

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 414-004**  
**Interviewee: Betty Kramen Miller**  
**Interviewer: Whitney Gaskill**  
**Date of Interview: April 11, 2007**  
**Project: Northside Oral History Project**

Whitney Gaskill: Okay this is Whitney Gaskill interviewing Betty Miller about her childhood growing up in the north hills of Missoula, Montana. So if you could just tell us- the beginning of the interview, your name and where you were born please.

Betty Miller: My name is Betty Jean Kramen—K-R-A-M-E-N—Miller. I was born in 1931 at 1120 Howell Street, which is probably less than an air mile from the ranch on the west side of Missoula.

WG: Okay so we'll start with your family. What did your parents do for a living?

BM: They were ranchers in this particular site that we're talking about here. Before that he owned a trucking business and paid cash for the ranch and was always very proud of that.

WG: How many siblings did you have?

BM: I had two sisters.

WG: Could you say their names?

BM: Their names are Harriet Spurlock and Martha Kramen.

WG: So what brought your family to Montana? You mentioned that your father drove a truck and saved up money to build the ranch. Were they originally from Montana or why did they want to invest in the ranch?

BM: I think my father had always dreamt of owning a cattle ranch. He was born in northern Iowa. His family returned to Norway when he was about four years old. He was raised in Norway and then returned to the United States because he was a citizen of the United States. He returned here about 1917- no it was earlier than that. It was more like 1914 and he worked all over the United States. He barbered. He worked with movie sets in California. He worked in the fields in the Imperial Valley of California. He worked in the lumber camps up in the Blackfoot here in western Montana. He met my mother and married in the late 1920s. Those were hard years. They were Depression years. His dream was to own a cattle ranch.

WG: When did he buy the ranch?

BM: If I remember correctly, it was about 1943 or '44.

WG: Did your mother share that dream? Was your mother from Montana?

BM: She was from Montana. She was not born here. She was born in Tico, Washington. She came to Montana as a very young child, about three years old. She homesteaded over in the eastern part of the state, or the mid part of the state in Big Sandy, Montana. She returned to Missoula when she was about a seventh grader. In response to your question did she share his dream? Yes, she did.

WG: So she was a homesteader. Did she ever tell you any stories about that? Did you know anything about what that was like?

BM: It was a hard life. They were happy. There were- it was a large family. I think there were 12 children in the family. She was in the middle. When we're through with this interview, I can show you a painting of this homestead, which she did from memory. Like so many people during that era, times were very tough for them and especially with the drought years. So they returned to this part of Montana, which was a little bit more conducive to raising good crops, having a good garden. My grandfather got a job on the railroad, which was pretty prestigious in those days.

WG: Interesting. So now kind of moving into your memories of the ranch, what kinds of chores did you have as a child?

BM: In 1943 or '44, I was born in 1931 as I told you, so I was probably around 12 years old when we bought the ranch. We did not move to the ranch right away. We kept the town house. The town house was in our family and it was a very handy place to have for going to school in the winter time. So my responsibility at the ranch mainly concerned picking berries, picking rhubarb, helping put up the hay, of course cleaning the house and all of the household chores. We canned. We put a lot of- my parents had a large garden. We helped with the garden. I never did have to milk a cow. I never did learn to milk a cow whereas my sisters did. How I got away from that, I have no idea. I've thought about that since. There were joys in living there. Besides that we rode horses. We were- say for example we rode a horse to go out and bring the milk cows in at night to be milked. I in particular enjoyed all of these. I never felt a hardship in doing any of these chores.

WG: What kinds of animals were on your farm? You mentioned the horses and cattle of course.

BM: Mainly beef cattle, which was the mainstay- the main income source for the ranch. We always had horses. We didn't have a lot of horses, probably three or four or five. My parents each had a saddle horse and there were horses there for my sisters and me to ride. There were two- there was a team of horses and when we're through here I will show you a picture on the wall back here of the team. My father worked with horses rather than a tractor. He seemed to take a lot of pride in his harnesses and the equipment that he had. He didn't buy a tractor

probably until the late 1940s. Most ranchers by that time had a tractor. He did not. He hadn't really coveted one.

WG: How many head of cattle would you run on your ranch?

BM: You know it's hard for me to remember how many we had at that time. I think later on I can remember and my husband could answer this better than I could, but I think there were about 90.

WG: What about- you mentioned your garden. What kinds of things did you grow?

BM: I think we raised the average vegetable garden in terms of what- you see the ranch- the altitude is higher than Missoula. So there are certain crops that don't grow as well up there as they would at this elevation or even a little bit lower. I remember we had lots of raspberries. We had lots of asparagus. There was an unusual amount of rhubarb that was considered at the time that the previous owner may have even used the rhubarb for making wine during prohibition years. I have no idea. I know that there was just an unusual amount. I used to pick the rhubarb and take it into the grocery stores and sell it. There was a good market for rhubarb at that time, and asparagus. Mainly other than that there were apple trees. We had lots of lettuce and onions and carrots and the kinds of vegetables that you would need for the home. I don't think I'm forgetting anything.

WG: Did you sell anything besides the rhubarbs?

BM: And the asparagus.

WG: And the asparagus, but you didn't sell the carrots or anything else?

BM: No there was a little grocery store in the Missoula Mercantile, which is now The Bon. It was a little red and white grocery store that fronted on east Front Street in the 100 block. They bought all the asparagus and rhubarb I could bring in on my bicycle.

WG: Beyond chores, what did you do with your parents?

BM: We had a place at Seeley Lake so we spent some time up there fishing and boating, etcetera. We did a lot of horseback riding. One of the most joyous things I can remember doing was hiking up to the top of the saddle of the mountain here behind Waterworks Hill. On the saddle there's a little pond up there. That's all a part of the original 160 acres. My parents bought a lot more land for pasture on further back. Anyway on this 160 acres, there's a little pond up there. I could walk up over the hill from the pond and I could look right down here in this area where we're sitting right now in the Rattlesnake.

I sat there and wrote poetry and just enjoyed looking at this Rattlesnake valley, never dreaming I would be living over here. There were no buildings in the upper part of the Rattlesnake at that time that were visible from that area. These buildings down here, say for example, the Reely (?) House, the old house here on the corner and I think there were a couple of houses here on this street. North of here, in those years, there wasn't much of anything.

WG: Oh wow. So can you remember anything else you liked to do during your free time? That was a good story. Anything else?

BM: Oh I enjoyed the house. I enjoyed- let me just say it wasn't all joy. There were some things that I didn't like to do. I just mentioned a little while ago that most things I did- I did not like to help with the fencing. The way we did the fencing- my father had what we called was a "stone boat" and it was a big contraption pulled behind the horses, which was very low to the ground and it was made entirely of wood. That's how we hauled the stuff, the equipment that we needed back up into the hills to do the fencing. Somehow or other that job- and I didn't ever work hard at it, in other words, my father seemed to enjoy my company so I did things like handing him nails and handing him tools.

I don't actually remember doing much physical labor, but I didn't like fencing. I can't exactly tell you why. I haven't even thought of that for a very long time. What else did we do? Well, putting up the hay and the hay crop during the late summer. That was always interesting and fun. Usually some other members- friends or members of the family helped us with that project. There was the homemade ice cream. My mother was a good cook, so we always had lots of tasty food. We cooked. My sisters and I helped with the cooking. We didn't have electricity. We did have running water. I can remember being very grateful for having running water, but we didn't have electricity nor did we have a telephone. That became a problem as I moved into my teen years. It would have been very nice to have had a telephone.

WG: Going back to some of the things you mentioned, can you kind of describe what it was like to put up the hay a little bit? Describe that whole process.

BM: My father cut the hay using the team of horses. He raked the hay using the team of horses. The task that I had in particular was to by pitchfork, put the hay from the windrows that the hay rake- used the hay rake to rake the hay into windrows. Then we raked it more clean to make sure we got all the hay. Then we helped put the hay into the barn, which meant then by using a pitchfork we stacked all the hay onto a truck.

I have pictures of that. We took the hay- we drove the truck up to the end of the barn where there was a huge hay hook that was on cables and somehow or other those cables came down and picked up great bunches of hay all at once with a pulley and cable system. The hay was taken into the barn. That was in the early days. We didn't start baling hay. I don't even remember helping during baling season until after I was married, which was in the Fifties. Dad probably bought a baler somewhere around 1950, '51, '52. Then of course that changed the

hay harvest because we had bales and we had a system for putting the bales on a- I don't even remember what you would call it, but some sort of a piece of machinery. I don't think that it was automated. It may have been run by the horses. Anyway, it took the bales up the trough and somebody at the top then stacked the hay in the barn.

WG: You mentioned also this was something I was going to ask you later, your mother being a good cook. Do you remember any other- you mentioned the homemade ice cream, any other special treats that you guys had or just what you ate?

BM: She made donuts, she made homemade donuts. We had a huge breakfast generally speaking. Breakfast was as big as the average person's dinner today. We had potatoes and steak and hot cakes. We probably didn't have very much fresh fruit when I think of the amount of fresh fruit that we have available today. We had fruit during fruit season when there were apples and whatever else we raised, rhubarb and we had lots of raspberries, strawberries.

During the wintertime we had to rely on the canned fruit. Of course we had plenty of canned fruit. My mother also canned- we had chickens. She canned chickens. Let me think what else. I can't remember very much about what our lunch meals were especially during the summer time. I may have been gone a lot in the winter time because I was in school. Dinner again was a big meal. Usually beef, my dad prided himself in providing all the beef that we could eat, all the potatoes we could eat. That was important.

WG: What were- you mentioned the pond, did you have any other favorite places on the farm or the hills around where your farm is situated, ranch I mean?

BM: Well there was lone tree in the northeast corner of the property. The original 160 acres didn't have a lot of trees other than those that had been planted around the house. There's one tree that you can see today from the Rattlesnake. When I look at that tree, I have kind of a nostalgic feeling because that seemed to be a place where I could walk. I liked to be alone a lot of the time. That could be a place that I was not leaving the property, but still I could walk away and be alone. I always enjoyed being alone, being able to write poetry, being able to just look around and experience the feeling of spring. The feeling of the earth, the feeling of the land- by the land, I need to differentiate there. The smell of the earth but looking out over the land- I always enjoyed that.

WG: Did you ever walk like into the Rattlesnake?

BM: No I did not.

WG: Did your family or this might have been more of your father, hunt or trap or involved in those activities?

BM: He didn't trap, but he did a lot of hunting. He hunted back, which is now the Rattlesnake wilderness area, yes. He hunted and we have photographs of some of the elk that he was able to get back there in the mountains and haul out by horses.

WG: Would you eat those?

BM: Oh yes. We didn't waste anything.

WG: Where did you go to school?

BM: I went to Lowell Elementary School, which is on the west side of Missoula. I graduated from Missoula County High School.

WG: Can you describe what school was like for you? Was it small or were the class sizes and...

BM: Lowell Elementary School in those days, the class sizes as I recall were probably between 28, maybe 26 and 30. I don't remember any classes any larger than that. I have a good memory of the students that I went to school with because I went all eight years to the same school. When I started the University, which was later in life for me, I didn't start college until I was 38.

I had a real appreciation for my grade school teachers. I really felt like we had a Rachel Mitchell who was our English teacher back in fifth grade who taught me things that came forth again as I went through college. Russell Neil who was the principal of the school picked my interest in math. I remember getting A+++ in my eighth grade math. I loved math. Now I attribute that to the teacher. Janet Rathbun in fifth grade for- I remember her kindness. I remember her beautiful hands. I remember her willingness to listen to the children. I also remember one time when a boy hit her in the breast and I thought, "What a cruel, cruel thing to do to such a lovely woman."

WG: How did you get to school?

BM: When I was in grammar school, the lower grades in grammar school, we lived in the house that I mentioned on the west side of Missoula. So I walked. It was only a block and a half. After we bought the ranch and we did some commuting there mostly my parents drove us back and forth. I started driving, in fact I have to go back, I started driving when I was about four years old. So I drove all my life. I had an opportunity to- had the privilege of beginning to drive the family car myself when I was probably in seventh grade. I drove back and forth.

WG: Did you want to move up to the ranch when your family made that transition? Were you excited about it?

BM: Oh yes, yes.

WG: How often did your family go into town and what did you do there?

BM: We went to town almost every day during the school time. At other times, I don't recall going to town unless we needed to go to town for supplies or groceries or a piece of machinery equipment. We didn't unnecessarily go to town.

WG: What kinds of things did you like to do in Missoula? How do you remember Missoula in your childhood?

BM: Well one of the earliest memories I have of significance, maybe for this particular interview, we stood on the corner of, I think it was Shakespeare Street and Phillips Street on the west side and we watched Barnum and Bailey's Circus going by. They unloaded the circus cars and the animals at the Northern Pacific depot up on Railroad Street. Then in order to set up camp or set up the circus out west of town on the flats, they drove down Phillips Street. That was always a real delight.

They had the Barnum and Bailey Circus wagons and horses and elephants and everything that you can think of that were used in a circus. So that was a fun memory. Considering the part of town that we lived in at the time, it's very, very different than it is now. It was a working man's neighborhood, working class neighborhood. People raised lots of flowers, took much pride in keeping up their homes, painting them, keeping them in good shape, mowing the grass, but many people didn't have automobiles.

WG: Did you have any favorite stores that you liked to go into that was a special time for you coming into town?

BM: Well I always liked going into the Missoula Mercantile mainly because there was a variety of things there. Everything there from groceries to hardware to clothing, stylish clothing. I remember buying groceries over at a little store called The Warehouse Market, which was over in about the nine or ten hundred block on Third Street. That was early on. That probably predated World War II. We bought a lot of our groceries at the little neighborhood grocery stores. We had a Ray and May Grocery that was just about a block or half a block south of Lowell School.

Goughnour Grocery, which started in about the 800 block on Phillips Street and then later moved down to- I can't think of it. It's the cross street. It's the street that runs north and south. It's at the end of Lowell School. They were situated there for a while. Then they moved to a block west of that. That was Goughnour Grocery. So we bought a lot of our groceries at those two places. There were no supermarkets in Missoula. Super Save came into being somewhere around in the late Thirties. We did some shopping at Super Save, which was located about the 100 block on West Main Street.



They also had other locations around town. I can remember a time when they were on North Higgins Avenue and I can't remember where else. Stop and Shop was another little grocery store, a hometown owned grocery store, which was located on the corner of East Broadway and Pattee Street I believe. Then later it moved out to South Higgins. Then there was Safeway and I don't remember when Safeway came into being. That was kind of a celebration. It seemed like it was a pretty big store to be coming into Missoula.

WG: How did your family celebrate holidays? Do you remember any fond memories?

BM: Any holiday in particular?

WG: Any special memories you have about holidays?

BM: Well we celebrated Christmas. We didn't have Christmas tree lights. That was a disappointment as a child and our parents wouldn't let us use candles because- is there something else that you needed? They were too dangerous so we didn't have lights, but we had decorations and we exchanged gifts in our family, nothing elaborate. Nothing comparable to what is done today. We had very special Christmas programs at school, which I clearly remember enjoying singing the Christmas carols, et cetera.

Birthdays were celebrated. I don't remember anything particularly being done for Easter or Valentine's Day. Our parents would not let us go trick-or-treating for Halloween. My father didn't believe in his children going out and begging for anything. So we weren't allowed that experience. Although the other children in our district did go trick-or-treating. I remember one time going to somebody's house I was visiting some friends and as a visitor at my friend's house, we were able to go do some trick-or-treating. The woman invited us in and we had cider and donuts and it was a real party. It was fun. Fourth of July was a time to celebrate. Normally we went to our place at the lake for Fourth of July.

WG: What did you do up there?

BM: Oh we went swimming. We went boating. We didn't have fireworks. My parents did not want to take any chances of us burning anything down. So we didn't have fireworks. We enjoyed fireworks that other people had. Swimming, boating, fishing.

WG: Wonderful. Did you go to church growing up?

BM: Yes we did. We were members of Immanuel Lutheran Church, which the little building is still there. It's on the four or five hundred block on West Alder Street. We walked from wherever we- if we were at the ranch, it wasn't unusual for us to walk into church. When the weather was nice it was quite a distance. It also was only about, maybe a little over a mile from our house in town. We participated not only in church, but extra-curricular- or extra activities there. I can remember baking things and going to choir practice and et cetera.

WG: Do you remember any local festivities or traditions?

BM: Well I think one of the most important local festivities in those days was the rodeo at about the end of August or maybe it was Labor Day weekend. There was a big parade in Missoula and a rodeo. Perhaps that was- we didn't have a fair during the World War II if I remember correctly. The fairgrounds had burned- the grandstand had burned. So we had to- I can't remember the fair as being part of our lives. I do remember the rodeos. I think the rodeos must have been held out at the fairgrounds. Anyway, it was an important- back to your question, it was an important festivity for us.

WG: What was going on out there? Just the basic rodeo events?

BM: Carnival, all the rides, the rodeo, the horse races. There were concessions, but of course not nearly to the degree there are today.

WG: Kind of going back, I mean you mentioned putting up hay, working with some people, some friends, who were your neighbors?

BM: Well the Randolphs were our neighbors. The Randolph family and really that was the only neighbor we had there on that side of the hill.

WG: What do you remember- do you remember anything about the Randolphs?

BM: Yes I do. I remember Mrs. Randolph. I remember that she wasn't able to- let me back up. There was one thing I just mentioned yesterday. We had a guest here and there was a little- if you look on the fence out here, there's a little windmill like thing that my husband makes. They had one of those little windmill little things close to their house. That's what gave them an electric light.

They were able to tap that and have a light. That always intrigued me because we didn't have any contraption like that at our house. So we had to settle for gas lamps and kerosene lamps like the one there you see on the wall. Anyway, I remember Mrs. Randolph as sitting in her kitchen. The roof was low and she was a rather portly woman. She was always very loving and friendly towards me when I went to visit her, which wasn't often. We didn't have time to do a lot of neighboring. We did- we were on good terms with those people.

When I was married, which was in 1951, Mr. Randolph came riding up over the hill in his black suit and his hat and just as proud as could be and came in for our wedding. I do remember that. Their son William who lived at home all those years and greatly resembled his father, they were tall, lean kind of Abraham Lincoln looking men. They were gentlemen and both of them, both Mr. Randolph and William and good neighbors, friendly neighbors, helpful neighbors, but never getting in another's way. In other words, it was a privilege to have them come.

WG: So did you ever do any work with them or have to collaborate on anything?

BM: Not that I recall. Now that's not to say that my parents didn't collaborate with them. I didn't. I wasn't privileged to anything of that nature.

WG: So how have the North Hills changed since you were growing up?

BM: Well they haven't really changed a lot. I visited the Randolph ranch about five years ago. They had an open house up there one autumn. I walked over the hill. I came home over the hill this way. It was a long walk. I had forgotten how far it was. I couldn't see that there is very much change. I looked in one of the old buildings. I remember tears coming to my eyes as I looked and saw Mr. Randolph's suit hanging in that building. I thought, "Maybe that's the same suit he wore to our wedding."

WG: What about Missoula? How has Missoula changed?

BM: Dramatically. How has it changed? That's a hard and a very broad question. I can probably elaborate for a longer time than we have here today. It's become more impersonal. Of course it's- the environs are extended far beyond what I ever dreamed would happen. Say for example just here in the Rattlesnake, it's amazing to me that there is as much open space as there is up here considering the crowding elsewhere in Missoula. Say for example what I'm referring to are those little tiny houses that are built out there by the airport. We've been very lucky here in the Rattlesnake that we've had strict zoning laws and they've been adhered to.

Oh what else can I say? How has Missoula changed? Traffic is- I told you I started driving when I was very, very young. I suppose when I began driving alone with no one in the car with me, I remember getting a driver's license without any exam at all when I was around 13 or 14, however old you had to have a driver's license in those days. It was no problem. You went in and applied and got it. I began driving alone at an age when I wouldn't consider allowing our children or even wanting any child to be driving at that age just simply because of the speed and the lack of courtesy in driving. I remember if I got into a tough spot, I remember a wheel came off my car one time over on North Stoddard Street as I was driving down from the ranch to our town house.

Someone was right there to help me. I didn't have a cell phone. I didn't have to ask for help. Someone was right there to help me. If I had tire trouble or car trouble, one didn't have to ask for help. Someone always came along and helped. After you leave I'll probably think of many ways I could answer this question better than what I'm doing right now. How has Missoula changed? I'll let that suffice for now.

WG: Great so how- did your childhood affect what you ended up doing as an adult? Did it affect your career or the fact that you stayed in Missoula?

BM: Well I think we were all very tied to Missoula in our family. Maybe that had to do with my parents' appreciation of Missoula, especially my father, who had been everywhere so to speak and chose Missoula and let those reasons be known to us as children. I can't say that the experience of my childhood affected my professional career, which was mental health. I can't see any connection, yet there was an evolution definitely. I didn't just one day wake up and say, "I'm going to be a psychotherapist." So there was an evolution and I guess it would take me some time to really honestly go back and track that.

WG: Why did your father love Missoula so much?

BM: I can't answer that completely of course. In retrospect I think perhaps it had more to do with Missoula or western Montana being similar to Norway. It's not as similar as the Seattle area is of course with all the lakes and the fjords and the rain and the high mountains and the damp weather. The mountains are here. I can remember my father never wanted to go to Glacier Park. He said, "I don't have to go to Glacier Park. I can see everything I need to see right here." The mountains and the trees, the greenery, hay fields, and the lushness of the grass growing. Grass meant, in those days, meant grass that the cows could eat. In other words, grazing grass, not lawns, although we did have a nice lawn at the ranch. He just- I guess he traveled all he wanted to and it was time in his life to settle down and live in a beautiful place.

WG: I guess now I'd just like to ask you about- do you have any specific stories or memories, anecdotes that you would maybe talk about if you were telling someone something about your childhood? Anything specifically you remember or any stories that were told to you by your parents? Anything like that?

BM: I'd have to think about that because my father was a great storyteller. He loved to tell stories. Nothing comes to mind right now. We talked a lot. We sang a lot. Any time we got in the car, we sang. My father was a strict disciplinarian. I'm sure some of the things that he told us were ways of legitimizing however, whatever punishment he was meting out to us. I can't recall anything in particular right now.

WG: Okay well thank you very much.

BM: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]