

Maureen and Mike

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**Interviewee: Mabelle Hardy**

**Interviewer: Annie Pontrelli**

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Annie Pontrelli: This is Annie Pontrelli interviewing Mabelle Hardy on August 1, 1991. Mabelle, why don't you start out by telling me the years you were here and in what capacity?

Mabelle Hardy: I started at the university in 1934 as a freshman student, but I also began as a typist with the registrar's office in the summer of 1934. Between 1934 and '38, I was both a student and part of the staff. I worked part-time all four years in the registrar's office at the magnificent wage of 25 cents an hour. By the time I finished my degree, I was getting 35 cents an hour.

Later, in the '50s, I did some paper reading for the sociology department when the push of post-World War II students came and they needed extra help for staff and dealing with large classes. Then in 1958, I was a secretary in the home economics department, moved on to be a graduate student and complete my master's degree in sociology. Then I taught in the social work department until 1973. A large part of my life has been The University of Montana.

AP: Well, why don't we go back to the years you were here as a student and start from that beginning. What was the campus like at that time?

MH: It was really small. I can't remember what the student population was, but it was only a couple of thousand students. All of the administrative offices and classrooms and so forth were in Main Hall. I think we had most of the clerical service in the basement of Main Hall, and then the registrar's office was in the south end of the main floor of Main Hall. President's office was in the center and other offices were in the center. The music department was in the top floor. That contained the entire music department, except for the practice house, which was on the corner of the University, well, just off the oval. The president's house was in that location and then next door to it was the practice house. We did not have these many, many buildings. We just had Main Hall, Craig Hall, the chemistry building, the forestry school. One important thing that happened then, prior to New Deal Public Works Projects, the current Fine Arts building was built—the student union. It was dedicated, I believe, in the summer of 1935. I was playing in the university orchestra at the time. We had a grand function at the University Theater to dedicate that building some time mid-winter. That was a bad winter that year so that the campus was not approached by bus or by car, but you'd walk down University Avenue to get to school. I lived in Missoula. I did not live in a dormitory. I was a Missoula person, a town girl.

AP: I'm sure you noticed many changes throughout the years when you were here as part of the staff and later on when you were part of the teaching staff as well. What were some of the main changes that you recall—both the physical essence of the campus, but also some of the changes of

students and attitudes and things like that?

MH: I suppose the increase in buildings, and the increase in services to buildings, and increasingly large student body are the main changes. One thing that I think is true: there were few post-bachelor's degrees. The law school was here and there were master's degrees in education, and possibly in other departments, but certainly no Ph.D. programs. Over the years, the offering for advanced study has been, you know, much enlarged.

Another change of course, when I worked in the offices of the university, everything we did was labor intensive. I was thinking as I drove here of working in the registrar's office. Records were kept on permanent record cards- these were hand-lettered. My immediate supervisor was the one who did this. I did the transcripts of records (unintelligible). That was done by taking a permanent record card and copying it on the kind of paper used for checks, so that accuracy in typing was very important. That was all done manually, you see. Then we had files, and I was the filing person for that.

When registration came, again the staff was increased just the same as it is now. All the records were done by individual people. When grades were turned in at the end of the quarter, we worked over-time. One person read the grade to somebody else who used a punch and punched the grade slips. So you see, no wonder they only paid twenty-five cents an hour, when they hired that many students. The whole business of, you know, in the rest of the working world, that's never been too big a deal and the technical input was—

AP: What were some of the changes that you noticed with students?

MH: Well, I don't know whether students changed all that much. I believe that when we came here in 1934 after high school, we were very naive people. The school was possibly more comparable to a junior college. You know one thing that of course is true, I think maybe there were five student cars on campus. Nobody had a car. It was Depression times, and we were all struggling. There was not affluence. I doubt there were more than five married students, I mean men students who were married. (unintelligible)

So after WWII when I came back around campus, it was normal to see a number of young couples, a number of people who brought their little kids to registration. And of course the number of cars had increased. Older students, there were hardly any who were not just in the regular progression from high school to university, not even (unintelligible) who went to school. Except for summer school. This morning I looked at all of the cars and all of the people coming to school. Summer school was a rather special little term. It was geared to teachers who were renewing their certification for teaching. I in fact attended summer school for three summers because I was employed and in order to graduate in four years I needed to pick up credits in the summer. Summer school was, in my opinion, less quality than regular term. It was, you know, it just wasn't as serious.

Well, students. I started teaching in 1960. The students who came, and I taught an introductory course in social welfare, so I'm teaching about current problems and things regarding people. And I was impressed and disgusted with the naiveté of the students who came out of high school, meaning the freshman, who knew almost nothing about the world and could care less. I mean they just could not get very worked up about anybody's problems. I've really been patient with many students.

Then the '60s came around, which was a trying and turbulent time. And I saw a whole different group of students. And the '60s were not easy to teach. At the extreme (unintelligible). So we went through the turbulent student rights times on this campus. There was some tension, but not too many very serious problems. Many of us credit Bob Pantzer for that. He was the administration. He dealt with student-faculty relations and student relations to the world. So in the '60s we had a lot of excitement and rag-tag students and all of the things that had gone on in the world. Then I retired in 1975, and by 1975 I think our student population was going back to the more comfortable, indifferent students.

AP: Do you remember any specific incidents occurring during the Vietnam War or during the tumultuous '60s?

MH: Well, there were some that didn't touch me particularly. I think on our campus we had some student activism. We had some small episodes or incidents, which were dealt with, as I say, very wisely by Bob Pantzer, he was the president. I found teaching my course an exciting thing to do because I had big, big classes. These students really did care and it was more a matter of trying to channel their energy than to stir it up at that time. Specifically at that time, I had, oh students that were telling me about their trips when they'd take LSD out in the woods and being excited about life, and lots of interesting things in that search.

AP: What were some of the organizations and activities that were going on? It certainly, that's going to be different during the different periods that you were here.

MH: Oh well, in the '30s I suppose that Mike [Mike Hardy, Mabelle's husband] has told you most of that. I think this is still true, the Sophomore (?) were people who were very active students in the campus. There were the Bear Paws, and Spurs. I was proud to be tapped for Mortar Board. That was the student's dreams our way (unintelligible). Mortar Board was a nationally-oriented society for college women. There were nine of us in our class of Mortar Board and we were pretty close friends. We had an unusually close relationship and enjoyed each other. It was one of the most meaningful things of my college experience.

The Masquers went on and productions of plays, usually in the main theater, the University Theater. I helped out, on the offside as a visitor's help person. I had friends who were in the group of acting among other things. I had lots of friends who used to get in (unintelligible). One story I have, and I'd forgotten the play for which we moved an antique stand here, which would be the size of that desk. A square fan we had, you know on their head with wigs. And I was so proud to

have managed to get the roof of it on. All of this required by the mender was to pay me. The mender was [something] so that was going to be really nice because then you can stay and (unintelligible). The mender had an apartment, which means that roof was very, very costly. They had a challenge and I was kind of in the doghouse for creating that much money to use.

There were a few honors societies, just as now there are societies that are honorary and all of those things. But there was the freshman women honors society and also...Anyway, it was initiated in this campus by (unintelligible) men.

Then we had balls. I don't know whether there are balls that go on on campus now or not. But there was the Co-ed Ball, and there was the Law Ball, and the Forester's Ball. And the big—

AP: I think the Co-ed Ball, that was something that was different—

MH: No, it wasn't.

AP: Oh, okay.

MH: But it was a formal. It was mostly formal dances. The top floor of the Fine Arts Building was the Ballroom. And it was pretty, all of them...I mean, good orchestras came. That was our social life.

AP: And that was in the '30s?

MH: Yes. I think Mike might have told you about Aber Day. That was the big holiday, the day of the year, the bell in Main Hall playing, and we knew that was the day off from classes. The idea was to come to campus and rake lawns and clean up, and do whatever. I mean, in teams, go around and clean up the campus. They made a big, kind of court in the middle of the Oval for a picnic lunch called Kangaroo Court. There was a lot of horse-riding. Then free time in the afternoon for everybody. You see we started school before there was any legal alcohol in the university. So by then there was no one available. I think they went off to a bunch of keggers. Well, I probably need some more coffee—

AP: Well that was pretty much the '30s and the '40s, and were there other activities and events which occurred while you were on staff?

MH: While I was teaching? You know, I can't account for too much on that. I was a part-time instructor in the Social Work department. When I was a student in school, the department was either in sociology or anthropology. Then when I began teaching and getting my master's degree here, the department was not divided into its own department. It was sociology and social work [together]. Then that's what really became sociology and social work, and then social work branched off. So those were changes that were in the curriculum. And I think those changes happened across the campus as departments became larger.

What was I going to say...oh, I was teaching in the Social Work department. I also had a family of three and some other things, so I did not take in all that went on on the campus. I'm not really sure about something like this...it seemed to me that those things became less formalized, and this university became a place to go and study, and all these other things were individual kinds of responsibilities. And when we were in school here, the whole structure was more formalized, and as I say, like a junior college or high school. But when we had more married students, and more older students, and all of those things, then the focus became just education.

AP: It sounds like you were here during several administrations, and you had mentioned Bob Pantzer...do you remember, or do you recall certain incidents or certain memories about specific administrations while you were here?

MH: Not too carefully I guess. It seemed to me that whatever I did here, went on comfortably for me no matter who was the president. I probably had some better...just to be historical...President Clapp was the president when I was in school. He'd been president forever, I think. And I grew up with his kids, I mean one of his children was in my school, Evie, Tanner. He died the year I was a sophomore. This was a very impressive thing to happen on this campus. We had the funeral. I was playing in the orchestra, and the orchestra participated in the memorial services that had been planned. And [it was] a really, really impressive service. (unintelligible) including parts of the New York Symphony. Well I was surprised, I was really sentimental, and, you know, a young student, and the death of the university president, who was also a friend of mine, was very moving. During the very most hopeful part in the middle of the symphony...it was, you know, just one of those moving moments.

Then he was followed by George Finlay Simmons, who was such a powerful character, and a great speaker, and probably not a very good president. I mean he was certainly very (unintelligible) but I expect he was a rather lightweight president.

Oh, I wanted to talk about courses. Now the University of Montana had adopted the University of Chicago's system of curriculum, which had four general courses that beginning students, or that were part of the first two years. Which were a general course in humanities, a general course in social science, one in biology, and one in (unintelligible). And as a liberal arts major, you were expected to take three of them.

AP: Was it the survey course that they—

MH: I don't know that they had...I thought it was bull. And I still think that the liberal arts are for anybody who is looking for a bachelor's degree in the university. That kind of thing is...it was well-taught, at least. The senior faculty, people who were senior and they knew what they were doing did the lectures. And then we had sections. It was five credits, so it was five days a week. Three days of lectures, two days of small groups. Earl Miller who was the student dean of men—in my view at that time, very, very ugly, a bulldog-looking man—who took a cage to lecture—odd piece of history. To this day I know world history better than some other lectures like sociology. But that

whole overview done by somebody really good at it, in history, was a real godsend for me.

Then humanities was the same thing. We had classes in art and literature and so forth, but I don't remember the lectures. I do remember my section instructor. He was a young man, but a very literate man. He cared a lot about conveying what he thought was important. And then I had biological science. Unfortunately I did not have physical science. But I still think, having watched students come through my introductory course in social work, that students who get strong, great conveyors of information can generally do okay, are so much better off.

I have one more thought, if you don't mind. On another thing I think is important for students, and that is career and advising counseling when a student comes through. Now I had a fair number of professors in my department with my advisor and I think they were quite good, but I know that they said when I went to the teaching parties that we were not doing a good job of advising students. We knew. We kept stewing about how to go about it. I don't know what's done now. But it seems to me that the average student coming out of high school does not really know how to find out about what is necessary for learning. It's only after you do it for a lifetime that you know you really should have known. So that a good counselor can be helpful, not dictatorial but helpful, in making choices. It's labor intensive, and I don't think that schools are doing it too well.

AP: Do you have suggestions for improving it?

MH: Well I had some thoughts about it. But I think it would be one of those things where you plug in a whole new approach to education. That it would require an increased staff of people who were good and who knew the university program and who were able to help students think through the choices that they make now on classes. Well, in our day, we went to our advisor and we were taught pretty early to take orders so we took what the professor recommended. And then, by the Sixties, students wouldn't always want...I mean, I didn't know what they should take, they just took what they wanted to take. I thought they didn't really know (unintelligible). I think that focusing on (unintelligible) education, they should focus on individual students' needs and views to try to get (unintelligible).

In our student days, the world was coming out of a major depression, so we wanted something that would get us a job. I might have taken a whole lot of programs I didn't need if I had not known that I needed to find a job. Jobs were here and not there. I think that's kind of true now too. That's why people want to take computer [classes].

AP: What do you think you would have taken—

MH: Well, I probably would have taken humanities more. I would have taken much more (unintelligible). It's true, the young person who changes, who can feel and is really interested, is the fortunate one. I mean nobody, the great scientists and people who do really outstanding things. Many of us, just kind of go along.

AP: And then you look back—

MH: Yes, and realize you were just going along. (unintelligible)

AP: What were some of your favorite classes? Actually that's something you've probably touched on.

MH: I think I probably have touched on that, yes.

AP: Okay. Who are some of the people who stand out in your mind? I know Bernie Malloy (?) you've mentioned, and other personalities. Were there other Griz personalities?

MH: There was my section leader in my humanities class was Andrew Corry, and I think he was...I don't know if he was a student, but he was certainly a junior member of the faculty. Lucia B. Mirrielees, was a long, long-time friend, and she was excellent. I really miss being with her. Particularly literature, that's what I had from her, and you know, it was an awesome experience.

Possibly in your interviews you've heard the name Harold Finch. Harold was a professor in sociology who had come here about the year I was first at the university, a fairly young professor. A real idealist, whose ideals—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

MH: —apology, and was the butt of many jokes. I took Introductory Psychology from him and Ewan McHunter(?). This was the year of the serious earthquake in Helena, which did much damage. He was talking about group psychology one day, and we were sitting in this room in Main Hall. He said, “Now you take what’s going on in Helena right now,” just as the students started feeling the shaking, in Main Hall, which was then an old decrepit building. It was an interesting experience. It stopped, but there was a minor tremor in Missoula, too. (unintelligible)

AP: What did he do?

MH: Well he held it up too. Oh let’s see, who else particularly outstanding in my mind? I don’t know, I don’t know. The psychologist Ernie Atkinson, whose name may have come to your attention, was a really good professor. And Ed Marlin (?), who came as the first philosophy teacher and I had Logic and something else from him, and he was wonderful. He ultimately established the Philosophy Department at the University and was chairman. He passed away a couple of years ago, but a very kind fellow. So there were really some good scholars.

[long pause]

I guess I would like to just add, talking about a favorite teacher, I’m not sure I recall accurately favorites, but I personally am most impressed by scholarly pieces. Any of our faculty had someone whose...it’s very difficult to be a student in a lecture class if the lecturer had to go. I think that one lecturer in biological science, who was a really scholarly man with an abnormal reputation in his field, but who droned in a major way. So, you know, I just fell asleep every time—

It’s too bad but, actually, it seems to me that people who are in the teaching field, that halfway have some real skill, can teach anyone in their program. One of the major factors I think is real interest in their field; a real mission to convey what it is that they know, because they think it’s so important for other people to know it. And I think a student needs to feel that. I was not any particular, [I did not have any] particular qualities that were good. I had a poor voice for teaching and I really finished it off having classes of 124 students in large rooms trying to talk. But, it is necessary to engage your students, it seems to me, in the same zeal for whatever the subject is, in some way. Since I was a student until (unintelligible), the key was take-home group projects. And I think, in a small class, having groups interact on a subject and talk it out and then come together is a good way of teaching. But if you have to convey some information in lecture, it’s important I think to be able to do it in an effective way. In other words, to be a performer. That isn’t always the part someone is known for. I think their skills will not walk off their subject.

My goal in teaching (unintelligible), which was an introduction to social welfare, was to give a concept of what things people knew, and how they go about procuring that knowledge and if there are many other people who cannot do that, how we as society go about helping them. And that we have to do something, and what kind of things seem to work best. I found that freshman

students, who were probably 75 percent of my class, had in general not very much thought to those who were less well off than them, or to how people needed to be educated, or other things in our society. So my goal was to make them socially conscious of what goes on in a community or a state or a nation, and how we are going to do certain things to make realistic goals for people. Knowing that in Montana there is a certain recognizable percentage of redneck people, who feel that it's no business of theirs if somebody is going to starve—well it's their fault, they should go out and get work. But I tried to get the idea, to get people aware of all the things that go on in people's lives that cause them to be homeless, bad, or unstable and then realize that we have to do it. So that was really my goal in teaching the class. An introductory class is not easy because there is a wide range of people and it's introducing a lot of new information. It's kind of dull and boring if you're only taking that class because you need the credit.

AP: What were some of the things that you did to make it more interesting?

MH: Well, we took field trips. I took my class to the School of (unintelligible) which was before the institutionalization. So we took a field trip to the school in Boulder so they could be around developmentally disabled people. We took field trips fairly regularly to the prison. I engaged the students in individual projects to read an article or make some kind of voluntary participation in programs that were ongoing in Missoula. For example they might go on the weekday for a couple hours a week. So you had some personal experience. That was not available, nor was Poverello at that time, but the Head Start classes, I usually got quite a few students involved for an hour or two a week in Head Start classes. But they had the one-on-one contact with people of various kinds of situations. That was lovely. And then I really did use group process techniques to deal with certain topics in small groups or act out or lead discussions. And we had a wide reading list which included one novel. For example, I had, (unintelligible) those kind of things that were current, current books, either fiction or nonfiction on the topics that we were studying.

AP: Do you have any questions?

MH: I better look.

[long pause]

One thing I thought about, is this summer, is that I really support the idea of limiting Montana State [enrollment]. I'm very serious about this because...It sounds exclusive and snobbish and not very polite to say that (unintelligible) the future of freshman classes, and the many, many, many people at the University of Montana who should not have come. I saw them come, I saw them in class, naïve, ill-prepared, not knowing what it was they wanted to do except go out. I saw students deteriorate. Students who came—bright—just fall apart by the end of fall quarter. In my terms, which I know are kind of old-fashioned. Then sometimes you recoup of course, and go on ahead and found themselves. But the University of Montana's policy of admitting all high school students, without some qualifications, means that we spend valuable time in the classroom learning stuff that the state doesn't (unintelligible), on something that was useless to start out.

Somebody should help the high school graduate figure out what really was desired by her or by him to go to the university.

Many should have gone someplace else, or done something else, or gone to (unintelligible) or were not, did not find their particular makeup suitable to the university. But that's still a waste of funds that Montana doesn't have. And so it would be so wonderful to have a class of students who really cared about being in class. So I, as I say, it sounds very aged, I believe that we in Montana have a university which is valuable, and we need to keep its scholarships, and we need it. Students all across the state need it, but not people for whom it has no meaning, except to go away, live in a dorm, flare up, and find it's not right and go home. It's their money, and it's the state's money, and it's all the energy people put into them. So I really support the idea, and I know it's a controversial thing.

But I believe the University of Montana is very good, and certainly good to me, (unintelligible). Many of our students have gone far. We're going to have a visitor this next week from New York, and she's a friend of our family. She came here after finishing in the New York Academy of Drama, but not from the university so she went and got a degree at the University, this university, and participated in the REP Theater. She was an outstanding actress here and went on to go to Yale, got a master's at the Yale School of Drama. Does some directing in plays, theater, and videos, all kinds of things, you know. And she's coming back to visit, she hasn't been back in quite a few years. But she's an example of the kind of thing the University of Montana can do for people. I think someone, both Mike and I are real supportive of it, and I have no criticisms about my time here at all. But to keep that quality up with our difficulty in getting financial support, I think justifies being more exclusive. And that's all I have to say about that.

AP: Oh, I know one thing I want to ask you. Since I talked with your husband yesterday and got the story of how you met from his angle, I want to hear your story on how you met—your angle.

MH: Well, I don't know what he told you. That's an interesting thing. You know, the small campus and we spent three, four years here, both of us, so that really means all of it except for spring quarter my senior year, which was also supposed to be his but he stayed another year. I had other goals and aspirations for my own life. He talks about a skating rink...but I don't remember that. Oddly an interesting thing that happened here, the activity was at Stephen's College, I don't know whether you know or not, it's a rather exclusive girls college in Missouri. I did not know why, but they were on a train trip across the United States. They came through Missoula, Montana, and they had dinner here and there in various sorority houses. Then some of them would then get back on the train and move to another city.

Many of us were supposed to meet them at the station, so I was one of them with some other girls (unintelligible). He went on because (unintelligible). So that's the first time I remember seeing him. Then after that the blind date we were on. He knows, and he may not have told you, but I was tall, as I am know, and I was also, I would have been the gal that trained my (unintelligible). I'm the real greyhound. So I was kind of uneasy around people who were shorter. I was working at the

Registrar's Office during and between quarters. I was called to ask for my instructions, and of course I just can't recall him.

AP: Because you didn't know him, or you didn't recognize his name or anything?

MH: No I didn't really recognize him. Then of course, I mean obviously you have all these records at your fingertips, you can go (unintelligible). But he knew that I was (unintelligible). The nicest thing about him was, I think the selling point was his voice on the telephone line.

AP: Oh.

MH: So that's why I'm distressed about my own voice because to me, you sound beautiful on the telephone, and to me the telephone personality is very important. You sound enthusiastic and good on the telephone, he does too. So leave that on. I don't know whether he told you but I was trapped in my slippers from the bed and I had to untangle them. So you know, we had a long day. I went to the ticket place and got a rubber band to get married with.

AP: And then you've been married 50—

MH: Fifty-eight years. I had already made my plans. I was going to go back to school. I was not interested in veering from it, foregoing all my aspirations. However, I think that college is a great aspect to live, because it figures and all that you're kind of midst of everything. It seems to me. You have a lot of other things to sort out.

AP: Well, any other insights, observations, memories, thoughts about your time at the University?

MH: Oh, we were talking – in olden days we had this lovely graduation week, and there was Singing on the Steps on something like Thursday night. It was my favorite time of year. Singing on the Steps would happen and everyone had to go forward. At commencement, the Women's Association, women students, designed and created a maypole. We walked around in caps and gowns, that was after the (unintelligible). And then walked around the Oval, around either side of the maypole. It was a lovely experience.

I really believe in those things. In my days we had a ton of rites of passage, and rites of passage are so important. Many students don't want to go to a commencement, but that's a very impressive thing that happens to you and you can hear part of what you're going to do in your life. And so, things like weddings and funerals and commencement and all those rites of passage, they're like putting a punctuation mark on your experience. So that was our engagement (unintelligible). So that's it.

AP: That's it then.

[End of Interview]