

Maureen and Mike

Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Archives and Special Collections

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: library.archives@umontana.edu

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

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: 052-001

Interviewee: Mary Graves Welte

Interviewer: Jo Rainbolt

Date of Interview: February 19, 1981

Project: Montana Settlers and Homesteaders Oral History Project

Mary Welte: It was called Whitesville (?), and those little towns were just three or four miles apart. They weren't hardly towns. Maybe there was a...No, there were no mailboxes...or a post office. Just mailboxes.

Jo Rainbolt: But the towns had names.

MW: They all had names. They were kind of just a little spot in the country. That's about all it was.

JR: You were Mary Goodbar (?)?

MW: My maiden name was Goodbar. Mary Wright Goodbar.

JR: How old were you when you moved to Montana?

MW: I was about...it seems to me that I was about 11.

JR: So you were old enough to remember the trip.

MW: Oh yes. It was a terrible trip. My mother had a little one, the youngest child at that time, and he was in diapers and he hadn't been well. So between the diapers and crying baby and all that, it was a rough trip. It was one of those, they called immigrant trains. Several people come out on them, and one part—a section—of the train was boxcars. Anybody had a cow, they brought it. Anybody had a dog, they brought it. We brought our dog and our furniture, and that's all the livestock we had. Then we were in the coach part.

JR: Your dad was a farmer?

MW: He was just a jack of all trades. Pop never stuck with anything long enough to become anything, but he could do anything. I never saw such a man. He was a genius in his day. Any housewife that wanted a kettle or a cup made, he could do it with his soldering iron and tinner snips.

JR: Well, he sounds like a real creative guy.

MW: He was.

JR: What was his name?

MW: Walter Goodbar.

JR: Walter Goodbar. You told me that he played almost every kind of instrument?

MW: Played every instrument you could think of. And I never knew he could play a piano until finally we happened to go someplace where there was a piano. Everything was by ear. He never played the note. But he was very good at it, and he didn't miss very many notes, I'll tell you that. He had very good time for his music too.

JR: Did he have a favorite instrument.

MW: He played his banjo mandolin most, then his violin next, and then he had a saxophone, and anything else that happened to be around. He taught us all to play the guitar—his children—he taught us all to play guitar. So when one would get married and go away, or something like that, why he would just get another one to sit them there and say, "You gotta do it," and we did it. Course, there were only four of us in the family. Three of us play guitars. One of them played a drum. So with what he played and we accompanied him, why, we did all right, and the dances were always held in schoolhouses and barns and things like that. So we had lots of music and had lots of music in the home. I never saw my dad ever a day that sometime he didn't pick up his instruments and play.

JR: Oh, that's great. And your mom? Did she play, or did she just appreciate?

MW: She appreciated it. And another thing, she had a beautiful alto voice, and she'd sing along, hum along while she was working. But she didn't play anything.

JR: But you really grew up in a musical house?

MW: Yes.

JR: And you kept that tradition when you came to Montana?

MW: Yes.

JR: Where did you settle?

MW: Settled south of Chinook about 12 miles between Chinook and the Bear Paws.

JR: Now, that's big country. Did your father have a ranch?

MW: My father homesteaded, and everyone were homesteading around there then. He didn't get much land. At the time he came out here, it was picked over pretty bad. He got 160 acres. Later, my mother took up what they call a desert claim. She looked for an Indian behind every rock, and there was lots of rocks. I was looking for a cowboy behind every tree, but there wasn't very many trees nor very many cowboys.

JR: But you found a cowboy.

MW: Yeah. He had been a cowboy, but there's no money in it. We got married, and then the children started to come so he had to get busy and do something. So in the summertime he worked out on ranches, and we proved up on this homestead he had and raised garden and had a milk cow and some saddle horses and teams.

JR: What was his name? What was your husband's—

MW: Clarence Graves.

JR: Clarence Graves. And he was a cowboy?

MW: He had been. He had been working on ranches after the cowboys...you know, it didn't last so long the cowboy stuff.

JR: No, that's what I was going to say because this was about, what, 19...When did you get married?

MW: Well, I got married when I was...in 1916 so we farmed from then on.

JR: You were only 17 then?

MW: Yes. Just arrived at 17. I thought I was gonna be an old maid. Now, I didn't want that to ever happened.

JR: So you got married when you had the chance? [laughs]

MW: Yeah.

JR: Well, now tell me about...Clarence—

[doorbell rings; break in audio]

JR: So was he musical, Mary?

MW: No, he could sing—

Unidentified Speaker: Why don't you have your coffee?

MW: He could sing. He had a beautiful voice—tenor voice. But all he wanted to sing was just bits and pieces. His favorite was "Down by the Old Mill Stream," and he sang that all day long when he was out working.

JR: So you ranched. You had a wheat ranch?

MW: Yes.

JR: You raised wheat, which was hard work—

MW: And against all the elements. That was terrible. Anyway, it was bad. It was hailstorms. That's all in my book if you want to read about the hailstorms.

JR: You know what I remember? The time you told me that when it hailed so bad that it ruined everything, and the lamb broke its leg and then you made ice cream. [laughs]

MW: Still got the same freezer.

JR: Do you? The same ice cream freezer? I thought that really showed your attitude. That's why you're such a survivor.

MW: [unintelligible the fittest, I'll tell you—

JR: When God sends hail, you make ice cream.

MW: That's about what you can do. Anyway, it was a hard life, very hard life those years because you didn't have much, and you take a whole load of barley to town and you'd send all the money you got out the barley to Savage Company (?) and buy some stuff out of their catalog. One year, we sent a whole load of barley and got just a little old radio. That's all we could get. Look at it now.

JR: Those were hard work years.

MW: They were. And when you did raise something and just about had it ready, the hails came. We lived in a hail belt and didn't realize it then so much, but we did live in a hail belt.

JR: Tell me about the entertainment. Were you playing the guitar? You never really gave it up, did you?

MW: I just learned to play it, maybe I had one or two kids. My sister got married, and Pop had to have somebody. So he says, come. I come. He put his foot on top of mine. He sat beside me, and I knew what it sounded like, what it should sound like. And if I didn't just hear it the first time, he come down on my foot about broke it.

JR: That's why you had such good timing today.

MW: Yeah, that must be—

JR: Now, when was that? That was when you were a kid?

MW: That was when I'd had a couple of kids.

JR: Oh, so you didn't learn guitar when you—

MW: Not right when I was really young, no. Of course, when I had a couple of kids I was only about 18 then.

US: Dad play too?

MW: Yeah, he played the violin and the saxophone and the mandolin. He had a banjo mandolin. I've never seen one like it since, and he took care of all those things just the way he wanted them. Scraped his violin because he thought it was too thick to make good music. So he took it apart and scraped it, put it together again, sounded good.

JR: Did he ever build any of his own instruments?

MW: No, he didn't.

JR: But he could make just about everything.

MW: He sure could.

JR: Did you tell me he was great big, good-natured guy?

MW: He weighed 235 [pounds] about all his life, and when he died at 91, he still weighed around 225 probably. He was a big man.

JR: But not fat, just big and sturdy.

MW: Well, he was pretty fat.

JR: That's pretty amazing to live that long because usually people that are that heavy—

MW: But when he passed away, he could hear me clear crossed the room in another room and know I was coming. He had very good hearing and I just notice so many people are hard hearing today and our people never did get it that way.

JR: Yeah, I've noticed that too that people who are perfectly healthy, who are over 80, generally—

MW: Well, he just died because he—

JR: Your hearing is excellent.

MW: Yeah, it's good—because he thought he'd lived long enough, I guess. The day he died, he said, "You know I've been around here long enough I think."

I said, "Are you taking a trip."

"Yeah. I think I've been here long enough," and that afternoon he died. And he did, and that's just the way...he just kind of bullheaded like I am.

JR: That's a nice way to go. Just decide you've been around long enough.

Did he play for the...Did the schools have dances, or did you have dances in the churches or how do the people get together during the—

MW: In the schoolhouses and in the barns. Anybody had a big barn always had a dance in the summer. Course, you couldn't in the winter. Then we played in the schoolhouses all the rest of the year. I remember one time when my little sister was very small—I think, she was only about six months old—we were all to dance, and we all went in a sleigh, in a bobsled and it had hay in the bottom of it. When we started home, why, Mom said, "Pop, Walter, have you got Margaret?"

He said, "No, I thought you had her."

She said, "Mary, did you get Margaret?"

"I didn't get her."

"Well, she's still laying over there in the schoolhouse," and we turned right around, went back and got her. Still had a fire over there, and it was still warm and nobody there but Margaret.

JR: [laughs] All bundled up. Well, those are the days when the families really stuck together, right? You took everybody with you.

MW: We had big rocks that we heated in the heating stove before we started out. Then we wrapped them up in a piece of canvas and put them down around amongst the hay and put our feet to them and had a big cover over the top.

JR: Keep your feet warm. What kind of dances did they—

MW: They were everything we dance now and square dances. Course, they were wild square dances in those days. And there was one where they formed a basket, put their arms each other's neck, and then the men would get the whirling around so fast with them that the girls' feet would go straight out and anybody sitting on the sidelines just had to dodge because they might get hit in the head—

JR: By a flying foot.

MW: Yes. But it was fun. The man always put their dollar in, and the women always took a pan of sandwiches or a cake. We kind of do that up at our Golden Age [group] now. The man always put their dollar and the women take cake or cookies. That serves the eats and—

US: What do they do with the dollar?

MW: That goes to pay us and other things that we need. We get paid now. We didn't used to get paid when we played...I played for six years or seven and never—

JR: Oh, I see, the Golden Age band gets paid now.

MW: Yes. We have two Golden Age bands, and one plays one Friday night and one plays another Friday night.

JR: Well, that's good that they're bringing some of those old traditions back.

MW: We use a lot of the old pieces that we played.

JR: Like what?

MW: "Over the Waves," "Let Me Call You Sweetheart," those waltzes, and "Down Yonder," and "South—

JR: And, oh, how those old-timers can waltz. It's put all us younger people to shame.

MW: Yes, they dance beautifully. They really do. I've had a couple doctors tell me that was just the makings of some of those older people is to get that exercise.

JR: Yeah, dancing is terrific exercise.

MW: But we're losing a lot of them.

JR: You play pretty much the same songs now that you played back in the 1916—

MW: Oh, I've learned a lot more of course. And we had the varsouvianna—that's when you put your little foot out—and we did that and the rye waltz, we still do that. But we don't do any square dancing. We think that's just a bit dangerous for as old as they are and it isn't necessary. They have their square dance clubs, and we are mostly for those waltzes and one steps and those...We do the butterfly which is wild enough. It's one man and two women, you know, and they really fly around.

JR: Well, back to the...You've been playing guitar a long time even if you learned when you were 18.

MW: Yeah, you see, I'm 81 now, going to be 82 pretty soon.

JR: That's a wonderfully long time to play the guitar.

MW: And that guitar is being played as long as I have. And it was second hand when I got it.

JR: Same guitar. It's a beautiful instrument.

MW: Same guitar.

JR: Do you know anything about it? You know it was second hand. You know—

MW: The fellows that I bought it of thought they could play guitar, and they got it and found out that it just wasn't what they wanted. They asked me if I wanted to buy a guitar, and I said I did and that was it. I was using my sister's guitar until then. So I bought it then, and that had to be way back, way back there, and I still play it. I don't think I could play any other one. But it has a resonator in it that carries its own music farther than...You take one of the guitars that they put on one of these amplifiers, you couldn't hear them in a barn, but you can hear mine in a barn. So that is the difference. It's built right in.

JR: It is? What's your favorite kind of music to play?

MW: I don't think I have any favorite. I like the waltzes because I enjoy watching them, and I like to waltz and one-step, and the—

JR: Do you play much when you're here by yourself?

MW: No. My son comes over once in a while, and we fiddle around a little bit. He has a banjo, but he don't bring it every time.

JR: How many kids did you have?

MW: I had five—two boys and three girls.

JR: Were they musical?

MW: They're all musical, but they don't all play anything. But you can...they know when Ma hits a sour note. Boy, they know it.

JR: It seems to run in families, this musical aptitude.

MW: Yeah. One of the girls played drums in school, and she followed playing for dances for a while. My son played a banjo mandolin, and the other boy plays a guitar. In fact, he's taking guitar lessons now to get some more than he had.

JR: Now did all the kids grew up over the Chinook area on the homestead?

MW: Yes. Then they went out to work, and they left home then.

JR: There just weren't any jobs over there unless they—

MW: Well, there was jobs. There were farm jobs, but my son—the oldest one—wanted to go to the Navy and he went. He was in 20 years. Don't think he intended to stay that long when he went in, but times got awfully hard there while he was in and he couldn't see any use getting out if he wasn't gonna have a good job. During war times, the other boy went in. He was over in the war zone. That was a time I sweat out when I couldn't hear from either one of them. They were over there, you know. That was tough.

JR: Both boys.

MW: Yes, and the sons in laws.

JR: Now, none of the kids stayed in that wheat belt area.

MW: No, no. They—

JR: But they all enjoyed their early lives.

MW: Yes, they did, and they talk about it quite often.

JR: I think it gave them a good backbone.

MW: It does. They're all strong and they've all got a mind of their own, and they know what's right and wrong and I've never had any trouble with them. They always go back when they come to visit and see all their old friends on the farms that's left, and they enjoy that so much.

JR: Yeah I don't really know much about that country except from the people I've talked to, but it certainly was an interesting life because even though there was so much hard work everybody...they really lived.

MW: They did. But you know, I don't think anyone of today can realize just how hard it was. Now for instance, I went to have my teeth cleaned yesterday, and I have a tooth filled, I just go and get it filled. But out there where we lived, we had to go in with buggy and team, and I had a toothache so I went in to Chinook and there's...It's no secret. There was an old guy there that got pretty drunk. No dentist. But he's the one I went to. So he filled this tooth, and I went home and I was eating a bowl of mush the next morning and I lost the filling. Then I had to wait. It was such a storm, I had to wait for a long time for I got back in. Things like that. That don't sound like much, does it? Hardship. But it was.

JR: Oh yeah, and what about the kids? They were all born at home?

MW: Yes. Every one of them were born at home, but always with a doctor. We could get the doctor out there, and then we had a neighbor woman or something.

JR: I hope he wasn't drunk all the time.

MW: No, but I have been with doctors helping with other people that had been drunk and that's no fun. But they all got here.

JR: Well, you've really done a lot because you even taught first aid to nurses for a while.

MW: Yeah, I did that in Havre, and I also played in Havre. We had a man that played violin, and he wanted guitars. He was playing for dances. So I played in Havre at their activity centers there with this guy.

JR: What were some of the other ways that you took a break from all the work that was involved in wheat ranching and all the hardships with the weather and everything? Were holidays a big deal?

MW: Yeah, in a way, but we were so far from anybody, you didn't go very often. Picnics were the biggest thing, and in the summer there was a crick [creek] down by my folks place and everybody took things to eat. One time I remember, it was in time when corn was on—roasting ears—and my mother lined a grape basket with some kind of paper. I don't know whether she

had wax paper. She put a pound of her homemade butter in there, and we'd just come along and wallop our corn in that and oh boy, was that good.

JR: Let's talk about the food for a minute. [laughs] There's always so much good food involved.

MW: Well, my mother would always put butter down for the year when her cows went dry, and she just put a crock in the cellar and fill it up two-thirds full of salt brine—to bounce an egg [put enough salt in the water to bounce or float an egg in]. Then she'd make her butter and make it in like about the size of baseballs and drop it down in that brine. Put a plate on it and push it down so it'd stay there. That kept it just as fresh as the next summer or next winter. We had it in the winter because your summer we had the fresh butter. So that was a good way to do it.

We put up eggs too in water glass. We could buy that and put it up. We'd fry down pork chops in a crock—

JR: Oh really? You could put up eggs?

MW: Yes. In what they call water glass, put them in a crock. Put them down in there and weight them down.

JR: Boy, those cracks were important, weren't they?

MW: Yes, they were because no metal or anything like that would do the same. Then we would fry pork chops when we had the fresh pork. We always raised our own stuff. Fry them and take the lard and pour over them until we keep pouring lard over the pork chops until they got to the top and then weight them down. They'd keep for a long, long time like that. Then just bring them up out of there a few at a time, and warm them up in the pan and you had your pork chops. Canned everything.

JR: It's amazing the amount of things you can do.

MW: An kraut—sauerkraut. We made sauerkraut. We made everything. We had to.

JR: Sauerkraut. Was your family German? Was Goodbar a German—

MW: Goodbar is German descent, but I think he must've been looking out from behind the rock because I never did hear of anybody coming over from anywhere. I don't think they did. I think they were there.

JR: Your family was here forever.

MW: And the [unintelligible] all came from Virginia, and my father's folks came from Virginia too.

JR: And they settled in Indiana?

MW: Yes.

JR: And then your father moved on to Montana. Why don't you tell me some of the superstitions?

MW: Well, right today I always...if you're going to pass one side of the tree, I always come over there by you, I'll never let the tree split our friendship. [laughs] And I'm not superstitious, I don't think. Always said we would throw salt over our left shoulder if we spilled the salt shaker or anything. We'd always put a bit of it across our left shoulder. Or once in a while when the stove was hot, you could spring a little on the stove, and if it popped, you're all right. If it didn't, you're out of luck. Since I've grown up, I've driven a couple of blocks out of my way so I wouldn't pass a cat, or the cat pass me.

JR: [laughs] But you're not superstitious.

MW: I'm not superstitious.

US: Not taking no chances.

JR: Was your mother superstitious?

MW: Oh yes, very much so. I could pretend I wasn't, but she never did. She knew she was.

JR: That's great. She didn't even pretend.

MW: No. I can't think of a whole lot of them, but there were an awful lot. You was very careful what you burned. Some things you couldn't burn. I can't tell you just everything. But the birds were lucky birds. If you ever saw blue bird, you're fixed for life. You're okay.

But we didn't...like in Indiana, they had these vultures and buzzards and things. Oh, we hated those things.

JR: Those are really bad luck.

MW: They're bad luck.

JR: Were there any bad luck things associated with weather or anything like that?

MW: Well, the moon. You didn't dare ever see a new moon with anything in your hands. I always think about it, but I usually have something in my hands. But if I know the moon's

coming pretty soon, I try to look and see if I can see him without anything in my hands. [laughs]
That's crazy, isn't it?

JR: It's interesting.

MW: But I never started the thing on Friday ever.

JR: Probably still don't.

MW: No. My husband said, "I can't understand that."

I said, "Well, you can start on Friday..." or, "You can start on Thursday night, and you can work all day Friday. But don't start it on Friday." So he didn't.

JR: He believed you?

MW: He believed me. No...just to keep peace in the family. That's all. He didn't believe it.

JR: He knew that you were strong minded lady. But your dad, was he superstitious, or was it just mom?

MW: Well Pop didn't like to let on like he was, but he went along with us sometimes. Yes. Went along with us.

JR: How about ways of predicting the weather since so much of your livelihood depended on the weather?

MW: Well, I know that's true, and nobody believed me until the last few years the doctors actually do that you know when a storm's coming in. You know it by the way you feel.

JR: By your mood?

MW: Your ache, and then my mood always changes when it was going to be lightning and thunder and I was so scared of lightning and thunder that I always got a headache long before it ever got there. I don't know why, but I did.

JR: So how long did you stay on the homestead before you moved to Havre?

MW: Oh, when I moved first, first place we moved was to Hingham, and I took on a gas station and run that. And my two youngest were still going to high school, and they graduated out of the high school there in Hingham.

JR: The kids all went to school in Hingham?

MW: No, none of them but those two. My oldest son didn't get to graduate so he graduated in the Navy. He finished up some college work also in the Navy, and the other boy he just went on about his business. He said he didn't need it.

JR: So the younger kids went to school in Hingham.

How did you get into running your own gas station, Mary?

MW: Well, come a chance that somebody didn't have anybody to run a gas station, and they knew me and knew I'd helped out this lady. Asked me if I wanted to, and I said I did. So I just took it on, and the guy that I bought the gas of—the consignee or whatever his name was—he said, “Any money you need, let me know.” So they furnished me with pumps. Then when I got to writing for the magazine, they took off five cents off every gallon I bought from them and that was my pay. That’s the way I got into the writing business. I started in writing about the people who would come to the gas station, and I sent the first one to New York and he wrote right back, “How about sending one every month?” And I did for ten years.

JR: That's great. What'd you call yourself?

MW: Gasoline Annie.

JR: Gasoline Annie. Yeah, I saw your picture “Gasoline Annie” with your...Was it a Texaco station? [With your] cute little cap.

MW: Yeah.

JR: Was your husband ill then?

MW: He was ill in the end there when we lived in Hingham, and we went back to Havre to live because the work was too hard for him. He was janitor of the school, and we went back to Harvard and Holland Benign (?), the mortuary there, asked us if we'd work for him because we were well known. They knew what we were before we ever went down there. We were friends, and we went there to work and that's where he passed away—

JR: In Havre.

MW: And I just kept on working there for...I worked there for years—

JR: In the mortuary. You certainly had a variety of work experience.

MW: Oh gosh! Nobody ever did as many things. Didn't think I'd live that long. But I did.

JR: That's great. Well, did you like working in the mortuary?

MW: Yes. If I'd have been younger when I started to work there I would've gone and taken...and learned it. But the first time they ever left me with someone that I had to fix up, they said, "Now here's the stuff and here, you do them up. Comb their hair, and if you think they need some makeup, put it on."

I said, "If you stand right there till I get through, I will. Otherwise I will not do it." So they were standing there, and I just got to work and I looked around and there was nobody there but me. I thought, well, I'm in it, I'll just go ahead and finish it up. So I did. I guess it was the artist part in me then coming out. I don't know, but I must've done a pretty good job because they wanted me to do it all the time.

JR: The cosmetic work?

MW: Yes.

JR: It didn't spook you?

MW: No, not after that first date.

JR: Wasn't one of your superstitions?

MW: No, not after my first time.

JR: Yeah, well you are an artist. Were you painting in those days, or just doing—

MW: I piddled around with crayons and things with the kids all the time. But I never had any paints until, oh, I guess I must have been...must've been when I moved off the ranch before I ever had any paints.

[Break in audio]

JR: What kind is it?

MW: I don't know. We can't find any name on it anywhere.

JR: It's a beautiful old timer.

MW: It's the amplifier on it that makes it carry its noise. I mean...one of these that you put on with the amplifiers that sits around, they don't carry it near as well. And this one does carry quite well. Carried over the schoolhouses and the barns anyway. [laughs]

JR: Go ahead.

MW: [plays guitar and sings]

JR: How about another one?

MW: That's all I know.

JR: You haven't been playing that guitar all those years. [laughs]

MW: I don't really sing much. I sing with the gang when I sing, but I don't.

JR: Go ahead and play.

MW: I don't know anything but chords, you know, so...

[plays guitar]

That's all I'm going to play. [strums a few notes] Has a beautiful sound, don't it?

JR: Oh yeah. Let me turn this off.

[Break in audio]

JR: Now, Mary, I've heard about this singing dog that you have, Mindy, and I wondered if you think you thought she'd sing for the radio audience. [dog woofs in background]

MW: Will you sing? Sing a little bit. [dog whines and wails] Sing real pretty. Yeah, real pretty. [dog continues to whine]

[organ music in background]

JR: Thataway, Mindy. She certainly knows the scale, don't you, Mindy?

MW: She's a good baby. She's my pride and joy because she won't let...She sang for the, I think it was the Seventh-Day Adventists. They came at Christmas-time singing carols. So she was barking and was so mad at them for being so noisy out there. There were about a dozen. Finally, I said to them after they got through, I said, "Would you like my dog to sing to you?"

They just looked...And I said, "Mindy, sing to them. You can sing for them." And she did. And I tell you, you never saw such looks on people's faces.

JR: I believe it. Mindy, you really know the scales, don't you? [laughs] She just yawns.

Do you know any old-time tunes, Mindy?

MW: She always likes this one. She learned to sing this one. [plays organ] Do you want to sing that one?

JR: She's more interested in me than she is the song.

MW: Mindy, let's sing this one.

JR: Mindy, the tape recorder's on. You've got to sing.

MW: Sing, sing, Mindy. Come on. Here, sing. [plays organ; dog begins to woof and whine] Sing just a little more.

[Well, that's enough.

JR: She says, "I've had enough. I've had enough singing."

MW: Yeah, she's had enough.

JR: That's a nice song too. Here I'll turn—

[Break in audio]

MW: What about the [unintelligible] on his legs?

JR: No.

MW: There is. That was my husband. I married him when he looked like that. I was 17 years old.

JR: He's a neat looking guy.

MW: He was a neat looking guy. Told about our marriage and that.

JR: Tell me about the hail stones.

MW: Well, just like it was before. The hail stones come so often. We lived in a hail belt so they came often.

JR: But you have a photograph that actually shows that the hailstones were the size of—

MW: Hen eggs.

JR: Yeah, as big as eggs. I mean that's incredible.

MW: Well, you saw them. That's the truth. Well, they were...That was in the '20s. The '20s were bad. Is it on now?

JR: Yeah. It's on now.

MW: We'd always have to put new windows in you know. The southwest is where we got them from, and we always knew when they were coming because we could hear the roar. So we'd get everything in that we could, but you ever try to drive a bunch turkeys? That's the meanest darn things that ever lived when you're trying to drive them. And sheep. That was almost impossible to get them all in.

JR: You had hailstones every year. I mean hail storms every year?

MW: Just about every year. Had put new windows on the southwest every year of the world just about. We'd cover all the flowers and the things we could, but of course, the crops always got it and it just wasn't good. Those years weren't good. The kids would watch their dad, see if he got into the barn all right. The older ones of the little ones. And they would getting as much stuff as they could. So the little lambs and everything would back up against whatever they were, but they didn't have sense enough to get to where they should be. And they got broken legs. The turkeys I raised that year...I raised about 100 turkeys that year, and they were piled up against the fence. It always rained hard after a hailstorm. Always wound up with a big rainstorm. So we got out in the rain and we slipped and slid over the hailstones and tried to take gunny sacks, and that's what we used to put grain in, and gather up as many as we could. We had a fire in the range and we'd try to lay them in the oven and try to thaw them out, but half of them died. So that's the way it went every few years. About every third year we'd have a hailstorm, and it was bad.

I remember having a new hat one time. About the only hat I'd ever had for years, and it was a great big wide hat they were wearing them that year. Had a great big red rose on one side. So in running around and trying to get things put away, my hat was laying on the table, who would have thought it would get all ruined. There it was full hailstones and the red rose had run all over the tablecloth and down on the floor. It was a mess.

So that's way things always went. Just a little bit hard to take sometimes.

JR: How'd you keep up your spirits? I mean it must have been—

MW: That's why I'm so stubborn.

JR: You had to persevere.

MW: I had to. You had to. My grandmother came out from Indiana, and she stood there and cried one time. It hailed while she was there. She cried and cried, and she said, "How can you stand it?"

My husband said, "Well, if you couldn't stand it, you wouldn't be here because it happens often."

"I don't see how you can stand it."

We had flax that year, and it was completely ruined. But there was good times between so we'd mortgage the sheep in the spring, buy a seed wheat—that was gone by that time—and then we'd shear the sheep in the summer and pay back the mortgage. So that's the way it went all the time—for a long time. Then the crops—after we got to summer following and everything—they were a little earlier and they did a little better and things went a little better. But it was rough in the first years. I don't mean to make it sound that it was all rough because we did have some very good times.

JR: But the constant battle with the weather—

MW: You had to battle with it.

JR: The winters were cold too.

MW: Oh, very cold. I've seen it 60, and that is cold. We'd have some old car that was just worked over and worked over and worked over, and I've pushed every hill in Blaine County. I pushed up every single Hill in Blaine County, I think, and I did push an old car up Glacier Parkway one time. That wasn't fun, but we got there. Slept on the ground on blankets. Those rocks were pretty hard, but we had fun.

JR: Camped out in Glacier? That's great. Well, Mary, what do, you know, looking back on your 80 years...what do you think were the...Do you have times that were the best years? As a woman. I mean, were there harder times or times when the kids are demanding a lot of time?

JR: I enjoyed my kids, but I feel badly now that I couldn't have enjoyed them more. But we all had to work then. And I would take them out on the harrow...I'd have a mud sled hooked in front of the harrow, and I would be standing on that and dragging the harrow. The kids, when I'd take them in the house—they were sitting in the mud sled—and their eyes was the only thing that could tell you they were people. We got them in there and washed them all up. But I had to take them with me, you know—the first three—but we made it through.

I'm sure my children got an awful lot of good out of their childhood because they played...they ranched...toy ranches they built all over, and they branded gophers. Made a brand out of

hairpins and built a fire and branded gophers. They did everything that was just going on in those days. They made gardens, and they did all those things—play stuff. They didn't have many toys, but one man told me that he went over to get a binder that was sitting in our yard in the barn yard there—years after we left there. He got this binder, he was going to use the parts to fix something. He said before he got out there he run over two or three ranches. He went back and looked at them, and they had corrals—the kids had made out of sticks and everything—and there they were yet.

JR: One time you told me your kids were born doing the circle two-step.

MW: Well, a woman was at a dance one night and she says, "Who are those kids doing that dance? How well they do it."

This neighbor of mine, she says, "Well, they should. They were born in the circle two-step." It wasn't quite that bad.

JR: [laughs] That's good. That's great. Well, then how long were you in Havre after you left the ranch and went to work in Havre?

MW: Well, my husband, first husband, died there, and we—myself and he—had worked a couple of years and I stayed a couple of years. Then I married again, and I went out on a ranch north of Hingham. That's where we just plain wheat ranch. There was no cattle and no horses, no nothing but a cat.

JR: The cat was your only animal?

MW: Yes.

JR: Was that kind of a nice change?

MW: It was a change for me because it wasn't quite such hard work. I worked real hard in Havre. At a mortuary, you're just lickety...all the time, you're at it all the time. In the middle of the night, you're going to get calls and everything.

JR: People are very predictable when they die.

MW: No, they just decide to die, they do. [laughs] I had a happening while I was there that I think of quite often. This man and his wife thought so much of each other. He just worshipped that woman, and they'd come to Havre on Saturday to do their trading. I would see her on the street, and we more or less kind of smiled at the way she'd do herself up—little kid curls on the sides of her face you know. She used highly pink cheeks and dark eyebrows, and she was just dressed to the nth degree and used an awful lot of makeup. Well, when she died, her husband's

name was Snoose (?), and he told me...Well, they called me down—I had an apartment upstairs—and he says, “You know what she looked like.”

I said, “Yes, I do.”

Well, he said, “I want her to look like you remember her. I don't want her to be pale. I want her to look like you remember her.”

I looked at the boss there, and I knew it would never go through if he had anything to do with it. But I went back to the preparation room and I said, “Well now, you want me to do this, or do you not?”

He says, “Mary, I just don't like to have it done the way she always looked.”

I says, “Snoose asked me to do it, and I'm going to do it just the way she looked to me,” and I did. That man cried, and he went down the florist and bought me the biggest plant he could get. He said, “I knew nobody but you would do it.”

JR: That's great. Well, that's the way she wanted to look.

MW: That's the way he wanted her to look. But the boys didn't think that was quite the thing to do. But I've always been glad I did. He was happy anyway.

JR: Well, tell me about your writing. You started writing when you were Gasoline Annie and you kept writing...Did you keep a journal or—

MW: Oh, I just wrote these pieces in this little magazine. That trade magazine belonged to the Texaco Company and many, many letters I had from the people who had read it. Even I felt good about the one from a professor in one of the colleges because I'd missed out on school very much. Well, I've got the letter yet. And I was very proud about what he said about it.

But anyway, I wrote every month for ten years. I missed one, and I got a telegram. “Mary, Mary, quite contrary. How does your column grow?” So I got busy and sent it. It was a little late that time, but that was only once in ten years that I missed it.

JR: And you wrote about the people that came to the gas station?

MW: I just wrote about the people that come into the station. Haven't you seen those writings? I mean, I did advertise for them in that writing too because of the gas and the oil. Now, I went to school, and I was the only woman in the school and all the rest were men—service station operators.

JR: Where was the school?

MW: The school was held in Havre. And I enjoyed it very much.

JR: Running your own station?

MW: Yes.

JR: Well, how long were you back on the wheat ranch then?

MW: Then, in '52, I was married to Norman Welte, and we went out to the wheat ranch. That year we knew we were going to get married in May. In that year in April, there was a big flood in Havre, and it was very bad. And they thought that Fresno Dam was going to go out. So they warned the people to...any papers and stuff they had, they wanted to get ready so that if they had to go in a hurry, why, they could. The boss there at the funeral home said to me, "Mary, put everything in a trunk, and if we have to go up on the hill up by the cemetery, there's a little house and you can put that stuff in there." And we could stay up there, he said, all of us here in Havre that could get up there. They had that one building they could use for shelter. So I called Norman. This was in April. And I said, "You ought to come and get me. I'd rather live in sin than live up there in that graveyard." So he come and got me.

JR: [laughs] That's great. Well, how long did you stay in Havre before you moved to the Bitterroot Valley?

MW: Oh, Norman and I were married just about 20 years. Then we come over here, and he only lived here three years.

JR: So this is pretty new country for you, this temperate, banana belt?

MW: Yes, yes.

JR: Is that why you came was because of the more—

MW: Well, we wanted to get out of wind. Where we lived you know by Terry Stevenson's (?) there is very, very windy.

JR: Gosh, Mary, that with the hail and the cold weather.

MW: Yes. But we didn't hear much hail there in that place. It wasn't a hail belt. In fact, we give up our insurance because Norman said we put that amount of money in the bank and we will not insure. The insurance is high, and you never get a heck of a lot anyway out of it. So that's what we did, and we didn't have much hail. In 21 years, we'd had one hail.

JR: Oh, so you were in a different weather pattern. So you wheat ranned, then, another 20 years.

MW: Yeah, and cooked for men during the harvest seasons and everything. That was no chore. I knew how to do that when I was 14 years old.

JR: Well hard work certainly doesn't kill anybody, does it?

MW: No, it certainly don't kill them. I do think sometimes my legs wouldn't have been so bad if I hadn't have...I really give them all they could take—

JR: Just plumb wore them out. You've had both your knees replaced.

MW: Yes. Replacement in both legs, both knees.

JR: You must have known how to relax when you worked that hard. You know, you're not a tense person.

MW: We played a lot. In between. You know what I mean? In the home, we popped corn, and we would...Oh, I played games with the kids, and their father would tell them stories that happened years ago when he was a cowboy and that was interesting.

JR: I wish somebody could have tape recorded him, but I realize there weren't any tape recorders back in those days.

MW: So that's it. I don't really know.

JR: He was quite a bit older than you when you got married.

MW: He was 19 years older.

JR: So and he cowboyed over—

MW: South of Chinook.

JR: In that area? So he was really—

MW: Cowboyed in the Bear Paws. B.M. Bowers, do you remember that name? She was a writer.

JR: No.

MW: It's a woman. He worked out for the C.M. Jacobs Company in the Bear Paws, and B.M. Bowers was C.M. Jacobs' wife. She'd come out there in the summertime and write books. She lived in New York most of the time. So there is where he did his cowboy stint is out there in the Bear Paws.

JR: What was Bowers' husband's name?

MW: C.M. Jacobs.

JR: That was when they had the ranch. Was it a great big spread?

MW: He had a big spread.

JR: No, I didn't even know about the C.M. Jacobs ranch. What happened to it? It was just a homestead? Was it like a lot of the cowboy—

MW: Oh, that had been there so long I don't know what happened, but he went there to work, I know, and he worked there for years. He was a foreman there for years too.

JR: So he really must have known horses.

MW: Oh yes. Yeah, he knew all about them. There's one story he told in the book about the boys taking off from a dance one night and getting into a barbed wire fence, and it ripped one fellow's stomach open and he laid there and they got blankets and old [unintelligible] that faded all over the place and put [unintelligible], watered him down so that he wouldn't dry out and give him whiskey and finally went for the doctor. When the doctor got there ,why, he sewed him up best he could. They were afraid to move him. Of course, one man said he was the only man in Blaine County that had a hand-painted guts. That old [unintelligible] had just faded all over—roses all over the man. But he lived.

JR: [laughs] Hand-painted guts. He lived though.

MW: He lived.

JR: Yeah. They had to be incredibly tough to survive some of those—

MW: Yeah, with the whiskey that he had in him, and the boys keeping...You know, way back then, they knew to keep his insides moist was the thing to do. How did they know those things?

JR: Boy, I don't know.

MW: But they did.

JR: Well, you must've know a lot in order to...You didn't have any of your kids die.

MW: No. We saved them all from pneumonia and all that stuff. With skunk grease and stuff like that.

JR: Well, how did you know it all?

MW: I don't know.

JR: Pick it up from your mom and common sense—

MW: Just common sense I think is the most, and we knew from other people that turpentine and goose grease and skunk grease and that rubbed on their chest was a good thing to do, so we'd sit up all night and put hot flannels on their chest with that stuff. They always come out of it. I'd do that yet if I had babies here because I think it's better than a lot of the things they do use.

JR: Oh yeah. I mean a lot of people come home sicker from the hospital than when they go in.

MW: You know, we have found out now that mold...those old puff balls we saw on the prairie that's nothing but mold, and we used to strap that on horses hoofs...above the hoof where they got a barbed wire cut, and we used to strap that on there because it was penicillin in its way.

JR: What other things do you remember that you used for cures? Like what for instance a common sore throat and cold type thing.

MW: Well, we used up a flannel and mustard plasters and sometimes flaxseed plasters, and one time I had sore throat so bad I just thought I was gonna die sure. Had a bunch of young people come down and my mother made vinegar taffy. I ate vinegar taffy right with them, and the next morning my throat was better. I found out that vinegar was the great thing for sore throat.

JR: Do you still use it like for a gargle?

MW: I use vinegar and honey. Just eat it.

JR: Vinegar's supposed to be a folk remedy.

MW: Yeah but we use a lot of those things.

JR: How about broken bones?

MW: Well, we didn't set them. We never had any. I think the...I knew people who broke bones often. They'd just take them to the doctor, but we never had any broken bone.

JR: Must be all that milk that your family drank.

MW: Must be. We all drank lots of milk. Bowls of it. Sometimes for evening meal we never had anything but fresh bread and milk. And that was plenty. As long as you had lots of it.

JR: Especially with the good wheat that you raised.

MW: We took that wheat and ground it coarse, and you had it for breakfast food. Never was a morning without it.

JR: That was your mainstay for breakfast—

MW: Mainstay for breakfast. And hot biscuits. Hot biscuits and homemade butter and our bowl of mush and our coffee and the kids with their milk. It was a different way of living, but I'm glad we lived through it because my children say to me these days, "We are so glad we grew up in that time because the children of today wouldn't know..." If they had to go to beans and pig hocks now, I don't know if they could live off of it, but you could then. I don't know. My kids could.

JR: Oh yeah, and they're healthy.

MW: Well, except one. I have one that isn't so well, but then that happens to everybody.

JR: Well, when I was talking to you last time, you said something about you think having more things creates more and bigger problems. I think that's a good point. The more we have the more we get away from.

MW: Yeah. I had a neighbor from out here say to me one day, "I've got some chickens, but I've got to wait till my husband comes home to kill them for me because I couldn't kill them."

I said, "Well, call me and tell me when you're going to kill them. I'll come and kill them."

She says, "You kill them!"

I said, "Of course, that's nothing. That's easy." I just take both feet and stick on a broomstick with the chicken's head underneath and give one yank. It's just pearl beans (?) popping off one time and the other.

JR: Did she let you do it?

MW: You know, he found out that the feed he was feeding was the wrong kind of feed. You know how that scared got. He chopped their heads off and threw them over the hill. That was too bad. So we never got them.

JR: Were rodeos very big for entertainment?

MW: Always the Fourth of July, we had rodeos. Then the other rodeos that we had, they didn't call them rodeos. Come over Sunday, and we'll have some riding. That's all it was to it. They'd go...the Rambergs (?) was a big ranch up above us, and we'd go there on Sunday, watch them. Then we'd ride calves in between times, just ride the calves. My boys rode the calves. Shouldn't do it, but they did it. They learned to ride that way anyway. They never wore saddles on the horses because it always made me nervous, so they'd ride them bareback. They just lay down on those horses and go like the wind.

JR: All the kids rode?

MW: Good riders, yes. Well, my youngest one wasn't because she didn't have a horse when she was growing up.

JR: None of your kids live in Montana?

MW: Yes, I have a son who is the appraiser for the Security Federal and Loan in Billings, and I have the other son drives a courtesy car for the Ford, downtown Ford Company in Sacramento, California. I have a daughter out in Washington. She married and raised her family. I have a daughter in Great Falls who is half owner of a drugstore there—the Medical Arts Pharmacy. And I have a daughter in Rudyard, and she studied to be a home nurse. So they all had their work they do. The one son will retire a year from this February. Right now, a year from now he'll retire, so he'll have to start out seeing what that's like. He wants to come to the Bitterroot. He likes it here. His son was in the Navy and he lives up at the Mystic Lake Powerhouse—Montana Power—he runs the plant up there.

[pauses] I like the idea of having to go every other Friday to play. If I didn't have that, I don't think maybe I'd go. So I'm glad I have to go.

JR: To go and play your guitar.

MW: Yes. For the dances.

JR: But they do have dances every Friday night.

MW: Every Friday night.

JR: How many people are involved in it? It's called the Golden Age group?

MW: The Golden Age group. Probably we have 250 members now. We had about 225 when I last heard, and we've gotten a lot of people. I don't know how many were there last night, but there had to be an awful lot of people there last night. But we have two bands, and one band plays one Friday night and the next Friday night the other band plays. So that makes it nice. If you want to go someplace, you can plan it so you have that weekend off. [pauses] We play for the rest homes, and they love it. They really do.

JR: Do they dance?

MW: The ones at Stevensville dances. Down here, they don't. I don't think they have room enough. There's so many down here that they're so close together in there that they couldn't probably find room. But Stevensville they do. You might have seen it in the paper that they had their Valentine party. Remember I told you there's a man called Bill, and he always sings when I'm down there and they always dance. Just make little shuffling, short—

[Telephone rings; End of Interview]