: No, they could make it in one day to Fort Benton, but when it came to coming into Great Falls, why it would take them several days to drive into Great Falls. They would have to stay all night.

WW: How often did you go to Great Falls?

EM: We didn't go to Great Falls for a long time. In fact, the train went through at that time: Fort Benton to Great Falls. We would get on the train and go. We didn't take a team and drive that distance because we just didn't do it too much. I think I was 12 or 13 before we even got to go to Great Falls. That was quite a treat. I didn't get to go. The boys would go, but I didn't.

WW: How old were you before you started dating?

EM: I was a freshman in high school, I think. Yes, I was a freshman in high school and I went to the first junior prom. I was 14.

WW: What other things did you do when you dated, besides going to the prom?

EM: We just seemed to have fun. We'd go to dances. We did everything. We skated a lot. They had an ice skating ring in Fort Benton and we'd go skating. I remember that, on Christmas Eve, we'd always go to the Catholic Church for midnight mass. Just a bunch of young folks would get together and do that. We did our own entertaining at home. We played cards. There was always a lot of boys around. My brothers always took care of me. They made sure that I would go with the right boy, the right one.

WW: Did you date very often?

EM: Oh, I dated quite a bit in school.

WW: Can you tell me about teenage pregnancies when you were a teenager?

EM: No. I just never knew anything about it. It just seemed like we'd go out and we'd have fun. I know one time we went out, several couples of us, went to Geraldine to a dance. I was with this fellow and his brother was along and he had a date. I think one of my brothers was along with a date. On the way back from the dance, we had a flat tire. Not only one, but we had two. It was the wee hours of the morning before we got home. I know the folks were worried about us and all, but we were good kids. (laughs) We were lucky to keep warm. No, there wasn't any in those days and that was in '21. 1921—I was a freshman.

WW: Did you ever hear anything about abortions?

EM: No, not in those days. I never heard anything about it. I met Jess about that time, but I just met him and then I went on to school. He went to Spokane to work. It was about six years before we ever married. We had known each other that long.

WW: Where was Jess from?

EM: He was born in Great Falls. He came to Highwood and he worked there for my cousin on the ranch. He worked up there for a while until he took his exams for the rural mail-carrier. He passed that. He was accepted as a carrier in '25. We were married in '26.

WW: How did you meet Jess?

EM: I met him at church at our young person's Christian endeavor. That's where I met him.

WW: What did he do in Spokane?

EM: He worked out there. He went out to Washington to work. I can't remember what he did in Spokane. He went out beyond Spokane and worked in the harvest field part of the time. Part of the time, he told me he rode the rails with a bunch. He'd go from place to place on the rails. He'd ride the box cars. He'd tell about being in camp with a bunch of these hobos. He said, "They were all pretty much nice guys in those days." They'd cook up a big pot of stew and everybody would help themselves. He did a lot of that until he settled down.

WW: What was the reasons for the hobos? Why were they hobos?

EM: They just didn't care whether they worked or not. They didn't look for work even. They just went from place to place, bummed what they could to eat. I guess that was just their lifestyle. They never knew anything different. I don't think they had been raised different.

WW: What prompted Jess to come back to Highwood?

EM: His grandparents lived up on the Highwood creek and he came back there. His mother and father had parted when he was only nine years old. His mother married again and I don't think he got on to well with his step-dad for one thing. So he went up to his grandparents and lived up there. He liked the Highwood. He'd go fishing there. He loved to fish and so that was his lifestyle. My cousin lived out there, so he wanted Jess to come over and work for him. He was in Highwood then when we were married. He'd already gotten past his exams for a carrier.

WW: How long did you go together before you were married?

EM: I knew him for about six years, but we weren't going together all that time. In fact, we weren't even corresponding over part of that time. I went with different ones and he went with different girls. (laughs) It was kind of mutual.

WW: When did you get married?

EM: We married on July 3, 1926. We were married on the third and he said he lost his independence on the fourth.

WW: Where did you get married?

EM: At Fort Benton at my mother and dad's house.

WW: Esther, did you work before you and Jess were married?

EM: I just helped around home. My brother was farming in the Highwood area and I went out and cooked for him: cooked on the cook car for 24 men, when I was only 16. I thought when I went to school that I would take up nursing, but I finished high school and then got married. I did practical nursing around Highwood. Anybody get sick, why they would send for me to come and help them. I did that.

WW: Did they have a doctor in Highwood?

EM: No, there was no doctor.

WW: Did they ever have a doctor in Highwood?

EM: Never did. They, at one time, had a drug store there, but they never had a doctor.

WW: What was Highwood like when you first went to Highwood?

EM: It was quite a town. Jess went to work at the Post Office and Mr. Phillips was the postmaster at that time. Of course, he just figured Jess was a young fellow. He treated him like his own son really. Jess always got along well with him.

WW: After you and Jess were married, did you work then?

EM: No. All I did was kept borders, kept school kids from the time we were married. We were in the hotel in 1940. I had school kids there and I had teachers boarding - board and room - with me. That's what I always did.

WW: When you were in Highwood, how did you spend your summers? What did you do in the summertime?

EM: We were usually working all summer. Part of the time, when the war was going on, Jess would take his vacation; go out and work with my brother in the harvest field. I'd carry mail for him because there were no substitutes there so I'd have to carry the mail too.

WW: What sort of fun activities did you have during the summer?

EM: We didn't have too many. Not too many. We had lots of company by having such a big family. A lot of the family came. Stopped by. Of course, my daughter was born the next year. I was pretty busy then.

WW: What year was she born?

EM: We were married in '26 she was born in '27.

WW: When family and friends dropped by, what did you do?

EM: We bought a piano. It was about the first year we were married. Most of the time, it was someone playing piano and they would all sing. Then, of course, we went into the Depression when there wasn't gas to travel. You didn't have the money to buy gas. The Depression was kind of bad, but we just adjusted to it I think. I think everybody did. No one had any money. So everybody was equal. They were equal.

WW: Do you think the people in the Highwood area...did they feel the Depression like they did in other areas?

EM: I really don't think they did. Not like they would in big towns and things like that because we had a garden too and a cow. We managed somehow. I can remember cooking for boarders and all. You got along with just what you had. We raised chickens. I don't think we felt the Depression like other places.

WW: How many boarders did you usually have?

EM: I usually had three high school kids at that time. In 1940, we moved into the hotel and I had several boarders then, lots of them.

WW: In the hotel, what kind of people boarded there?

EM: The school teachers roomed and boarded. I had a couple of bachelors that lived there. One was a blacksmith and one was a carpenter. He did carpenter work. He boarded and roomed with us. All the teachers...it seemed that's the only place they had to stay. When we had our anniversary, a lot of the teachers came back. They wanted to see us for our anniversary. We had our fiftieth and sixtieth anniversary.

WW: There in Highwood?

EM: In Great Falls.

WW: What did you do in the wintertime during the evening to pass the time?

EM: In Highwood?

WW: Yes.

EM: We played cards a lot, a lot of bridge.

WW: Did the neighbors come in?

EM: Yes. The neighbors would come in and play cards. We had a lot of neighbors.

WW: Did you go to church in Highwood?

EM: Yes I did.

WW: What church?

EM: We had a little Christian church there. That closed and then I went to the community church there: the Methodist Community Church. I helped out. I taught summer school, then bible school, vacation bible school. I helped in that. When we moved to Great Falls, I went to church there. I didn't teach in Great Falls, but I worked in the women's groups.

WW: When did you move to Great Falls?

EM: We moved to Great Falls...let's see...I moved in 1950 and Jess got his transfer a little later than that. He was transferred from Highwood to Great Falls.

WW: Transferred his work?

EM: Yes, the government transferred him to Great Falls. Of course he had a lot longer route in Great Falls, a lot more patrons. He said he should have had that when he was young rather than wait until he was older, but he retired in Great Falls.

WW: What other churches were in Highwood?

12EM: The Catholic Church, that was all. Catholic, Methodist, and our own church for a while. I think that was all the churches we ever had there.

WW: The community church, the pastor there, was this the only church he had or did he have other churches?

EM: Oh no, he had the Highwood Belt Church. He would have church in Highwood and then he'd go to Belt. I think he lived in Belt. I don't think he ever lived in Highwood, but he'd drive over from Belt.

WW: What was his name?

EM: Let's see. The first one that I remember there was Dover, Edward Dover. He was from Lewistown I believe it was. It happened...kind of a coincidence, he and Jess had gone to school in Helena together. That was quite a coincidence.

WW: That's nice. How many pastors did they have there during the time you went to church there?

EM: I can't really recollect. I would say four or five while I was there probably, but they usually kept the same pastor.

WW: Let's talk a little about other activities that women had. Did you ever have quilting bees?

EM: Yes, we did have. We'd have some. In fact, I had made a quilt and they all came to my house and helped quilt it.

WW: How many women would come?

EM: There were usually about four or five. That's about as many as you could have because they would get in one another's way.

WW: What was the frame like? Can you kind of describe it?

EM: It was homemade. A wooden frame that was homemade that you could roll the quilt up on it on either side. The legs as I remember were kind of crossed. They folded up too. That's what we used.

WW: How did the women sit around this frame?

EM: They would sit two on a side. We could sit down and quilt two on a side; at least, that is the way we usually did it.

WW: Was it sort of a seasonal thing? Did you do this year round?

EM: We did a lot in the winter time when it seemed like there wasn't so many things going on. We had to have a winter project so that was it. Crocheting, knitting, and all that kind of work.

WW: Did you make a quilt every winter?

EM: Oh yes, at least one in the winter.

WW: Was this quilt made out of necessity or was it just...?

EM: I think it was just we wanted to make it. I don't think it was made out of necessity. It was just fun to do. They did a lot of it in those days. Some of them we would do...make heavier quilts and tie them with yarn. Just like that. We did quilt those. But this one, the one I was thinking about was hand quilted.

WW: What kind of material did you use in the quilting?

EM: It was all mostly just cotton material. Make the box and then sew them together. For the back, we usually used a sheet and we'd put a batting in between that wasn't too heavy. A regular quilt could pass.

WW: The blocks that you made out of cotton, were these made out of discarded garments? Or was it new material?

EM: It was new material. Most all of it. We did make some out of discarded garments, but they didn't wear as well as the ones that were made out of new material.

WW: Where did you learn to quilt?

EM: I just picked it up. My grandmother did a lot of quilting and my mother did too, as I remember it. It just seemed like, in those days, we were just young and we wanted to learn to do things. That's what we did.

WW: Did you crochet yourself?

EM: Yes, my mother crocheted and that is where I learned that. We've been making lap robes for the nursing home. That's what I've got started there with just odds and ends of yarn. Whatever I have left, why, it goes it into the lap robe.

WW: That's nice.

EM: We give that to them for Christmas time. This friend of mine, she furnishes 450 gifts for nursing homes around here in Missoula.

WW: Every year?

EM: Every year. She starts wrapping packages in the summer time. She has enough room in her home to store them all. We made something like 60 crocheted lap robes last year. Two friends of mine crocheted. We did that.

WW: How many have you done yourself personally?

EM: Gee, I can't count up how many afghans and all I've made because I made for all my grandkids when they graduated from high school. I made for them when they got married and I made little lap robes for all my great grandchildren so I don't know. I'd have to count up. There's a lot of them.

WW: Did you ever learn tatting or anything like that?

EM: No. I never did learn tatting. I think it's beautiful.

WW: What other crafts and that sort of thing did you learn from your mother?

EM: Besides crocheting?

WW: Yes.

EM: My mother was a good cook. I don't think I ever got that from her though. (laughs) I learned to cook all right because I had to cook for a bunch, but my mother was a good cook.

WW: Did your mother sew?

EM: She sewed quite a bit because in those days we didn't have money to buy new material. I remember going to school with my bloomers made out of flour sacks. They had to because they didn't...and they wore, too. We had to wear long black stockings and bloomers. We were lucky if we got a new dress. We didn't have any money to buy anything with.

WW: Did you have a special dress for Sunday?

EM: Oh yes, always had a special Sunday dress.

WW: How old were you before you got a dress that was store bought?

EM: I imagine I was pretty old. Let's see, what would it have been? I had pictures taken of my three brothers and I believe that was about the first boughten dress, store boughten dress. I was about ten then, I think.

WW: How old were you when you learned to sew?

EM: I started sewing in school. I took up home-ec. That's where I started sewing in high school. In seventh grade I think I sewed too.

WW: Did they teach it to you in the seventh grade?

EM: Yes. Fort Benton, seventh grade and eighth grade.

WW: How big was the school in Fort Benton?

EM: It was a pretty good sized school. Fort Benton School was pretty good size. I don't know just how many went.

WW: Do you remember your father and your mother making decisions about your homestead and what have you? Did your father do this basically? Did your mother have any input into this?

EM: I think mother and dad discussed this together. I think that is the way we were brought up. Mother and dad, they were the teachers. We were brought up like that. I went to Fort Benton two weeks ago. They had the 75th anniversary of the church, and I was the only one—the only person that was there in 1916. We'd held church in the courtroom in Fort Benton and they couldn't get over. They were looking round to see who was there at that time. All the others had died. I think there were only a couple girls in Fort Benton. One of them had stroke at Christmas time; she wasn't able to tell them anything about it and the other one, she was sick. She wasn't able to come.

WW: That was quite an honor for you then.

EM: Yes. I told them at Bible study this morning, I said, "You know, they gave me a corsage. I never got so many hugs and kisses from everybody." A lot of people I hadn't seen for years. I said, "I felt like I was queen for a day." (laughs) It was quite an honor.

WW: You have Bible study every morning?

EM: Every week, once a week here.

WW: Are there many people that attend that?

EM: Quite a few. Quite a number. The Catholics, they have church here too. They have church on Sunday and then they have rosary on Monday night. On Sunday afternoon, there is a Methodist minister comes in and preaches for those who can't go out to church. I still drive my car, so I can get out and go. I take a woman with me that's 91 years old. She is just as spry as she can be. Her mind is clear as a bell. It is really remarkable.

WW: When you and Jess were married and you made decisions, did you have a division in your decision making? Did you make decisions for your home yourself, did he make the decisions for the family himself, or did you talk these things together?

EM: We talked things over, and we never argued. That was one thing I always said, I didn't want him to argue in front of the children. If there was any disagreement or anything, we'd

talk it over after the children had gone to bed or gone out. I know the kids said they never heard us quarrel. I said, "Well, that was one rule." I never remembered my dad and mother ever quarreling, and I just couldn't seem...If you have something to say, it is better to say it not in front of the kids. That isn't too good an example for them. We had the two children. The boy was born two and one-half years after Bonnie was. All the kids brought great joy to us. My son died when he was 58 years old. I lost Jess and my son just a year apart with cancer.

WW: What was your son's name?

EM: Jess Junior. He was in Great Falls.

WW: And your daughter's name?

EM: Bonnie Passini (?).

WW: And where does she live? In Great Falls?

EM: Yes. I have four grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

WW: They're all in Great Falls then?

EM: No, one granddaughter and her husband and three of the great grandchildren live in Boise. One of my granddaughters is in Maine. She works for the state of Maine. She's always been interested in history. I told her that I was going to have to give a talk for this 75th anniversary. She said, "Grandma, you can do it!"

I said, "Oh, I wish you were here, Sheila, to help me."

She said, "You can do it, Grandma."

Then I have a grandson in Great Falls. He is really a mighty fine kid. There were four generations of us at the Fort Benton church. When they came to Great Falls this last Sunday, one of the men came up to me and he said, "You know, I remember your dad. That would have been five generations of Allens."

WW: My.

EM: Isn't that something? That's quite a record.

WW: Yes it is.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

WW: Esther, when you were a young girl, was sex discussed at all?

EM: Not in the home at all. I can't remember anytime that that was ever discussed. I can't remember. I think when I would go out with the boys, my mother and dad would always tell me...what was it that they'd say? Just be a good girl or something. Just be a good girl.

WW: Was sex discussed in school?

EM: No. We didn't have it in school. I think it's wonderful that they do have now.

WW: What was your first experience with the menstrual cycle? Did your mother discuss this with you before your period started?

EM: Yes, she did. She discussed it with me, but it was frightening too. I just couldn't picture anything like that because we didn't have the schooling that they have now. They have it all in books and printed up for the young people now. They know more about sex than we did when we were married.

WW: Did it seem to bother your mother to talk to you about this?

EM: I think it did. I think it did. I don't think they were quite as free as they are now.

WW: Why do you think this particular topic was more or less taboo?

EM: I don't know why it was. I just often wondered. When my daughter was growing up, I didn't hesitate about telling her, talking to her about it. She seemed very open about it.

WW: What do you think made the difference between the generations being able to talk about and not being able to talk about it?

EM: I think it made quite a difference. I don't know what would cause it to make a difference. I think it's people that were more educated, I guess. We were more free to talk about it.

WW: Do you know anything about the birth control that people in your mother's and father's generations might have used?

EM: I don't know what they did use. I think they called it the rhythm, but my mother never discussed it with me. I didn't know. When I was married, mother never said too much about it, but my sister-in-law, my oldest brother's wife, was one that sat down and talked to me about it before I was married. Otherwise, I don't know what they used.

WW: What did your sister-in-law tell you?

EM: At that time they were using...what was it? It was grease, I guess, or ointment to use

before you had any sex. A lot cheaper than prescribed. (laughs)

WW: Was this method effective?

EM: Yes, it was.

WW: What size were the families, as an average, when you were growing up?

EM: Most of them were more than four. Four, I think, was about the least number, but most of them had more than that.

WW: What was the largest family that you can remember?

EM: I think 12 is the largest that I remember from that day. I was surprised the other day. One of my friends here, her grand-daughter works out at Community Hospital. She said that she works in the baby department part. She said they delivered nine babies in two hours and one of them was a mother that had had...it was her 11th baby.

WW: That's unusual for today.

EM: It is unusual, but that many in two hours' time. She was kept pretty busy.

WW: When you were having children, what was the average sized family then?

EM: When we moved to Highwood, I think...It seemed to me that two or three was about the average in our time.

WW: Why do you think there was such a decrease in family size?

EM: I just wondered about that too.

WW: Do you think economics had anything to do with it?

EM: That could have been too.

WW: Apparently, birth control must have had something to do with it.

Let's talk about Jess's occupation a little bit. He was the mail carrier for the Highwood area. Did this include the North Bench?

EM: The North Bench, yes.

WW: Did he have any more than that?

EM: That's all he had when he started in, was the North Bench. After Gilbert Jorgenson retired he took the South Bench then.

WW: You mentioned a little bit earlier on the tape that sometimes you took the mail route for him when he was working harvest.

EM: I carried for him for about a week or two weeks. I remember going out. It was nothing but adobe (?) in those days. At that time, we had an old Dodge, and I could only go a little ways and the spokes would fill up with mud. I'd have to get out and dig the mud out of them. Go a little ways. Oh, it was hectic. One day, I broke the gas line. It broke and I didn't have anything to fix it with so I had to tear up my slip and wrap it around the gas line. (laughs) You had to make things do. That was makeshift.

WW: How long, under normal conditions, would it take you to make the route?

EM: Let's see. It was about a 30 mile route. About two hours, I think, is what it took me.

WW: Did you take your kids with you on the route?

EM: Not all the time. Sometimes I did. In the hotel, the kids were at home. Jess' mother was with us. She lived with us. So I left them in charge. I usually had somebody helping me. The oldest Mead girl, Violet Mead, she was a twin. Violet and her brother...What was his name? They were twins. She was in school, so she came and helped me at the hotel. I usually kept school girls to help, especially if I had a bunch to cook for.

WW: What was the reason that Jess was working in the fields during harvest?

EM: Because our checks weren't that big. When we were married, he worked for two weeks, and his check was 97 dollars for two weeks. Jess would go out and work in the harvest field and help with the money. You had to buy a car and keep a car running and buy chains.

In the wintertime, you had to have the horses, horse and buggies. Sometimes he'd take...go horseback. He'd go out halfway and stay all night. Then he'd get another horse, a fresh horse, the next day, or he'd change horses and come back. He did that...I remember, Eleanor was staying with at the time...six weeks' time, he went horseback every day. Like the time he was snow blind, I think twice. It was just terrible. The snow was up over the fence posts; there was no road whatsoever.

One time he tried skiing around it. He thought he might be able to do that and he came home so tired. He did make it around the route, but he didn't make it in one day. (laughs)

WW: Was mail delivered every day?

EM: Every day, five days a week.

WW: The times when he stayed all night, then, would he have...when he come in the second day, would he go out again or wait until...

EM: Oh yes. He'd just bring in the mail that he had, pick up the new mail, and start out.

WW: He had to start out again. So you were...

EM: I was a widow a lot of the time.

WW: A mail route widow?

EM: Yes. A mail route widow. I sure was.

WW: Were there many patrons on the mail route?

EM: I can't remember...there'd be around 50, between 50 and 60. In those days, they'd call in to the store. They'd want something from the store. I remember him telling me that this one girl was a teacher out at Nine Mile. She'd come out to the car, putting her laundry into a pillow slip to send with him to Great Falls to the laundry. (laughs) They said when he retired that he delivered everything but babies.

WW: Did he deliver groceries on the route?

EM: Yes. He delivered groceries. He'd take out kerosene for their lamps before they had any electricity.

WW: Did they phone these things in?

EM: Yes, they'd phone them to the stores.

WW: What did Jess do then? Would he check with the store to see if there was anything to be delivered?

EM: Yes, they'd have to pay postage on it of course.

WW: That's interesting. You said there was what...50 or 60 patrons on the route? Was this enough to keep the mail route going?

EM: Yes it was. They'd have the inspector come out. He'd be out there once a year and they'd have to make the count. Jess'd say, "Maybe it won't make it. Maybe this year they'll close the post office." But every year it seemed to make up. People didn't go south in those days. They stayed on the ranch all winter. Nowadays, they go south every winter, but in those days they didn't. They were there all the time, year-round.

WW: When it came time for the mail count, and they feared that maybe there wouldn't be enough to keep the route going, how would they handle this?

EM: A lot of the patrons would get a lot of postcards, and they'd send those to their friends to make sure that they were in the count. That's the way they'd do.

WW: How were they notified that the count was coming up?

EM: They had a certain time each year that the count was due, so they had to get it in. Jess would always tell them. They knew about when it was coming and they'd start in with their writing letters or cards to make sure that they didn't lose their mail route. I think since then they have consolidated to two routes so one carries both the north and the south routes out the highway now, up the creek...They surely have more. I don't know if they have anymore or not because the ranches have sold out or they've combined even on the upper highway there. There's not that many up there now.

WW: You suppose they do the same thing now?

EM: I don't know. They'd have to count, I suppose, now to keep it going.

WW: Where did your children go to school?

EM: They graduated from Highwood. Then Bonnie went to Spokane to Kinman and took a business course. Junior went to college. Then he decided he didn't want to go to college, so he went into Denver. He worked in Denver for a while; came back and worked at White's Refrigeration until he was called into the service. When he came back from the service, why, he had a job at White's. They let him work there. He never went on to college, just had a year of college. He seemed to enjoy it. He was in the service and then he was in the Reserves for a while too.

WW: When you lived in Highwood, did you have dust storms down there?

EM: Yes, we had quite a few really bad. You dust the house and then the next...after one of those storms, it'd just be yea thick. I could go about it again. I remember I was so happy when the first vacuum...after we got electricity there, the first vacuum they got I thought, "Oh boy that's great to pick up all that dust with the vacuum." It really helped a lot. We didn't have any electricity in Highwood until 1939 I think was when we had the first electricity there. We were happy that we had a way of getting all the dust picked up.

WW: Tell me about the dust storms when they came. What did they look like?

EM: Everything was moving, the weeds and everything. It was just terrible. I know Jess was telling about how one day he was going out on the route and he couldn't see to drive hardly at all. It was just terrible. He said the dust even got inside the car it was so bad. It was frightening.

WW: How long did they last?

EM: The worst ones we had would last about a day and maybe part of a night, but that was too long really.

WW: Did you have any battles with insects?

EM: I think the crickets was about the worst. We were in Highwood the time they came in. The men went out, dug trenches, and put oil in the trenches to keep them from jumping over; but they came into Highwood. I remember the post office was in Mr. Phelps' store. Those crickets didn't stop for anything. They just came to a building and up the side of the building they'd go. They never stopped for anything, just kept going.

WW: Nothing got in the way then?

EM: Nothing got in the way. They just cleaned up everything that was in front of them. It was just so interesting to see how they would go over the buildings. They covered the roads that the cars would just be slick from them. Just like ice almost.

WW: What did they eat? Did they eat anything other than vegetation?

EM: As far as I know, they just cleaned the fields, everything that was standing. After they'd go over it, it was just like a mower had gone on and cut it down. They ate what they could and they were on the go. They headed as far as they could go. I remember the men, they'd haul oil up—it was usually used oil like transmission or engine oil—they'd use that as much as they could, but they'd have to dig trenches and pour that oil into it. Then when the crickets got into that, they couldn't go then. The oil just froze them up. They couldn't move.

WW: How did they dig the ditches?

EM: I don't remember how the men did do that. I think they had machines to dig them.

WW: They did? What year did that happen?

EM: Let's see, I have to think back...We moved to Highwood in '26...must have been around the Depression time. It was in the '30s that they were so bad. Then we had them again later on. I think that was in the '40s, before we moved to Great Falls.

That and hail storms. I think those were two of the worst things that could happen.

WW: Why was hail so bad?

EM: Why did it hail?

WW: Why was it so bad?

EM: It just cleaned the whole country, the crops and everything. I know we had broken windows for us and the house would be flooded with water. It was just really a mess. I can remember spending several...going through several hail storms in Highwood when I lived there.

WW: Did they happen often?

EM: Not too often to my memory. I remember two real bad ones is all. That is that did any damage to the house. It broke the windows and all. That was the worst.

WW: What about grasshoppers?

EM: The grasshoppers were pretty bad too. They'd get so that the road would just be covered with them. You'd drive down the road and it'd just be covered with them, hopping all over the place. They were the same as the crickets. They could mow down a field in no time.

WW: Did the grasshoppers eat anything besides vegetation?

EM: No, not to my knowledge. I don't think they did. They were after the wheat.

WW: Let's talk about the Mormon crickets a little bit again. When the crickets fell in the oil, what did they do with them?

EM: They shoveled them up into barrels and hauled them off. What they did with them then...? They must have dumped them someplace.

WW: What did the crickets look like?

EM: Haven't you ever seen a cricket?

WW: I've seen crickets, but I just wonder what the Mormon crickets look like.

EM: They're the awfulest looking things. They're about that long and some of them were bigger. About that wide and their eyes are just almost like a frog's eyes standing out there. They're awful looking things.

But they could travel. They could travel almost as fast as a...can't think what. The way they traveled, they traveled a good many miles. Not quite as fast as a grasshopper because they jump so, but pretty long legs on them.

WW: The Mormon crickets, do they fly or do they walk?

EM: They just crawl. They don't stop for anything.

WW: Where did they come from?

EM: I don't know. They seemed to come in just in droves. I don't know whether the ones we got there in Highwood so much where they did come in from...I think came in from the north, came on across there.

WW: How far past Highwood did they get before they were stopped or whatever?

EM: They were in Shonkin too and I don't know if they went across the mountains all the way into the Judith Basin area or not. I think they had them over there too, but they must have run out of oats I guess.

WW: How far is Shonkin from Highwood?

EM: How far is...?

WW: Shonkin from Highwood.

EM: Shonkin? It's about 15 miles, 8, 10, 15 miles. Judith Basin is right...Stanford is right across...Geyser and Stanford is right across the Highwood Mountains. They'd go over that way.

WW: How long did it take the crickets to reach Shonkin from Highwood do you know?

EM: I don't know just how long that would have been. They were pretty busy taking everything in stride.

WW: Why don't we talk about doing laundry a little bit? When you were at home with your parents how was the laundry done?

EM: For a while, we had to do it by hand. Then Mother got one of those machines. It was a crib-like thing like that. Eventually we got an engine that run with a belt, washing machine with a belt. We had to have a washhouse where we'd heat the water on the laundry stove, water, then have to take it over to the machine and dump it in. In those days, we made our own soap, lye soap, made of lye. I remember we always had the...My dad had six work shirts every week and six Sunday shirts, six white shirts. I had to stand and wash and iron.

WW: The engine that you got, how was it powered?

EM: With gasoline I think it was, with gas. I don't know how big an engine it would have been, probably two horse-power. Would it have been two? I know it just put-put-put along all the time. It was something when we could get a washing machine with a gasoline engine built right in it. This was the one that had to be run with a belt.

WW: How did your mother cook for the family?

EM: Mother had to cook, I'll tell you. She'd have to bake bread about every other day because you can imagine that many big boys and my dad. Then there was always somebody dropping in. Some of the bachelors or neighbors would drop in. I know she baked bread about every other day. Be 11 and 12 loaves of bread.

WW: What kind of stove did she have?

EM: Just a regular. I was trying to...the name of our stove was...We didn't get a Monarch. I believe the first stove we had was a Majestic. We didn't have a Monarch until later on. But she had to do all that baking and cooking. It took a lot of cooking.

WW: What kind of fuel did your folks use in this?

EM: We used coal.

WW: Where did the coal come from?

EM: I think a lot of it was hauled from Belt. The Belt mines were running at that time. Some of it Dad would buy in Fort Benton, but it had to be shipped in. After we got so we could travel or have somebody haul it for us, they hauled it from Belt. Most of it was shipped in by train into Fort Benton. The lumberyards handled coal.

WW: Did your father have to haul the coal then from Fort Benton to your place?

EM: Yes, had to haul it out.

WW: How large of quantities did he buy at one time?

EM: He'd usually buy it by the ton. It was about the way it went.

WW: Did you have a storage place at home for it?

EM: Yes, at the end of the house they had the storage shed. I remember that. He had kind of a storage up above and then they had the chute down into a little room into the house where it would come down this chute so we wouldn't have to go outside for it in the wintertime.

WW: What about water? How did you get your water?

EM: We had to haul it from the river up to there; then, we finally put in a cistern. They dug down for a well and the first one was a flop. They never got any well. Finally, he made a reservoir. It had the water from the rain and all. That was all right for the stock. We washed clothes for that too, but we finally got a well dug that we had pretty good drinking water. They'd haul it up to the house to the cistern. Finally, got a little pitcher pump in the house so that we could pump it in.

I don't know how we ever managed. I still wonder about that because of taking baths and all. We'd have to all take our turn at bath day in a bath in the washtub in the kitchen by the stove. (laughs) That was a great experience.

WW: How often did you take a bath?

EM: Once a week. You had to have a bath once a week.

WW: What did you do in between times?

EM: We'd take spit baths most of the time otherwise. I think now how handy it is to get into the tub or under the shower. My poor mother never had a lot of those conveniences. She died when she was just 75, I guess, was when she died. But my dad lived to be almost 94.

WW: That's a long time to live. Look at the changes he'd seen in his lifetime. Could you kind of describe what bath time was like?

EM: I think Mother would give me a bath first. Often times they had to use the same water, so then the boys would get their baths taken. It was something.

WW: How did you heat the water?

EM: Heated it on the stove. I think most of the stoves we had had a tank on it. That would be just boiling hot, so then we'd have to cool it down with cold water. That's the way we'd take our baths.

WW: Did you have to draw water out of the cistern or something and use a bucket in the house?

EM: No, we had the little pump. We used a bucket at first, but then after that we got the pump to bring the water into the cistern. That was all right, but the wash water—we couldn't use it for cooking or anything. It was just used for washing. It was more rain water in that, nice and soft.

Water was pretty precious. Dry land farm, I'll tell you.

WW: Esther, in your 85 years, almost 85 years, you've seen a lot of changes in your lifetime. Maybe we could talk about these for just a minute or two. Tell me a little bit about what it was like before you had electricity and then the changes that electricity brought with it.

EM: We never had electricity until 1939 was when the first electricity that we had. Before that, you had to wash the chimneys from the lamps every morning because it would be sooted up. We had to do that and it was just an entirely different mode of living. We had no running water; had to carry our water most of the time. Even after we were married, we had to carry water from the spring to heat to wash clothes in and for our baths and everything. It was just an entirely new life when we got those things.

I can remember, even in the hotel, we didn't have electricity there and we didn't have water until after we'd been in the hotel awhile. They had to haul water up to the cistern. Then we pumped it up into a tank up above and we'd get water that way. We didn't have any electricity, so we had to cook on a wood stove, coal stove. I had a restaurant stove that had two ovens in it and I'd have to get up at four in the morning to start that fire so that I could cook. I had 15 regular boarders. They had to have breakfast, so I had to get up at four in order to get the stove hot enough to bake biscuits or else fix pancakes on top of it. I was so happy

when I got an electric stove. I couldn't believe that. I could just turn the button and turn it on.

My years in the hotel were kind of tough with not much to do with. Mrs. Berkner (?) had lived in the hotel before and she had done all this work—washing and everything and cooking. When we bought the hotel from them, she had worked so hard doing her own work. I don't think she had help too often. Once in a while, she'd have a woman come in and help her. She was a dear old soul.

WW: Was that Charlie Berkner's wife?

EM: Charlie Berkner's mother. (laughs) She said, "Esther, I just wonder if there'll be slop jars to empty in heaven." (laughs)

The rooms we rented out had those commodes in them. I'd sometimes have a traveling man go through and they'd use those commodes. I had that to empty and the beds to strip. I fell down the backstairs one time carrying all the sheets to wash. We had to wash those and all. Oh dear. Those were the days.

It was nice after electricity came in and the water. We put a shower in downstairs and one upstairs and that was really something. The girls could have their shower.

I had to be a doctor too. One of the teachers took the mumps while she was there so I had to doctor her and take care of her. She missed school.

WW: How old was she?

EM: She was about 20 years old, just a young teacher just come there to teach. A lot of the teachers...one teacher was only 19. She'd just gotten out of high school, and she'd gone to normal school for one or two years. She came there to teach. They were just like my daughters really. They were young enough to be my daughters. Whole new ball game.

WW: When did you first get a radio?

EM: The first radio we got was when the electricity came in. I think we got that in 1939. We got our first radio. We were so tickled with that. That was really something. Bonnie was taking piano lessons in Great Falls and Jess would drive her into Great Falls for lessons. We got the radio and the kids always enjoyed that. She'd play the piano down at the hotel and the kids would dance up and down the hallway and up in the lobby, the high school kids. They'd come down. So many of the kids would come down there.

One of the mothers said to me, "Esther, you don't realize how much we appreciate it, having a place for the young people to go." There wasn't anything in Highwood, only bars. There was no show houses or anything like that, so they come to the hotel and make their own entertainment down there, dancing or playing the piano. Some of them would bring their horns down and play. Jess had put up a train for Junior, and the kids would all come in and run that electric train. We had it in the window of the hotel and they'd run the train around

there. It was something.

WW: How many kids were in high school then?

EM: I think the high school was about 100 enrollment in there at that time.

WW: In just the high school?

EM: They came in from North Bench and the South, Upper Highwood. Some of them stayed there at the hotel and went to school, like your aunt Eleanor came stayed there with us during the week and then she'd go home for the weekend. Lots of times she'd take Bonnie out home with her. Your grandparents just thought the world of Bonnie. She was the cutest little girl. Eleanor would take her home with them and she'd stay there for the weekend.

I had Eleanor and Bernie Irons (?) and Kenneth Hansen. They all stayed with me and went to school. Then I had the Darkos (?), both Lyett and his sister, Velma. Evan Golden from Waltham stayed with us too. I had Billie Carver, she stayed with us. I had Mary Remington. I always kept girls, high school girls, seemed like and boys too. It would help with the grocery bill. (laughs)

WW: What other kind of activities would the kids take part in while they were staying at the hotel during the week?

EM: I was trying to think of all...They made their own entertainment really. Most of the time it was dancing or something like that. I remember Nadine O'Connell—she was Nadine Davison-O'Connell. She came to me one time when the kids were going on sneak. She wanted Patty to ride with Junior in our car. She said to me, "Esther, what do you do with these kids? What do you do with them?"

I said, "Patty, you can't build a fence around kids and say you can't play with this one or you can't play with that one. But you just have to teach them the difference between good and bad and then just pray and hope they turn out all right. That's all you can do."

Nadine of course had had a bad time. She had to get married. She was pregnant with Patty, I guess, and she and Tim got married. She was having a hard time trying to raise children so that's the reason she came to me and asked me. I said, "I don't know, Nadine. You'll just have to teach them. That's all you can do, and then just hope and pray they turn out all right." I was so fortunate. I have two nice kids, and I have a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law that are just super. I couldn't ask for any nicer son-in-law and daughter-in-law.

I think that the kids were used to...They knew that I didn't get angry too much, but they knew that when I set my foot down that their dad was the one that cracked it most of the time. Sometimes he was kind of rough on them. I thought he was kind of rough on them, but I didn't ever say anything. They have to be taught.

WW: I think the old-fashioned morals are the best.

EM: Yes, spare the rod and spoil the child. But Jess's theory wasn't...He was real strict with them, but he was good to them too. They knew that. They knew just how far they could go. They knew there was a limit to what they could do.

WW: Kids know their boundaries.

EM: Nowadays, I think children are so spoiled that parents buy them everything they can think of. They've got toys stacked up that they never will play with a lot of them. I don't know. They don't appreciate what they have I guess. I have some great grandchildren like that, just have gotten too much. Just not good for them.

WW: What change did the automobile make in your life?

EM: It made quite a change. We drove the mules all the time when I was a kid. My dad would say to Mother, "I'm going to go over to so-and-so's place"

Mother'd say, "I'm baking bread. I don't think I'd better go."

"Bring it along." She'd put the bread pan in the back of the wagon and away we'd go. (laughs) She'd bake when she got there. That didn't stop her from going.

But neighbors were something in those days. They just all got together, and they all had a good time talking. The kids grew up together. They seemed to get along. They had a few words, a few differences, but most of them were pretty good.

WW: What year did you get your first automobile?

EM: In 1916. We got a Studebaker, the first one we got. I remember Mother and Dad had an argument over that because Dad could have bought two Model-T Fords for the price he paid for the Studebaker. (laughs) Mother wanted the Studebaker. It was an eight-passenger with those fold-up seats. Dad kind of wanted to buy the Ford, but Mother won out. She won out on that so that's what we had.

We did get a Model-T later on. When we got that we drove back and forth in Fort Benton in that. I learned to drive on a Model-T. We had it up on the hill. If I couldn't crank it, I'd give it a push and then I'd run and get in. (laughs) I learned to drive on a Model-T. My brother Howard said, "Now, Sis, if you're going to drive, you'd better learn how to change a tire. You better learn how to do that. You'd better learn how to put it in the garage. When you get home, don't leave it sitting out."

So Sis had to learn. That was my orders. These big brothers were all like that.

WW: Did you change many tires?

EM: I changed a lot of tires in my time, sure did. In those days, they were hard to change

because you had to take the tire off and put the inner tube in. You had to fix it and put it back in and then put that tire back on the wheel. That was a job. Didn't have any rims in those days. That was quite a job. Then pump it up.

WW: How'd you pump it up?

EM: With one of those pumps you stood on and then you pumped it up like that. Took a lot of strength to do that. Now they have a thing you can pump up a tire in no time. That's what I hear. Every time I go down to get my car, I look around and see if my tires are flat and think, "I can call Triple A [AAA]." (laughs) I don't have to change it. Let them do it for me.

WW: You patched a lot of tires?

EM: I patched. You bet I had to patch them.

WW: How did you do that?

EM: They had these little adhesive packs that you got in a little can. You'd have to cut off the size of the patch around the hole where it was leaking. All you had to do was pour water on it, and you could tell where the leak was. You'd put that patch on with glue—it had a special glue—then pound it on to make sure it was down and glued good. Then you could put the air in it. Some of those inner tubes were patch on patch.

WW: How expensive were cars, do you know? Back then.

EM: You could buy a Ford for about 450 dollars in those days. The first Model-A Ford Jess and I bought was in...Let's see, Junior was born in '29 so it was about in '30, '31. We bought a Model-A and it cost us 600 dollars. That was something in those days.

WW: Did you buy it on credit?

EM: Yes. The funny part of it was, we had another old car and we'd started out on our trip to the park. Bonnie was staying with your grandparents and Junior had...we'd taken him to Fort Benton to my husband's mother. We were going on this trip. We were going to meet my dad, mother, my brother, and his wife in Glacier Park. We started out with this old car and we had just 30 dollars in our pocket because Jess said, "We'll go by Helena and pick up my check in Helena." This was around the first of the month so we could get the check. Before we got into Livingston, the timer went out on (unintelligible) went out on this old car. He kept driving it around and he said, "I know if I stop it, it won't start again." We drove it around looking for a Ford garage. Or looking for...what was the car? It wasn't a Ford, I think it was a Nash or DeSoto or something. Anyway, he couldn't find a garage that carried that.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

Winifred West: This is tape two of the Esther Allen McDonald tape.

Esther Allen McDonald: To be continued. Here we were in the Ford garage with no money. The mechanic said that they had no parts for the car. They'd have to send away and it would take them...it would have to be overnight. Jess said, "I could see my 30 dollars going down the drain." Finally, we went into the showcase. We started looking at cars. We didn't have any money, but we started looking at cars. This one car we thought was pretty nice. It was a two-door and you could let the front seats back and make a bed in it. He said, "I'd like to have that car."

The salesman said, "Do you have anyone that could recommend you?"

Jess said, "Yes, the postmaster in Highwood."

The fellow said, "I'll call him."

So he called L. E. Phillips (?). He said, "Mr. Phillips? I have a boy in here, a young man in here. He wants to buy a car. He doesn't have any money, but he wanted me to call you and see if you would recommend that he would pay for it."

Mr. Phillips said, "Jess McDonald? Give the boy anything you want." (laughs)

We went out of there with a new car and still had our money in our pocket. We drove on to Helena and picked up the check. Then we drove to Glacier Park and met my dad, mother, my oldest brother, and his wife. We spent some time there, which was nice because we had the bed in the car. We didn't have to get out. The first trip we made without the children so it was quite an exciting trip.

WW: When you bought a car like that did you make a payment every month?

EM: He signed up that he would make the down payment, which wasn't very much. The car was only about 600 or 500 dollars I think we paid for it. The next month he promised he'd send him the down payment, which wasn't very much which was out of our check. He did and then we made it. He wanted to carry it through the Fort Benton garage, Mr. Olson (?) at Fort Benton. This man said, "You don't need to do that. We can take care of it right through our garage." So that's the way we bought it—on time. That was quite an experience.

[End of Interview]