

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: 389-007
Interviewee: Valerie Clubb
Interviewer: Dawn Walsh
Date of Interview: April 8, 2000
Project: Missoula Women for Peace Oral History Project

Dawn Walsh: Hello, Valerie.

Valerie Clubb: Hello.

Dawn Walsh: I'd like to start out the interview by asking you some basic background information about yourself, such as when and where you were born.

Valerie Clubb: In Norton, Kansas in 1928.

Dawn Walsh: And then, how long did you live in Kansas?

Valerie Clubb: Oh, most of my childhood. I moved around from place to place in Kansas and Oklahoma and Texas and Illinois, that part of the country where oil refiners were. For a short time, I lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Bartlesville, Oklahoma and went to college in Lawrence, Kansas and also in Eugene, Oregon. That's pretty much where I lived when I was younger.

Dawn Walsh: So what was it like for you to move around?

Valerie Clubb: It was all right because I did have a stable family that moved around with me. I did become, and I am still somewhat of a loner because of going to new schools and not knowing people. But that was fine, and still is fine.

Dawn Walsh: So you said that you had a—what was the word, a strong family?

Valerie Clubb: Yes, a mother and father and a younger sister.

Dawn Walsh: And so, as you were growing up and moving with your family was peace an issue for your family? Were you involved in any—was your parents involved in any activism type of work or conversations? Was this part of your growing up?

Valerie Clubb: No, it wasn't. My father barely missed the draft for World War I, and he barely missed it for World War II. He was just of an in-between age then. For World War II, he was working in the oil industry, which was a bit of an exemption, and he had two children, which was another exemption, and then World War II was over.

Dawn Walsh: So were you ever aware of World War II, how old were you?

Valerie Clubb: I was. Let's see...I was young, but...toward the end...yes, I was old enough to be aware of it. I had an uncle who was in the War and in the South Pacific and survived. My husband—I didn't know him at the time—he was in the War in the South Pacific and shot extensively and survived—the gentleman that you just met. But the idea of peace came through really hearing of my husband's terrible situations during the War, and then with the prospect of the oldest of my three sons coming along, getting very close to the draft age.

Dawn Walsh: And so, if you could talk about Merrel's experiences that he shared with you that affected you so much?

Valerie Clubb: Just the conditions of War in the Pacific, which was the area where he was fighting, which was pretty horrible and pretty inhumane.

Dawn Walsh: So can you be more specific about what the conditions were like?

Valerie Clubb: Not really, other than just horrible and inhumane and the fact that many did not survive it and any who did survive it had their lives changed forever because of their horrible experiences.

Dawn Walsh: And that has an affect on those people that they get involved with, like yourself, and then it sounds like it affects your life forever as well.

Valerie Clubb: It does. This was not what I wanted for my sons or other young men who had already been drafted into that war—the Vietnam experience, which people know some about, and who are also having conscientious objector experiences that were very rough.

Dawn Walsh: Such as?

Valerie Clubb: Moving away from their country or going to prison, or short of that, experiencing the fear and indecision as to what would be right in such a circumstance. Also the fact that the Vietnam War was not universally supported was something, of course, the young men were aware of at that time. Many of them had veterans for fathers, all of which presented difficult family situations.

Dawn Walsh: So did you know personally anyone who conscientiously objected?

Valerie Clubb: No, I just heard the stories. That was pretty much it.

Dawn Walsh: And so I want to clarify, did you say your son was drafted into the Vietnam War?

Valerie Clubb: No, they were not. My oldest son had his number drawn, but by that time the war was over at about that time. So that's the closest that we got.

Dawn Walsh: But again, just the idea of your sons going to war was a catalyst for you to get involved in peace activism?

Valerie Clubb: Yes. I had a friend whose name—have you heard it before—Betty Moore, she was an extremely active woman in the Missoula Women for Peace, and she was the friend who brought me to the group. She has two sons, one of whom is a very good friend of my oldest son, who is Peter Moore, who lives near Missoula now, I think down by Stevensville, and that's how I became a part of the group. Betty was a very dedicated woman and very dedicated against war and worked during the last years of her life with Amnesty International. She wrote a lot of letters for them from here in Missoula. So that's how I came to meet this nice group of women.

Dawn Walsh: Now had you had any experiences at other times in your life with issues of war or unsettling? I know that you had mentioned being in Burma during the political coup, what was that experience like for you?

Valerie Clubb: Yes, that was later and that was the beginning of, really, the situation in Burma, which still is a really awful situation in Burma. We had to leave our friends, our short-term friends—we just there two years.

Dawn Walsh: And what year was that that you were there?

Valerie Clubb: I'm trying to think of the year. It was the year of the coup, and we had to leave without maintaining any contact with friends there, because it would not have been good for the people there to maintain contact with Americans. We understood that it was not good for people who had friendships; they had to rationalize them and not stay in contact with them. So we really don't know where the people are to this day. It's been so long ago. Some of them would not be still alive.

Dawn Walsh: Can you recall some of the conversations that you had with your friends at that time?

Valerie Clubb: It's been such a long time ago; I just have really general memories, nothing specific. There was some fear of this coup, which happened suddenly overnight, and all the things that we were fearing did happen, I fear.

Dawn Walsh: Such as?

Valerie Clubb: Without any specific information, I feel very bad about the drug situation after we left, which was a means of gaining control over people. But I would be very interested to someday know—really, I think we don't know exactly what's going on there, still. Let me find out what year it was that we were there.

Dawn Walsh: Okay.

Valerie Clubb: '61-62 was before the war got going in the Pacific and when our children were young. I believe our oldest son was about seven or eight years old at that time. Things were starting up in the Pacific in places like Vietnam and Cambodia.

Dawn Walsh: And at that time how would you describe your philosophy or your beliefs about war and peace?

Valerie Clubb: Oh, I have had an instinctual feeling for peace, for peaceful relations between people, even without the fear of war and death and so forth.

Dawn Walsh: So you remember having that feeling even as a child?

Valerie Clubb: Yes.

Dawn Walsh: So do you remember where that came from?

Valerie Clubb: I had a peaceful family and a peaceful growing up, in a general sense. And perhaps, interestingly, my sister who lives in Illinois is also interested in peace issues and is active in groups, peaceful groups.

Dawn Walsh: So can you remember as a child or as a young adult with the really deep sense of peace and harmony amongst people how that expressed itself in terms of—I don't know—just how you interacted with your friends or what types of jobs you held? I guess I'm just trying to get a sense how that inner belief that you held expressed itself as you were growing up.

Valerie Clubb: I don't know quite how to answer that, except in that...just in general. I can't be specific about that. When I was young—I was married when I was 20, and my work was raising children. I did some teaching in grade school, some before I had children, and some after my children were a little older. But it was just a general thing.

Dawn Walsh: And so, in terms of your work as a mother and raising your children with these ideals of peace, was that something that you talked about or was it just something that was in air?

Valerie Clubb: That's hard—keeping four children from fighting one another, keeping peace in a family with three sons and a daughter. But it was just a general thing.

Dawn Walsh: So would you say that...well first of all, what year did you become part of the Missoula Women for Peace group?

Valerie Clubb: That I'll have to try to figure out. We could pin it down by the end of the Vietnam War, a couple of years before the end of the Vietnam War would be the date, and I don't—I can't estimate it.

Dawn Walsh: Would you say that was the first formal organized peace group that you became a part of?

Valerie Clubb: Oh, yes. It was not at the very beginning of the group, but close to the beginning of the group. Later, I dropped out of the group for a while. I was working at a bank and didn't have the time or the incentive. But then later when I retired I joined the group again, because it's a very nice group of women who meet and talk about current affairs, which is interesting. They're an interesting group of women as well, who are more informed than I have, who are quite well informed about current affairs. They keep themselves well informed. So it's a pleasant experience, twice a month to go and listen and express opinions with a generally peaceful group.

Dawn Walsh: So what are some of the current issues that the group is talking about these days?

Valerie Clubb: Oh, always disarmament and the land mine situation and always poverty around the world, which leads to war, and always our country's involvement in situations that could very well bring about another war. We stray sometimes to local situations, and we even stray in our conversations, sometimes, to personal situations in our lives, which makes it... Some of us worry—Jean Pfeiffer for one—about how effective we are on the international scene, which I feel we are not effective on the international scene. She wants us zero in and do something that would be noticed and be effective, and the only way that I could even conceive of us even having an effect on the international scene is just perhaps in being counted, swelling the number of people who express these opinions. I'm not even one of those who write very good letters to the President and the members of the Legislature—they are probably not read, maybe counted with a number. But I go to the meetings mainly because of the interesting experience it is for me.

Dawn Walsh: And so, can you talk about what it's like for you in terms of the group being all women, and it sounds like it's very important those friendships for you? And if you could elaborate on that a little bit more?

Valerie Clubb: Well, I think, it has not always been all women and, at times, men come and have—I remember even some have been members of the Missoula Women for Peace. But it has been the women who, I believe, have had the time to do it. Even, I think that's what it boils down to, it has been the women who have had the time for these friendships. Sometimes husbands come before the end of the meeting and talk about things with us, sometimes Alice's husband and others come and join us. But, I think, the reason for us being a women's group is that it has been women who have had the time.

We were coming through our lives at a time when women were not all working as young women are now. I think, in these days, young women's friends are people who they are working with in general, and they don't have time for these nice meeting with cups of tea and cookies, which is true for my daughter who has very peaceful inclinations, but she has her children and then she works evenings, and there would not be time for a relaxed time such as we older ladies have. Her friends are some friends from childhood who have moved to Seattle and some friends from the coop daycare that she is going to, and those are her friends that she sees.

Dawn Walsh: So I'd to go back to the beginning of when you joined Missoula Women for Peace and ask you what was happening in the group when you came into it.

Valerie Clubb: At the time I came into it we were talking mainly about the Vietnam War. We were all against it, and we were talking about the draft and our sons, and that was the main focus, and what was happening to the young men who were drafted and did have to go into that war. We demonstrated against the war in front of the post office. We did marches down Higgins Street. We did things of that sort to join into the nationwide protest against the war. We were focused almost entirely on that war, because that was where our selfish interests were. Then, there have been wars since, all of which we have been against, because of the tragedy that it brings to people's lives on both sides of wars.

Dawn Walsh: What was it like for you to march against the Vietnam War in Missoula?

Valerie Clubb: Oh, I was angry. It was a kind of feeling of solidarity with friends who were also angry. At one point, my son marched in one of the marches, to the anger of some of his high school teachers, who threatened to give him black marks or something—count it on his grade. But he did it because it was his feeling, it was not just his mother not wanting him to go. My other sons were younger.

Dawn Walsh: Well I was thinking about that, if you experienced any conflict with friends or family members, in this case, school employees, conflict with your protesting and your beliefs?

Valerie Clubb: Many had different views, but I didn't really experience conflict. Most of my friends and acquaintances, I think, were understanding of the fact of these women who had sons, and they thought they might feel the same way.

Dawn Walsh: How did your son settle that conflict with some of his teachers, did you get involved in that at all?

Valerie Clubb: No. He went to the march, and he went back to school and there were no serious repercussions. It was a bluff. He's a pretty good guy.

Dawn Walsh: Did you know any young men who did get drafted, any sons of any of your friends?

Valerie Clubb: Not well. Some that I knew of and, not close friends, but some did go. Over the nation, many did, and it was a bad time for our world.

Dawn Walsh: And how would you describe the effect of your participating in the protesting, did you feel a part of a greater movement?

Valerie Clubb: I think it was good that people did protest because there were so many of us that did protest it. I wonder. I don't know what will happen in the next war experience that we have Wonder—I think that probably our country will be...of course, don't know this for sure, but I think probably that our country will be the site of some violence. It has to come. It's on the way, and we're not doing anything to avoid it. We feel secure that we are safe here, and I think we will be the target of people around the world who are rightfully very angry with the way we provide arms, not just provide arms, but the way we bomb callously for our own gain. I think it will come—I don't know—I'm fearful about what will happen, and I don't know what people's attitudes will come about if that happens. I think that when that happens, rather than if that happens, because I don't see how it can be avoided. Perhaps it can, I may be wrong. I hope I'm wrong.

Dawn Walsh: So do you imagine it would be a Third World War in which America has a lot of fighting going on within our country?

Valerie Clubb: I see people who are in other countries who are rightfully so angry with our country specifically, maybe they're a little bit peeved with Britain or France, but there's a lot of very deep anger toward this country. I see it as revenge that's going to come about. This hasn't always been. At the time when we did traveling around the world—we lived in Burma, and we lived for awhile in Italy, and we lived for awhile in South America—and we were liked because we were America, way back then. This was before the Vietnam War. Now, people traveling are not in that happy position; they are not liked because they are Americans, and that's pretty widespread. So that's my dire prediction for worldwide collapse—not really worldwide collapse, but for war on our land in the cities and countryside. I expect a lot of devastation. We have supplied countries all over the world with the arms to do this. We have done this because of the money it bring us. So what do you think can be done about this situation our world is in?

Dawn Walsh: That's what I'm supposed to be asking you.

Valerie Clubb: Well, I don't know. I feel that because we, this little group of elderly women who get together and visit twice month, I feel that they are not—there's no way they can have any impact on our world. Perhaps groups of young people who are coming up could possibly have some impact. What are the feelings at the Jeannette Rankin Center? What are the feelings of younger people who surely must see this, what I see? What are their feelings about the

possible effect of people who are of good will and young, and therefore very, very busy with their everyday life? What do you think will happen?

Dawn Walsh: Well I see a lot of young people that are committed to peace and compassion and just...you know, through the Jeannette Rankin Peace Center they've recently done the, or are still working on the, Compassion Project in bringing compassion into the schools. There's a lot of workshops and training that are happening in the public schools in Missoula, prejudice training and diversity training and things like that. So there are a lot of young people who are devoting their life to this work. I don't know, is it enough? Maybe I say a lot of just because of in the circle that I'm familiar with, but how does that, you know, cross over to the larger public? You know I'm not sure.

Valerie Clubb: How about the young people in other countries of the world? Do you know of other such groups that are large enough to have any influence at all on other continents? There are groups in Canada.

Dawn Walsh: Now are there Amnesty International Group, internationally? I mean that's an international group.

Valerie Clubb: Yeah that is one.

Dawn Walsh: I think it tends to be young people, and people, like in Green Peace. And so I think there is.

Valerie Clubb: And there have been visiting groups from Russia who visited in Missoula, and there are in Britain, I believe, groups. But I just don't have any idea if there is anything strong enough to have any influence.

Dawn Walsh: So what do you imagine it would take, what do you envision the younger generations needing to do in order to make a difference?

Valerie Clubb: Well I really envision the younger generation as being just so busy trying to survive that I don't know what it take. The young people that I know who have peaceful inclination and do as I did try and raise their children not to fight with one another so much and to have good attitudes toward one another. That seems to be young people's contribution as I have seen it. But my generation is, and some of those younger than my generation, the ones who are running the world are running it toward war, I think, but I have been wrong before, and I may be wrong now.

Dawn Walsh: Now do you have a sense that this impending war that you see on American soil, do you think that America would be defeated or what would be the outcome of any such war like that?

Valerie Clubb: I don't know. What I wonder about is what would happen to the attitudes of Americans toward war when it comes home, and whether Americans would come together in different coalitions, so to speak, come together with different attitudes, or not, if the war were here.

Dawn Walsh: We saw a lot of different groups of people coming together to protest the WTO in Seattle, did you follow along with that?

Valerie Clubb: Yes, I did. That's was interesting in that many peaceful protesters were injured, tear-gassed, beaten by out-of-control police violence in Seattle. A group...from a hooded violent group who were destroying property was not...the group was not being controlled by the police. But the peaceful protesters were an easier mark, and they were being terrorized and beaten and injured and hurt by the police, who were not attempting to control those with black hoods and who were armed and who were destroying property. That was an interesting situation with the police, I thought.

Dawn Walsh: Yeah that's very interesting. So what do you make of that?

Valerie Clubb: That police are sometimes out of control and, I think, in many cases out of control, and that was showcasing it in Seattle, which brings us to the topic of our prison situation and our justice situation. Justice has become a word for revenge. We are so bent on revenge in our country. People who say they are seeking justice are seeking revenge, and everybody's angry and everybody's trying to get revenge. Our horrible prisons are full, and they're building more. Our police are part of that, and they are controlled by the generation that is generally in power now.

Dawn Walsh: What do you think fuels that desire for revenge?

Valerie Clubb: Well I think it goes back—I'm really talking a lot—I think it goes way back to the situation of competition, which our children are raised from birth to compete and to compete violently if necessary. I think competition is a euphemism for greed, for wanting to be the best, wanting to have the best for myself, wanting the sport's team of the high school to win at all costs, wanting the intellectual team of the high school to win at all costs, wanting to have the best grades in order to get the best jobs in order to make the most money in order to have the most power. It's competition, which is in our culture so strongly, that is the basis for all of our problems, I think. Our children are really being raised in an atmosphere of competition, which is a selfish, greedy attitude really. The general defense of competition is that it causes people to do their best in order to be better than others, but people could do their best in cooperative ways rather than competitive ways.

We see this in the human genome project right now. The people who are doing their best to identify these genes on the chromosomes are rushing quickly to patent them, so they can make money off of them. This is not basically for the prevention of disease; this competition is

to make money off of the situation. The government project is working on one level, and the competitive attitude is right in there. And really, in all of the situations in our country's culture it's there. Competition's basis is in greed.

Dawn Walsh: And for all of that to change it would have to take a real shift in individual?

Valerie Clubb: Adults' attitudes, the adults who are raising the children. In our talking about school systems now, we talk about having schools compete against one another so we won't have any bad schools; getting the kids to compete against one another for test grades; and getting the teachers to get in there and teach better or they'll lose their jobs—In that kind of competitive atmosphere we'll have only the best. It's not going to work. Granted, our school system is not the best, but there are good pockets in our school systems around the country. There are very good pockets, and there are very good people in teaching. But the answer is not to make the whole thing more competitive therefore people will be better if they are trying to beat down others.

Dawn Walsh: So how would you imagine an alternative model to that?

Valerie Clubb: Alternative model? My considered answer to the education problem, which we have, would be to in the first place very, very drastically improve the teacher-pupil ratio, improve it down to as far as we can get it, and to stress cooperation as opposed to competition. If we have adults teaching fewer students we'd have a lot more learning going on. There are many, many teachers in our country who went into teaching with idealism and found themselves confronted with thirty, thirty-five unruly children and in order to survive they have to keep order, and they can't really do anything much in the way of individual teaching and of influencing character. They just try to keep order in order to survive, and they could be good teachers. The very same teachers could be good, if they had fewer children to deal with. So that would be my answer to it.

That would probably be the most expensive educational initiative possible, to vastly increase the number of teachers. There would be a whole lot of opposition against teaching cooperation—cooperation in learning, cooperation in sharing of knowledge rather than keeping it to yourself, so that you will make the best score on the test. Children teaching other children. Real learning for learning's sake would have to come if we got a good educational situation, because after all people, children and adults, do learn for themselves. They educate themselves. So that's what I think about that.

Dawn Walsh: We're coming sort of toward the end of the tape, so I wanted to explore a little bit more this seeming contradiction or tension on the one hand you are very strong conviction of peace that you felt that you've just had your whole life and this, maybe more intellectual, understanding of continued conflict and war, even to the place of it being here in America. And so how do you balance those two views? And what is it that, even though you know or you

believe there's going to continue to be war, what is it that just keeps you striving for peace in the face of that?

Valerie Clubb: Well, I continue to want a good and peaceful world. I suspect that I'm not going to get what I want, because I don't see it coming. I would be happily surprised if it did. That's pretty much the connection between the two, and there are, I hope, more hopeful situations going around the whole world that I don't know about, and I hope they're out there—and they very well might be things that I don't see.

Dawn Walsh: So before we end, I'd like to give you the opportunity to say anything that's come up that we haven't talked about directly, any closing words, any story that you'd like to share that we haven't talked about yet?

Valerie Clubb: No. I will be interested to see what the results of your study are. I would like to have a copy of it when it reaches its conclusion. So thank you.

Dawn Walsh: Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]