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Interviewee: Phyllis Baird

Interviewer: Diane Sands

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Project: Illegal Abortion in Montana Oral History Project

Diane Sands: This is Diane Sands interviewing Phyllis Baird, whatever the date may be here, March 1983. Okay, why don't we start, Phyllis Baird, by...Why don't you just go ahead and tell me what it is that you and your daughter were talking about, about your experiences with illegal abortion and other people in your family?

Phyllis Baird: Well the only thing that, when I was pregnant with our second daughter, we'd been living here at Milltown. We moved to Lincoln and then we went into Helena where I was going to have more medical attention and she-the next baby would be delivered there. So the woman that I knew in Lincoln had told me to go to Doctor Berg, to his clinic. I went to him and I always thought it was very odd there because here were all of these women, but you never saw any pregnant women. Or you never saw any children. I never thought much about it, I was very young.

Finally I made a couple visits to him then we moved to Helena and our landlady wanted to know which doctor I was going to. I told her and she got this funny look on her face and she said, "Well, do you want me to really talk to you about it?" and I said "Sure." She said, "He does abortions, and he does take pregnancies, deliveries like this every once and a while as sort of a cover-up." Well I just quit, I never went back to him. But that was my only experience with this, that particular one, but I knew lots of people who had abortions. They went to different doctors. I know one woman that had one and some kind of a butcher; she wound up in the hospital in an awful mess. I really don't know the details of that, but then there were others that went to Roundup. Of course in those days, people—this is when I was very young—people didn't give you any details who they went to or what. But I know those two in particular, one wound up very sick, the other one didn't. The one that was so sick could never become pregnant when she was married, so I suppose somewhere it was really a butcher job. I could get more details on her but I never, I just never ever asked her.

DS: Well let's go back and start at the beginning of that. What was Dr. Berg's first name, do you have any idea?

PB: See I just don't even remember.

DS: That was Great Falls?

PB: No, it was in Helena. I could even go to his clinic, I couldn't tell you the street number but I could go to his...

DS: About what year was that?

PB: It was in Carroll, the one I was pregnant with, was born in '38 so it was in '37.

DS: What did you think of him as a physician when you went?

PB: I liked him very much. He was sort of sandy-haired with the name Berg, you know what it would be like, very nice, very good, examined me well and I think back through the years because I had five kids but he was very good. But it was very strange, it was a strange place. They had all these beds and all these sort of little cubicles, all sorts of things. It was just entirely different and it wasn't-generally in a doctor's office you'd see anything and everything and I was too young to really stop and think about it. I was about twenty-one I guess, I was about twenty.

DS: Did it cross your mind at the time that there weren't any pregnant women there?

PB: Well I thought it was very strange, and there weren't any men, you know what I mean? No kids. I thought it was sort of strange, but who knows who comes on what day.

DS: What was the situation there like, was it a regular clinic or part of a hospital or private building?

PB: No, it was just like, it was a one-story building and it was sort of on a side street there in Helena, not too big of a building. But you went in and there was a reception, you know, receptionist. There were nurses, quite a few nurses, and just Dr. Berg.

DS: You moved so you quit going to him?

PB: Well, we'd been living out there at Lincoln. When I came to town then we started renting from these people, and then that's when I found out what he did, really this is what he did.

DS: Did you ask this woman who told you how she knew that?

PB: It was common knowledge.

DS: What was your reaction when she told you?

PB: She said as far as she knew he was very good delivering babies but I thought well, if he was doing the other then that's what he should be doing. I thought 'well I don't need him.' That was my reaction.

DS: So you switched doctors, did you let him know why you were switching?

PB: I just never went back. I'd been paying for each visit; I just never went back. I suppose maybe he'd probably had this before. That was the only time I was ever in a place like that that were so definitely-and I know at home there were different doctors that performed abortions.

DS: In Lewistown?

PB: Yes. Dr. Wallin did.

DS: Wallin?

PB: W-a-l-l-i-n. All I know is what people told me and I think there was Dr. Deal that did. This was back; it must've been in the thirties because those men were quite old then, of course, when you're real young they look older.

DS: So you were probably a teenager at the time or in high school when you were hearing about this?

PB: Well, yeah. There was a woman that lived down on 4th Avenue in Lewistown and it was common knowledge, that's all she did. She did these abortions.

DS: Was she a doctor or a nurse?

PB: No, no. She might have had some nurse's training but she was not a doctor.

DS: Do you remember her name at all?

PB: I can see her as plain as anything...and she married a fellow named-why I remember all this, he was in my age group and he was going with a friend of mine and she was just broken up. He married this woman old enough to be his mother and she had quit this as she'd gotten older and he married her. Isn't it funny I see these people in my mind? But her name was, like I say if I'd known all this I could've gotten these things at home, the names, her name was...

DS: Why don't you think about it and you can write it to me if it comes to you later on. How did you know that information when you were a teenager? Did people talk about it?

PB: Kids talked about it, oh sure.

DS: Any of the girls that you knew in school go to them?

PB: There is one girl, well the girl I'm talking about that her boyfriend quit and married the woman, I always, I never knew but I always imagined it was his child and she went to have this abortion and then anyway he got mixed up with this woman and abandoned....but kids talked

about it. We didn't talk as free as people do now but we still, there was a lot of freedom in our talk.

DS: What do you think the view was among your circle of friends of girls who got pregnant or had an abortion?

PB: We didn't think much about it, I mean this wasn't the thing you did. You knew some of the girls were sleeping around and of course the boys were talk, talk, talk or not but there were some of the girls and there was much more rigid and cold than there is now. As far as we were concerned, it's a small town, I was raised on a ranch and most of my friends were ranch kids and of course I had a lot of friends in town but the bunch that we ran around with, really this just wasn't done. You knew some of the kids were but it still wasn't the thing that you were supposed to be doing. Like I say we knew that, I can't remember exactly any instances, how we did know this but it was discussed. I suppose somebody knew from somebody and so on, you know how that goes.

DS: When you married, was that in Lewistown?

PB: Yeah.

DS: Among your women who were friends of yours like young married women, was that information also discussed?

PB: Yeah, of course I've never been...some of the women would tell most intimate details of the married life; I've never been like that. But things were discussed, oh yes, about the miscarriages or about the different things about your abortions and so on. Although I don't think there were as many, well again you didn't know as much about it. I think people were much more hesitant to talk about it than they are now.

DS: Do you remember instances of women if conversations discussing birth control at all?

PB: Oh yes, that was a very vital thing.

DS: What were the discussions like?

PB: Well there wasn't much. There weren't very many things, like I told Karen I said there were rubbers, I don't know what they call them now and the diaphragms came later but when we were first, well after Karen was born, we were at Fort Peck and you know it's been so long ago but I know it wasn't in Nashua, but there was a doctor there in one of those little towns around Fort Peck, you're familiar with that...?

DS: I graduated from Frasier so yeah.

PB: So you know all about it but there used to be funny little towns.

DS: New Deal and Wheeler and those towns.

PB: Oh yeah and we lived right near Wheeler but where we went to the doctor my husband might remember. I wanted a birth control method. This is why I was interested in reading lately about this sponge. This old doctor as I remember for how old he was, I was young yet, but he gave me this sponge and it was about so big around and it had this string on it and then he gave me...

DS: So it was only about an inch, inch and a half around?

PB: Oh about like that and he gave me some kind of a cream to use on that. Then we moved home, back to Lewistown-couldn't buy the cream.

DS: Just wasn't available?

PB: Just wasn't available. Now whether he gave me that from his office or whether there was a prescription for it I have no idea. I never did, because when you're young like that, nobody else had ever heard of such a thing and I hadn't either until I read this article the other day. Then they were using diaphragms. Then along about, well before this we were over here at Missoula when we were up here at Milltown and Bob's old aunt, she must be about a hundred now if she'd be alive, told me what they use, that he put Vaseline on the end of his penis. Now they never had children but I have always thought that one of them was sterile, must've been. We always wondered, we younger nieces with our husbands, we always wondered what would happen if they got Vick's.

I can't understand where this would work but that was what Aunt Gertie always said that they used but I figured one of them was sterile. I know they used a withdrawal method, I can remember hearing the women talk about that. But there wasn't anything really.

DS: Was there any kind of consensus you think about what was the best technique to use? Did most women talk about using withdrawal or rhythm or something like that?

PB: Well I was thinking they had a rhythm. I'd never heard of that until later years, as far as where I was. The guys used the safe and they used the withdrawal and that was about it until eventually this diaphragm came out and that's been around I think for quite a while.

DS: In those discussions, was there a discussion of-was there agreement between husbands and wives about how many children they were going to have and how they were going to do that or did it end up being one sex's responsibility more than another?

PB: Well I think the men generally blamed the women for getting pregnant, this was always the feeling, well if you'd take care of yourself you know, as far as I could ever figure out from what I could see, that's the way it was. Some people just never had many kids and some just never could quit. I don't think there's even, like I say I was in a small area and I, well I don't know I think I was as advanced as most of them but there just didn't seem to be anything. You either had the kids or you didn't have them and that was it.

DS: What did the other doctors you went to say about what you could use, or did you talk to doctors about it?

PB: Oh yeah, I was always trying, I had five babies and I was always trying not to get pregnant. I know I was fitted with a diaphragm and I think I used that a lot. I do know they'd tell that if you nursed your babies you weren't as apt to get pregnant which I believe. I don't think, if they knew it they certainly weren't passing it out. I know that finally we had the five kids in seven and a half years. When the last we had the three girls and then I had one boy and when he was five months old I weaned him and I immediately got pregnant. I was using this diaphragm, but I understand now, of course I was tipped, my uterus was tipped and some way or the other so evidently things weren't working. The doctor told me then, "You could kill yourself having babies," and he said, "There's one thing to do, your husband's going to have to have an operation." I said "Well what about me?" because I figured there was going to be a problem with that one and he said, "Well you could be pregnant again by the time you have this baby before you could have your operation." But there was no argument and my husband had the operation. From what I knew there was just no other way.

DS: So he didn't object to it at all?

PB: No, he felt we had enough kids too. But this doctor I know was Catholic and of course he said "I'm not supposed to be doing any of this." This child at that time is thirty-nine so that's been a long time ago and he said, "I can't do anything about it," but this other doctor would do the operation. They actually, because I had different doctors through those years, they actually didn't know. I don't think they honestly knew.

DS: Were there any folk stories or something like that other than what a doctor would give you that people used or talked about to prevent having kids?

PB: No I don't...oh there was a, I can't think of this, I know there was a lot about having babies but I mean as far as not...

DS: How did you decide how many kids you wanted to have? Did you and your husband talk about that when you were first married?

PB: I don't think we ever did. He wasn't used to kids, I don't think he particularly cared whether there was any or not but I just figured you just had kids you know. I can't ever remember really any discussion. We knew they were coming way to fast but they couldn't turn off.

DS: What did you was the ideal spacing between kids?

PB: You know I don't think I ever thought about that. Of course I believe they should be close. I don't like, I see kids scattered out, you might as have them if you're going to have a family you should have them. I don't care when or what, they should be close together so they are company for each other. I noticed with Misch (?) right now, she's sort of resentful of that little...and I think that if they're quite close it's better for all of them.

DS: You said a little bit ago that your children were coming too close together.

PB: Well the last two were only fifteen months apart. Karen was nineteen months older than Carol, then Bobby, the third girl, she was about two years between her and the other way, and then the two boys were only fifteen months apart. So there was like I say five of them in seven and a half years and that's pretty fast babies.

DS: So it's hard on you.

PB: Yeah. I was down to ninety-eight pounds.

DS: Really? So about how much, how did it affect you to have that many kids in that time period?

PB: I nursed them all and I nursed them nine to ten months, all of them except I got to the fourth one who was a boy and the doctor said "You are so thin you must wean him at five months, you can't nurse him." Well then I had the fifth one and he'd only let me nurse him to three months because I had milk you can't believe but there was nothing to me. I was just some hide and bones and a hank of hair.

DS: How much did you start off weighing?

PB: One hundred twenty, when I got married I was one hundred twenty pounds. But it wears you down because I didn't have an automatic washer; you know you had none of this. I had a washing machine after about the third one, we finally got a washing machine but everything was done, you know things weren't easy. We lived in town, I had water and a washing machine but it wasn't like it is now, throw your things in and out because I had to hang clothes on the line. We raised a big garden and I always did all the canning and I made the kid's clothes, everything.

DS: Were you concerned about your health?

PB: Well, of course I've always been tough as...No, I can't remember being concerned about it. I was terribly sick when I was pregnant with the last baby. I had serosyphilis (?). Do you know what that is?

DS: I don't think I know that one.

PB: Well it's a skin disease. Well it isn't a skin disease, it starts on the skin. I had measles, I was pregnant with him. The kids all had measles and he was born in March. About Christmas time I got the measles but the kids, I'd had them I don't know how many times. Well then I was getting over that and I developed serosyphilis (?) and I was desperately sick, I almost died. I had a temperature of like a hundred and four and they thought I would probably miscarry. I had started to miscarry, I had labor pains. The doctor came in and gave me shots and it quit. Serosyphilis is something pigs get you know. They asked me what pork, if I'd been handling pork. I probably had, who knows. But it started out with a pimple, where was it...It was on my nose! I knew then, my dad came, he'd had it a couple years before and he came to town that day and I was in bed and he said, "You have serosyphilis." Well we had to call in to the doctor because it was in the war years and we had a couple doctors.

The doctor came and he came in and I remember he said, "For God's sake, what did you do?" By then my face was all swollen and I just had slits for eyes and they hauled me to the hospital and started this thing. Anyway they had a bunch of student nurses and they had lessons on me. Of course they didn't come touch me or anything but they had lessons on me because you don't see this very often. I found out afterwards when I got out of the hospital finally, every two weeks I had to go to the doctor. Then after the baby was born, which was a couple months, I had to take him and then the doctor told me afterwards, "You're the only woman that has ever lived through serosyphilis pregnant." And the baby to be alright, very, very, bright fellow but he said I couldn't tell you because, I'd keep saying "Will the baby be all right?" and he told me afterwards "I didn't know because nobody had ever lived through it before." So we didn't know.

DS: That's incredible.

PB: Yeah, but I was fundamentally strong or I wouldn't have lived through it because I was in a rundown condition with all the babies, but it didn't take me long to build up.

DS: What kind of concern was there among, say women you talked to about possibly dying in childbirth?

PB: Well frankly I don't remember because I never knew anyone that did die in childbirth.

DS: What about having infants die? Was that very common during that period?

PB: No.

DS: This was before antibiotics.

PB: My mother had nine of us, she never had a miscarriage.

DS: Really? From a healthy line there...

PB: Evidently. I can't remember, in all my dad's family there was lots of them and I can't remember if any of those women...let me think, of any of those aunts, and momma had one sister and none of them ever lost babies that I know of. My mother had a little brother die, of course that was a hundred years ago. I can't remember anybody; there was a woman in the hospital when I had one of the kids that lost her baby. She had her baby the same day I had mine and her baby died, I never did know what went wrong. Of course this was a farming community and your nutrition was good. You might work like a horse and whatnot but really nutrition is good.

DS: And there's a little more isolation so there are a lot of diseases that just...

PB: That we just never had. I just can't think of anybody that lost their-oh I'll take that back. One of my sisters lost a baby, never did know what happened. It was stillborn. Perfect little boy.

DS: How did she deal with that?

PB: Took her quite a while. She had one little girl. Let's see, this must've been, well that child was born in '38, it would've been the age of one of my kids. I never did know, I don't know if they ever told them, it just was stillborn. It took her quite a while to get over it; she eventually had another child in a couple years, one more boy. Now they go into it a lot more to find out what is wrong or what caused this but then it just was dead.

DS: Did your sister talk about it a lot or was it a source of conversation?

PB: Oh yes. I went out and bought the clothes for it and then she had a whole layette but she wanted a white dress to bury it in and I don't remember if she gave that away. She grieved for it and she still does, talks about this baby. That's been a long time ago, I can't think of any of the rest of them. Let's see, I had one sister, my oldest sister was forty-two and she'd always talk when she started having her family and her oldest daughter took seventy-two hours to be born, and finally they took the baby.

DS: They did a cesarean?

PB: No they just took it.

DS: Oh they did? What did they do, do you know?

PB: Used instruments.

DS: And cut it up and removed it that way?

PB: No the baby lived, in fact she's the county superintendent of schools.

DS: It was a forceps thing?

PB: Yeah.

DS: That's an incredibly long labor.

PB: I know; I was there with her. It was harder-I'd rather have got on there and had the baby myself. She was completely out of her head but we had sort of this old-well he was supposed to be the baby specialist in town but I don't think he was that great and she'd been in labor and in labor, my husband was even up there. We were with her husband and the three of us would take turns with her and they moved the bed clear down against the wall so it didn't pull and we'd stand and pull on her hands, can you imagine that? And she would say, "Mellodita." Well I didn't know what that was but she'd married-well the fellow I'm talking about was a cousin of this aunt Heselic (?). That's Croatian for little baby. My sister said that in this being out of her head, she'd take the teakettle off in my house and there was a baby's head in there. She was completely out of her head and finally my husband told her husband, "If you don't do something, I'm going to." About that time this old doctor came back that was in practice with the one that was taking care of her and immediately they used instruments and took the baby.

DS: When I was asking you earlier about folk tales you said you knew some where there's some sort of common sense things floating around the community about what you did or didn't do that related to having babies.

PB: You mean like...

DS: Things you should eat or not eat or things you should do or not do.

PB: You shouldn't hang clothes on a line because that would wrap the cord around the baby's neck; that was one thing. I remember people used to get after you about that. Of course it didn't matter how hard you worked but there were things you weren't supposed to eat. You weren't supposed to see anything; that would mark the baby.

DS: See anything, what's anything?

PB: Well if you looked at, my brother in law got his thumb twisted off in a funny farm accident and I looked at it and his grandmother, my husband's grandmother too, said "You're going to mark your baby." Well when she was born—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

DS: So she had a birth mark on her wrist, that's funny.

PB: Yeah just a red mark on her wrist and grandma looked at that and she never did say a word. She was seventy-five or so but she'd sit there and look at that baby's wrist like "I told you so." Well I told this to this old Dr. Addis, who was just a fun old doctor, just a very good doctor. I was telling him this one time and he said, "Well you know, I don't know if I believe that about marking babies, I know you're not supposed to be able to." But he said at one time they were in some city, he and his wife, the wife was pregnant and there was a fire in the theater. He said of course we got out and everything was fine but he said always that child, they of course lived in Lewistown, any time there was fire engine or anything else that kid was right on the trail of that fire. He said, "I don't know if you mark them or not." But I'd always heard that you mustn't look at anything or you would mark them.

DS: What were you supposed to eat or not eat?

PB: Well you supposed to eat just a good diet, meat and potatoes and vegetables and milk and eggs and this sort of thing.

DS: Were there some things you weren't supposed to eat?

PB: Can't remember anything because I always, I never was really told to watch my weight because the older doctors didn't seem to care how much you gained. By the time I got to this younger doctor when I had the two boys that took care of me I was so thin anyway, "eat anything you want."

DS: Please do.

PB: When the third girl, I had this doctor I'm talking about, Dr. Weldon that I didn't think much, I had him and he kept telling me "Eat, eat, you're so thin." The baby weighed nine pounds, six ounces, and that's why you don't eat is to keep the baby small. And I was, I was nothing but a pumpkin.

DS: That's a real big baby.

PB: Nine pounds, six ounces, that's lots of baby, and she's the smallest of the kids. They seem to...not much concern about what you eat. They hadn't gone into nutrition like they do now.

DS: I guess that's true. But there are lots of little folk tales in some areas about what you can eat and not eat. Going back to this other illegal abortion situation, the Roundup situation, do you have any remembrances of...?

PB: No. There was some doctor that did it down there.

DS: And this would be in the thirties too?

PB: Let me think. Yeah it would've been the early thirties. I supposed they were stuck around and what they charged, it seems to me this woman I'm talking about as I remember she charged seventy-five dollars, which was a terrible lot of money.

DS: Right, in the Depression.

PB: But I understood Berg, they told me, I used to hear different tales, you know how this many years ago you forget, but he got terrific prices. He got a couple hundred, again this is back in '37, '38 but they said people came to him from all over. He wasn't just sort of a local one, they came to him from all over.

DS: Can you tell us more about the woman who went to the Roundup abortionist? That was a woman doctor?

PB: No I understood it was a male doctor.

DS: And Dr. Berg is a man?

PB: Yes. I think if he'd walk in I'd...because, I don't know, there was just something about him that you was the sort of person that you'd notice, but isn't that funny that I couldn't even tell you his name.

DS: So what was it that you heard about the Roundup abortion situation?

PB: Well I know this woman that left her, of course I think any time when you interrupt a pregnancy, I don't know even how far along she was, but I can remember she drug along all spring. She had it at Christmas time, she was a teacher, and she had the abortion and Christmas time. I can remember yet, I didn't realize at the time, I was probably fourteen, I didn't realize at the time what the problem was but she drug along all spring. Of course I think they used to do a lot of butchering on them, but she went on and had a family.

DS: She was unmarried at this time?

PB: Yes, but she went on and had a family. Well that was my oldest sister and that was just, I didn't know for a long time, you know when you're fourteen, lots of things you don't realize.

DS: Did the rest of the family know what was going on?

PB: I have no idea. She was teaching a home school there and she was living at home and I can remember yet how sick she was, I was thinking 'I wish she'd get over that flu or what else she had' you know when you're fourteen. I know my sister just older than I am, she's the one that I finally found out, got this squared away, but whether the folks knew I have no idea because you just...

DS: Didn't talk about it?

PB: My goodness in my house you didn't even talk about somebody being pregnant, even if they were married and neighbors, mom and you just didn't talk about anybody being pregnant.

DS: Why was that do you think?

PB: Well Daddy was much more open. Momma was from the South and I don't think they ever talked about this kind of stuff. We didn't even see the older girls, there were nine of us in the family, and the older girls were not allowed to undress in front of us younger kids or anything because nobody...you just didn't do this. In fact we didn't even call a bull a bull, you didn't say those words, and you didn't a boar. I guess we did say rooster.

DS: So what did you call a bull?

PB: Well it happened that they had bought one from somebody and the lady's name was Florence. My dad had quite a sense of humor and he always called that bull Florence. So we always called them Florence cows. I don't know how old I was when I found out there was a bull involved, probably when I took-you used to take agriculture in grade school and probably I found that out when I got into that, I don't know.

DS: So there was this real reticence to talk about anything having to do with sexuality or reproduction?

PB: Oh yes.

DS: How did young girls, say when you were a young girl, how did you learn about menstruation?

PB: Well from the older girls; from my sisters.

DS: Even though you weren't supposed to talk about it?

PB: Yeah, well you just can't help in a family of six girls and no bathrooms or not much privacy you find out. I can remember I had one sister who went away and became a nurse. By then I was beginning to wonder, I think I was a little slow developing, I never had a period until I was fourteen, and I finally decided I wondered how babies...well I knew how babies were conceived

but how did they get born, I couldn't figure this thing out because you didn't-and I wrote to my sister who was a nurse and I've bawled her out ever since. She wrote back and she sent the letter to Momma explaining it all and then Momma passed it on to me, but I always did bawl my sister out. I said, "You at least could've written to me!" because Momma could not talk about this and so on and so forth and so my sister wrote, but how the other kids in the family found out about it I don't know.

DS: So your mother gave you the letter?

PB: Yeah she gave me the letter that Shirley sent to her to give to me, to approve it like and I guess momma didn't know what else to do but give it to me.

DS: Was she embarrassed to give you the letter?

PB: I remember she was quite embarrassed. But I wondered about this stuff and I figured Shirley being a nurse would, you know, they should and I guess they do give you quite a bit of training now but actually they didn't tell you anything. And my young friends certainly didn't know any more than I knew. So I don't know we probably wore the letter out, I don't know.

DS: Do you think you got good information say about menstruation then from your sisters? What did they really know?

PB: Well then somebody got me a book. It was put out by Kotex I think, Anna Mae's, or somebody's twelfth birthday or something, did you ever see that little pamphlet?

DS: I've seen versions of them, yes.

PB: Well that was pretty good and then Shirley just went into basic, I suppose like she was getting in school and so I'm the one that took care of it, that's all I needed to know and I couldn't figure though how the baby got out, I just couldn't figure this thing out but she explained how things work so that took care of it. But there wasn't really any knowledge.

DS: So do you think when people got married it was expected that neither of them would know anything about sex?

PB: I think there was an awful lot of that. I really think there was a lot of that. In fact in our circle and friends, and none of us were young, this one guy, I mean this is what we're talking about is-he was, this is just not, well he's been dead several years now but he asked the fellows, they all hunted together and so on, what it felt like when a woman had an orgasm. Now here he was at his age, their age, so you see still even ten years ago, this is probably ten years ago he asked this. So you see there was still-and I think there's a lot of them won't ask.

DS: Lack of information.

PB: Yeah. Now along in this, we had no information but there are still segments of people that don't have this information because we have this third daughter who lives in New York City and she has this very good friend, this Puerto Rican girl that they talk together and so on. When we go there we always go to Zuma's for dinner. It's quite an occasion too, to mix these cultures it's really interesting. Anyway two years ago when we were there, Zuma's husband who was, well I suppose they're getting towards forty now but he must've been around thirty-six. We went over there to his daughter's sort of coming out party, which is a big occasion, she was sixteen, and we got there early so we could visit. We hadn't seen them yet on this trip, and so we got there early and my husband didn't, he didn't feel good and he didn't go, so Bobby and I went over there and we sat down in the living room. Jimmy, that's the husband, has always been sort of a nut anyway but he's sort of a nice nut but anyway he came over and Zuma and Bobby were sitting there and he said to me, "Now you're older," and he said, "I need some information," and I said, "Information?" and he said, "Well nobody will talk to me, nobody will tell me anything." He said "Now like when you get to your age, have you had a change of life?" and I said, "Yes," he said, "Can you still have sex?" and that's about when Bobby Jo and Zuma disappeared, they were embarrassed to death. He said, "Nobody will tell me," he said, "Can you do anything, can you and your husband?" and I said, "Well certainly." He said, "I just want to know because nobody will talk to me."

I found out afterwards that Puerto Ricans are the worst people in the world (as far as talking about sex); they will not talk about anything. So the two girls, they disappeared, they were embarrassed to death but I gave Jimmy a sex lesson anyway if you know what I mean, talked to him. But here you are in this day and age, he couldn't find out anything and he was curious. He'd tried the Puerto Ricans and nobody would talk to him so I looked like a likely customer. So I think well, there's sure a lack of knowledge now too.

DS: What effect to you think that lack of being able to talk about it has had?

PB: On me?

DS: On say your generation or other generations?

PB: Well like I say, here's this one couple where I know they had sort of an unhappy sex life because nobody knew what the other one wanted or anything about it. I don't know, we were all raised up more or less with this 'hush, hush' thing. Some people overcame it and some didn't. If they'd had instruction in school they'd have known it and I think it would've helped, I really do.

DS: So it's 'hush, hush' outside the family but it's also you can't talk about it between husbands and wives?

PB: Yes, this is what I have seen in quite a few instances. Not as pronounced as this one particular case that I know of but I know quite a few of the couples that are my age that have had a lot of problems just because they were told that nice people don't do this I guess. So they couldn't overcome it and I think it has made a lot of trouble. I think we do need education-sex education, I have always felt we needed it.

DS: What effect do you think the change in abortion laws has had on young women?

PB: I think it's given them a lot of freedom and I think it's fine. I think that's anybody's choice, it should be anybody's choice. Whether I could've done it or not I have no idea, because I'm not in that situation now.

DS: Did you ever consider it at the time?

PB: That last one, when I was pregnant with him, I thought 'I can't stand this,' more spilt milk and feeling miserable but then when I stopped and thought about it I thought 'I can tend one more.' Actually not seriously consider it because there was so much danger then, and you know there was a high risk and I knew this. It was quite a thing, at that time I don't think there was anybody in town that was really doing it.

DS: If you had decided at the time, what influence did it have that you didn't know anyone that was doing it, or did you know someone?

PB: I don't think there was anybody in Lewistown at that time. The old doctor that had been, they had died, there was two of them but they had died long through that time. I don't know.

DS: How would you have gone about finding an abortionist had you been interested in one?

PB: Well I knew there were different people-women that did go, every once and a while they would go have an abortion, so it wouldn't have been any problem to have found out. Well when I said I considered the thing I knew how sick sometimes they would get and I knew the things that could happen to you and it wasn't worth the risk.

DS: What did you think could happen to you?

PB: Well I'd seen some of them that were so sick and they would get infection, and it seemed to take them...again this old doctor Addis that I'm talking about, he always said that one abortion was worse than ten babies. That was his theory and I believe him.

DS: Did he say that to you, or you had heard from someone else?

PB: He told my mother that; he told me that.

DS: Under what circumstances did he tell you that?

PB: In talking to him I-well he took care of my mother and she was down at my house and was sick. He came down there and I had all these little kids and mom had had nine kids and I know he came in there and he said, "What are you trying to do, keep up with your mother?" and I said, "No, not really," and we talked then about abortion. He said, "Well I'll tell you this, one abortion is worse than having ten babies anytime." He said, "You can have a baby and be over it a lot quicker." Probably it might've been when I was pregnant with one of the kids that this conversation took place because he was asking if maybe I was even pregnant; he wanted to know if I was keeping up with momma.

DS: What did he say the complications were?

PB: I don't think we went into that. But it's against nature because I think they used to let them go a long time instead of getting it-you know there's certain times now the way I understand it that they can do it with practically no risk. But it used to be my gosh they'd be very pregnant and they would do this and of course it would be completely-it would upset them and I suppose their methods weren't the same as they are now, I don't know.

DS: Do you know anything about the methods at the time?

PB: Well they used to go up in there and they would puncture, the way I understood it, they would take a needle, use a needle.

DS: Is that what happened to your sister?

PB: I don't know.

DS: So you and she have never discussed it?

PB: No sir, never. She just-with this one sister of mine, who through her...and I could ask, she lives in California, she would know-tell me.

DS: But those two sisters did talk about it?

PB: Yes.

DS: Do you think the sister who had the abortion talked to her husband about it at a later point when she married?

PB: I would doubt it. He was Croatian, old country Croatian. Marion was a very good man but I have an idea she never told him, I don't know. That's sort of interesting to think.

DS: It strikes me as quite a burden to carry that kind of information around and have no one to talk to about it.

PB: Unless she talked to my sister. Yes, she would need someone. Well this sister I have that's a nurse in California, she talked about this old maid school teacher that came in that was pregnant...you know syrup buckets, how they had a bail on them, remember the soap buckets? They brought her in there, this was down in San Diego, where she was, and they brought this woman in here and she was pregnant and she had tried to abort herself with a bail off of a syrup bucket and it got caught in there. Can you imagine that? The woman was desperate and she swore up and down she-and they told her of course she was pregnant. Shirley said when she left she was swearing up and down and she didn't know how she could've got pregnant. Now this was probably forty years ago.

DS: Did you hear of any women who had tried to abort themselves or was there any talk about that?

PB: Yes, yes I've heard talk about that, the different things they would do. They would actually jump off of things, there was some kind of tea or something they'd drink quinine that they used. They would do all sorts of things, they would ride horse back, now whether it worked I don't know. I could've jumped off of something and broke my leg I think and that would've been it.

DS: Had a broken leg and be pregnant.

PB: Yeah a broken leg. But they used to, like I say quinine was something they used and I'd forgotten about that.

DS: Any of your friends to your knowledge try to self-abort themselves?

PB: Not that I know of. This one gal went to this woman but I can't remember-if they did they didn't tell me. I might think of some later but I sure can't think of anything now.

DS: Is there anything else you want to say on this whole topic? It's kind of a wide-ranging discussion...

PB: Well I sure think they need sex education and I'd like to see this abortion law because I think people ought to have a choice. I think that they ought to have more birth control methods freer for people, the knowledge, and pass it on to...I don't believe in having to report to the parents that the kids want birth control. I do not believe in that and I don't think there will be any more of it than there is with them having to tell, I just can't see it. Watching people with kids, I still they ought to have freedom because they're growing up faster than they used to and I don't think its going to make them any worse than they've ever been and I think that they

should have that freedom. I don't believe they should have to tell their parents unless they want to, I really don't.

DS: Great. Well thank you, Phyllis.

PB: Yeah.

[End of Interview]