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Oral History 295-01 a,b

Interviewee: Martha Staff McIver

Interviewer: Gladys Peterson

Interview Date: July 8, 1993

Gladys Peterson: This is an interview with Martha Staff McIver. The date is July 8, 1993 and we're going to talk to her about her growing up and spending her life in Montana and it's been a very unusual life. Mrs. McIver, I know your maiden name was Staff. I know also that you were 92 April 25. I should explain that I'm taping you because you were recommended by your daughter, Lillian LaCroix, who said you have so many remembrances of some events that are important in Montana history, so why don't we just start at the beginning? You tell us about where you were born in Montana, a little bit about your parents and what they were doing where they were.

Martha Staff McIver: I was born south of Chinook, Montana. The doctor came to your house. There were no hospitals at that time; that is, we couldn't go.

GP: And this would have been April 25, 1901.

MSM: Yes, and I wasn't registered till 1965. My husband and I were going to take a trip to Scotland and I had to get a birth certificate.

GP: How long had your parents been in the Chinook area?

MSM: Well, they were married in 1899 and my dad homesteaded and his folks were right close by there.

GP: Did his folks homestead also?

MSM: Yes. When they came from Norway; they came over in 1893 and they went to Helena because they had friends there. They had relatives there. My dad was 14 years old.

GP: Do you know what the relatives were doing in Helena?

MSM: Just farm work or whatever they could find to do until they moved to Chinook and then they homesteaded.

GP: In other words, they went to Helena first before they homesteaded; do you know exactly

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when they did homestead?

MSM: Right soon after they were married, I guess.

GP: And they were married in --?

MSM: 1899.

GP: You must have been their first child then, is that right?

MSM: My brother's a year older than I am. He's been gone now for about 5 years. So I'm the oldest in the family now, and most of the relatives too.

GP: Well, you must have some very fond and clear memories of growing up in that area.

MSM: Going to school was a real chore. I can remember my mother taking us with a one-horse cart to school and then coming after us. Then we moved into town for awhile till I got through the 5th grade and then my folks had sold their place and moved into a different place and the school, "Logee School", was two miles from home and we walked.

GP: Why did they sell their place?

MSM: Well, of course they had this irrigation system on it and he was expanding that and my mother took up what they called a "rezzer". It's a homestead and then Papa could irrigate most of that land, so he sold the upper place and bought this other place. That's the home ranch yet.

GP: Were these 160-acre pieces?

MSM: No, I think they were 320 and it's expanded now until it's over 3,000 acres. Very good place.

GP: Is it still owned by your family?

MSM: Yeah; my niece has it. When my older brother got it, you know, and of course my sister and I married and moved away (there were four of us; my younger brother lives in Havre now) (he's 83) and my sister lives in Billings; she's in a rest home. Anyway, in 1920 I married Angus McIver.

GP: Let's back up now and talk about your childhood some more.

MSM: Our recreation was mostly horseback riding and visiting neighbors that way. I can remember when Papa got his first car. Cars weren't very plentiful at that time. We had our dances --almost every Saturday evening we went someplace to dance.

GP: What about as a child now; you were born in 1901. Did you have playmates or was it mostly your family?

MSM: Well, there were four of us and my folks took in another boy; his mother was a cousin of my mother and he was 18 months old when she died and so my folks took him, Gaylord Ross, to live with us. So there was always plenty of kids around and then we had lots of friends in town who liked to come out to the ranch every Sunday or bring their kids out for a week, so there was lots to do that way.

GP: How far out of Chinook was this?

MSM: About 12 miles.

GP: So they could do that in a day and get home?

MSM: Oh, yes. Most of the friends in town had cars, so they came out.

GP: Did your mother depend on the children and did your dad, to do a lot of the work?

MSM: I just can't imagine all the work that my mother did. I just can't imagine it. Because she had all these kids around and we had lots of hired help. In fact, they fed so good that the men liked to spend the winter there for nothing, just for their board and room.

GP: And then that meant you had good help the following spring when you needed it.

MSM: She washed all the hired help's clothes and patched them and ironed them. Of course there was always lots of work to do.

GP: What about you kids; did you help her? Did she make you guys work too?

MSM: Oh, yes. We never set the table for less than 8 or 10 and of course Mother was cooking; she never used a cookbook but she was cooking and you started washing breakfast dishes and by the time you got through it was almost time for dinner. Because she could dirty them pretty near as fast as you could wash them. But my dad had water in the house. It was a pump but you carried most of the water out. Always something going on.

GP: You told me that your father was fourteen when his folks came from Norway to Helena; what about your mother?

MSM: She was born in Bergen, Norway, but she came over here when she was just two or three years old and they lived in Minnesota. She lost two sisters who were buried the same day. I don't know what it was. Pneumonia or something, I couldn't tell you. But she was left alone, that is, she

was an only child.

Then her mother and dad separated. She moved out to Port Orchard, Washington and they got acquainted with a captain of a ship and they took Mama with them. She was only about ten or so.

GP: Was she with your mother?

MSM: Yeah. And she went with this captain and his wife to help take care of their baby and so when she got back to the United States, her mother had died and then she moved to live with her uncle and aunt, so then my dad met her then and I think she was only sixteen when they got married. She could do the most work, wash on the board. Of course my dad never did have electricity out there, but he had a washing machine with an engine under it.

GP: Was that sort of a Norwegian settlement where they moved?

MSM: Well, no, not south of Chinook, no. It was just all relatives, like. Of course they were all around there too but now they're scattered everywhere.

GP: Were these mostly your father's relatives who settled up there?

MSM: Yeah. I have four kids; I have one out of Denver, one boy; and one boy down in Falbrook, California. And then there's cousins all over.

GP: Well, I just didn't want to forget to find out more about your mother. She was quite a worker.

MSM: Just wonderful. There wasn't anything to having 20 or 30 at the table. From a dance they came to our place because they had a bunkhouse to sleep in and then Mama fed them.

GP: What was your dad raising?

MSM: Well, mostly sheep and cattle.

GP: Did your mother have a garden?

MSM: Oh, yes, but she did most of the work in it too and all the canning and everything.

GP: Did the children help garden and canning?

MSM: Oh, yes.

GP: Was there any time for recreation among your parents? Did they go to the dances?

MSM: They went to the dances but when I got older, I can remember Mama baking 10-15 loaves of bread and we made it all into sandwiches and brought a whole washboiler of sandwiches to these dances. When I think about it now it's amazing. Two and three cakes. I think about it now and I don't know how she did it. She could look at a picture of anything and cut it out and it fit perfect in making clothes. I don't remember her making shirts but I remember her making my clothes and my sisters' clothes and then after I didn't get to go to high school, only just one year.

I graduated from the 8th grade at Logee School and you had to take a state examination at that time and then I tried to go to school in Chinook and work for my board and room and you know that just didn't work. This family had four little kids; I had to get up and get their breakfast; get the older ones off to school, wash the dishes and get things clean and then try and get to school on time myself. It just didn't work. So then my mother lost a baby so I had to go back out to the ranch and cook for the hired men for a couple weeks till Mama could come home and then I went back into town to go to school. I just got caught up with my subjects when I got the flu and of course that was pretty bad.

GP: You were maybe 15 years old, 16 when you got the flu? This was about the time of World War I then, wasn't it?

MSM: Well, yeah. I hadn't been able to go to school for a couple of weeks, and he came home from the service and my dad's car was in town getting fixed, so he was going to go home with that and I wanted to go with him because I knew if he told his stories about being in the service that I would never hear them again, and so I called the doctor and the doctor said at first I couldn't go. And I cried and cried and called the doctor again and he said well, if I put a scarf over my mouth then I could go home with my brother.

GP: You were living with this other family at the time?

MSM: Yes, so I went home and I never did go back to school.

GP: Did you ever find out where you got the flu?

MSM: It was just everywhere. There were people dying everywhere. Kind of like the 1918's or . . .

GP: Well, if you were sixteen, this would have been 1917. That was the time.

MSM: At that time you could teach in a country school which I had done. I'd helped the teacher at the Logee School; when I was in the eighth grade I did most of the teaching. So then I could go to Dillon for three months and I could get a certificate to teach in a country school and I had my suitcase all packed and my dad came home and he said, no, it was too far away from home; I couldn't go.

So then I was offered a chance to move into town and work for a lady who had a dressmaking shop

and millinery and she would teach me everything that she knew because I could put any hat she had in that store on and look good in it, and she wanted me there to do that but she was running around with a married man and my dad wouldn't let me.

So in the meantime Angus had come home from the service and he was working for my dad and so after we'd known one another for a year, we got married. My family started it.

GP: Let's back up now, Mrs. McIver. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about your childhood before we move ahead. Was the church important in your community or with your family?

MSM: No; just what little my mother could teach us. There was no way to get into town to go to any service. When we did live in town those couple years, there was a German Lutheran there but my mother didn't like that. Papa's family was Lutheran. There was a Presbyterian church there so that's where we went, and of course when I got older, I went to the Presbyterian church. I married a Presbyterian and I've always been a Presbyterian.

GP: Another thing I was interested in, your father was born in Norway and came to America at 14, was Norwegian spoken in your home or was it always English when you were a child?

MSM: We were Americans, so we never learned any of it and I joined the Sons of Norway but I can't talk any Norwegian.

GP: I doubt whether most of those do either.

MSM: Well, the older ones did, I guess, but I never did. And of course I married a Scotchman and he could talk Gaelic but he never talked it around me, so --

GP: You certainly did all you could to get an education and were thwarted a couple of times at least.

MSM: Well, anyway, after we were married (my husband was wounded twice on the battlefield) --

GP: Now you say that your husband was working for your father and that's how you met him.

MSM: He had spent ten months in the hospital. So he couldn't do too awful much. Of course I didn't realize that. But he came out to work for my dad after the war. He was in the US army and had gotten citizenship papers before he went in. He came over in 1911.

GP: Was he a man when he came over; did he come over by himself?

MSM: Well, yes; I guess so. There were several brothers and cousins and stuff and they sent Angus's oldest brother over and every year then he sent back for one. So that's how they got over.

GP: Sent the money for the passage?

MSM: Yes. The year he came they put him out herding sheep. He said, "I used to sit on a rock and cry. I didn't want that kind of a life."

GP: Did all the McIver brothers settle in that area?

MSM: Yeah. His older brother managed the Sprinkle outfit for quite a number of years.

GP: Now that I think of it, have you read Ivan Doig's books? "This House of Sky"? Isn't the name McIver in at least one of his books?

MSM: Not that I know of.

GP: No? Well, I'm going to check on that because it sounds very familiar to me. I think there's a McIver in "Dancing at the Rascal Fair", I believe.

MSM: Yes, but he's [from] west of Havre, up in that territory.

GP: I see.

MSM: And to me, it's -- he carries things a little too far.

GP: Well, it ["Rascal Fair"] is a novel.

MSM: Yeah, I know. But living in those times, I guess he had to do it to sell these books or something, but it's almost too fictitious.

GP: You don't relate to them too well.

MSM: No.

GP: Well, I guess you call that "poetic license".

MSM: I suppose.

GP: He makes a good story anyhow.

MSM: That gets money out of it, I guess.

GP: Well, anyhow, you probably were a very young woman when you got married, then, weren't

you?

MSM: I was such a kid, I didn't know much. You grow up pretty fast after that, don't you?

GP: You were eighteen or nineteen, maybe?

MSM: I was married in March and I was nineteen in April.

GP: I see. So you stayed in that area too, didn't you?

MSM: For quite a while, but he was wounded and the government gave him money for education.

GP: From WWI! That's interesting.

MSM: So he didn't know what he wanted to take up. Of course he graduated from the eighth grade in Scotland and he had [inaudible] and all that stuff, but he didn't know what he wanted to take, and they were short on electricians at that time so he took up electricity.

GP: Where did he study it? Great Falls?

MSM: No, he was sent to Minneapolis, so of course Lillian was little and I was pregnant again.

GP: Is she the oldest?

MSM: Yes. He was sent to Minneapolis, so I lost a baby {inaudible} (I stayed with my folks). In July, Lillian and I went to Minneapolis and we stayed there then till he finished that school and then he was sent back to Montana and we lived in Helena then for a few months, and then he was sent up here to Thompson Falls and we lived there till he got through with the schooling there and then I got sick and my oldest boy was born then and I wanted to go back with my folks so bad, so we went back to Chinook and he worked for the Montana Power lines to put electricity in Chinook.

GP: This was during the '20's now.

MSM: Yeah. '23, and he found out he couldn't climb poles. He knew his electricity but he couldn't do a lot of stuff because he was shot above the knee and he carried a lot of shrapnel in his back.

GP: Was that in Germany?

MSM: Germany. So then we went farming. We worked for a summer and different things like that, and finally my brother bought some land and it had a little house on it, so we lived there for nine years. We moved there in '26 and we lived there till '35.

GP: Was he able to handle the farm work?

MSM: Well, if he could sit down when he got tired or not do too much standing. Then in '32 he was covered up in a coal mine. He found a real nice vein of coal down the coulee from us -- you could almost light it with a match, that coal.

GP: This was in the Chinook area?

MSM: South of Chinook. All the neighbors came to dig coal too, and they didn't have time to do anything about it.

GP: Who owned it?

MSM: It was just "down the coulee" from us.

GP: I see. "Help yourself," eh?

MSM: Yeah. And that day we had gotten a little hay.

GP: Hard times; 1932.

(End of Side One)

MSM: There was about a four-horse team that came to get coal, so they put some dynamite in there and the top came down. Angus wasn't supposed to help them that day, but he was in there helping anyway and my cousin was behind him and he lost his cab. Another neighbor, the thing came down and he scraped the whole side of his face, but Angus was covered up to here and it took them two or three hours to dig him out and then I wondered why in the world they were all coming up to the house. The house was on this side and the barn was down here, so you had to cross that coulee to get up to the house and I wondered why they were coming, the whole outfit. One of the neighbors (the one who had the scrape on his face) came running up to the house and he said, "We've had a little trouble down there," so I said, "Come on in; I'll wash your face," [inaudible]. There was lots of snow and cold; it was the second of December, I think.

So my brother and this cousin who had lost his cab, he had a saddle horse, so they got ready and had a pickup, like, and they went in to get the doctor. He came out about midnight that night.

GP: Was he still living?

MSM: He didn't get hurt in any way. My husband couldn't move. We started to take his jacket off and my dad was there and he said, "Cut it." And Angus said, "Oh, no, don't cut it because I'm going to wear it." And my dad said, "M'h'm." And you know that chills went up and down my back. I'll

just never forget it.

The doctor came in about midnight but he wanted me to go with him, so my brother and my cousin were going to go along with us. Dr. Hohn wanted to go to Chinook to get some stuff and call the hospital from Chinook and my brother and cousin went on to Havre, so we went on to Havre to the hospital; there wasn't anybody there to help us get my husband out of the back seat. Doctor and I lifted that man and put him on a stretcher by ourselves. It's funny how strong you can be.

GP: How long did it take you to get him to Havre?

MSM: I guess it was 4:00 in the morning.

GP: And he was conscious all this while?

MSM: He was conscious, but he had broke the pelvis here and this piece that moved out and then broke this here and you could lay your fingers in how wide that spread, and you know they never set his pelvis.

GP: Was he in pain?

MSM: Well, he couldn't move. He was a veteran, see?

GP: He wasn't on a stretcher when you took him in?

MSM: Oh, no.

GP: You just carried him in.

MSM: We got him into the back seat. They were going to send him to Helena and he wanted me to go with him because he didn't think he was going to come out of it. They had to go on the train and they couldn't bend him, so they put him through a window.

GP: He was on a stretcher by this time?

MSM: Oh, yeah. And then to Helena and I stayed only just a few days up there because there wasn't any place for me to stay -- I didn't have any money.

GP: This is 1932, right?

MSM: Yeah; anyway, he stayed there till about the middle of March.

GP: From December until March.

MSM: And I lived out [inaudible] with my three little kids. Took care of all the stock and when I think about it now it just scares me.

GP: They were young children, too, weren't they?

MSM: Lillian was 10-11, you know? She did all the chopping of the ice, helping feed the stock. I'll tell you.

GP: And you were in the country.

MSM: Three miles to the nearest neighbor.

GP: And the children were in school, weren't they?

MSM: Yes.

GP: Pretty remarkable story. Made you tough, didn't it?

MSM: I'll tell you.

GP: You mentioned the Depression. When did that begin to affect you, Mrs. McIver? When did you notice it?

MSM: [Inaudible] In the nine years we were there, we had two crops, one was 800 bushels and we sold it for 80 cents a bushel and hauled it 18 miles.

GP: I'm trying to think when that would have been. Was that the Thirties you're talking about now? The Crash was in '29 but I don't know --

MSM: Angus had \$18 a month coming in.

GP: Veteran's pension.

MSM: And for a while we paid \$9 a month on a set of harness we needed. We borrowed horses and the rest we lived on.

GP: I'm just trying to get the time of this in my head. Let's see, you got married at almost 19 so that would have been around 1920.

MSM: Yeah; we were married in '20. And we moved down to the dry farm in '26.

GP: Was it pretty good farming when you first moved there?

MSM: Well, it was easier for Dad to do, you know.

GP: You were able to manage, though; to make a living out of it.

MSM: Oh, yeah; we always had our cows to milk and we raised pigs so we butchered our pigs and cured our meat.

GP: And did you do as your mother did, you canned a lot and had your garden and all that.

MSM: Yes.

GP: But then when you weren't able to sell your hay, that's when things got tough?

MSM: Well, we had to try and get some stock to feed so we could get some money, you know.

When he was covered up, our sheep all went over to my dad's and he took care of them. And then of course Angus wasn't able to do anything more like that, but it sure is funny; you send your kids six miles horseback to school, one way, and two big coulees to cross and I'll tell you I don't know how I stood it.

GP: Now one thing that you might remember, the school terms were different at that time, weren't they?

MSM: When I went to school, we just had the four months in the spring and four months in the fall, but when the kids went, why, it was almost the nine months.

GP: Oh, it was. So in the winter they had to make that trip on horseback. And their dad wasn't able to help them; his health wasn't good enough.

MSM: And, of course, it was hard for Lillian because she was the oldest and Donald wasn't very strong (the second child) and she had to get up and go feed her horses before breakfast [inaudible].

GP: It made her tough too, didn't it?

MSM: Yes, it did. And the year that she was in the eighth grade, she never missed a day. Twenty below zero and the wind blowing and she went to school anyway. Donald didn't always go if it was too cold. Dad thought it was too far for them to ride double so each had a horse.

GP: I intended to ask you earlier and just remembered it again. You had the flu about 1917. We haven't talked at all about illnesses during your childhood. Were you a pretty healthy bunch?

MSM: Well, so far as I know.

GP: Do you remember having any serious illnesses or what was done about them?

MSM: No; I don't remember too much about it; I don't even remember now just where we were living when my older brother got appendicitis and they had to hitch a team and haul him into town and then send him to Helena to be operated on.

GP: And he survived all that?

MSM: So we don't know too much about the other way; Mama seemed to know what to do for us.

GP: Do you remember having contagious diseases? Maybe, living in the country, you weren't exposed to them so much.

MSM: I suppose; I don't know.

GP: But you did go to school.

MSM: But when we were on the dry farm a neighbor lady had a baby and she couldn't bring the baby home with the other kids there because they had the whooping cough and my kids had the whooping cough, and so all her kids came to my house.

GP: So they probably got that in school, don't you think?

MSM: I suppose. But I remember going into the winter with a bottle of castor oil and of course a lighter physic too and some turpentine and if they got a bad cold, I'd put turpentine and lard on their chests. Give them a physic. Put them to bed.

GP: And it worked.

MSM: Yes.

GP: Turpentine and lard on their chests.

MSM: That's what my mother always did.

GP: Did they get any other contagious diseases?

MSM: Well, I guess they had the measles and chicken pox and mumps and stuff like that.

GP: Was there any fear at the time that they wouldn't survive?

MSM: Oh, no. We didn't have any of that till after Kathy was born. We moved into town and Lillian was ready for high school and my experience in trying for my board and room. It didn't work, and I figured out it was up to me and Dad to see that my kids got an education, so Dad didn't want to move to town, but I said "I'm going to move to town." Kathy was a baby and she was awful little. She got pneumonia and I don't know how many times she got pneumonia. The doctor didn't expect her to live. After we moved into town, Dad had a mail route 30 miles out in the country. The doctor wasn't going to leave town because he didn't think Kathy was going to come out of it. And she was almost four years old before we discovered that she had lost her hearing through high fever, so that's my baby.

GP: Completely lost her hearing?

MSM: She's worn a hearing aid since she was nine years old.

GP: But she does hear.

MSM: The way we called her when she was little and she was outside, we'd clap our hands. I don't know whether it's the vibration or just what, but anyway she had her heart operated on when she was 20 years old. We had moved to Missoula here and then I had heard that there was a school here that I could put her in and then it turned out that it was a Catholic school and they wouldn't take any Protestants. Then we sent her back to Great Falls for two years and she got so she would talk with her fingers and never a word. And I didn't want that. So I went to the school over here at Willard and talked to the principal and told him about it. I said, "She's so smart; she could understand and lip read just wonderfully." I said, "I'd like to put her with normal kids," and he said "Yes." He had a wonderful teacher, so we sent her. She was in the second grade and Miss Octobek put Kathy in the front seat and she stood in front of Kathy and talked to the class and Kathy got everything she said. She passed very well. I was so tickled.

GP: Was she beginning to speak more?

MSM: Well, yeah. And she was out with kids. I can't think of the teacher and the next teacher. I told her what the first teacher had done, put her in front and talked to the class, and, you know, she put her in front and went to the back of the class and talked to them. And I tried to be home room mother; I tried everything I possibly could. I think I furnished the cookies for that place all winter long, but she did pass Kathy. And then she got up and she passed the eighth grade at Willard School. Then we had her operated on in Great Falls and the doctor who operated on her had only done two operations before that.

GP: This was ear operations?

MSM: No, this was a heart operation. The blood didn't go through her heart, it passed over, on the top. Lillian has names for these things, but I can't [remember them]. Her heart is enlarged. So now here's three years ago; she got married when she was 26 to this fellow who had three kids and she did wonderfully well with the kids, as much as she could. The youngest boy, she got him before he was five years old and he's got his Master's degree in teaching in Las Vegas now.

GP: Is that right? Well, she was a good mother.

MSM: Her husband sold everything and he wanted to travel, and I wanted to go with them to see what traveling is. So we went to Denver and were down there a week or so. Coming back home, Kathy had said that she had fallen a lot and she didn't know why. Her husband kept saying, "There's nothing wrong with her, there's nothing wrong with her." We got home on Wednesday night and on Friday morning they were sleeping in the basement. Here she came running up the stairs and she said, "Mama, we're going to have breakfast with the Meaghers, and she came out here and right there by that chair, she collapsed.

We called the ambulance and they took her to St.Patrick's and they couldn't figure it out. They thought she had a stroke. It was her heart. So they decided they had to have an operation on her heart and they operated. One valve was almost closed. The operation was fine, but they had to scrape something and it got into the veins and she had a heart attack. Twenty-one days we never knew if we were going to keep her. I'll tell you, I owe the hospital \$92,000.

GP: But she made it.

MSM: She left this morning feeling good. She has a pacemaker and I don't think it's ever been on after her heart got straightened out.

GP: \$92,000.

MSM: And that's not the doctors.

GP: That was the hospital. What year was that now?

MSM: Two years ago.

GP: No insurance would cover that.

MSM: I had this veteran's insurance which covered an awful lot.

GP: Well, that's good. Her husband is a veteran. That was one good break anyhow, wasn't it?

MSM: Well, but he still owes that hospital about \$9,000. (Chuckles) Anyway, that's my life. We

lived at Cleveland (near Chinook) for 32 years and the yard was so big, we sold that and bought a house on Strand which had a smaller yard. Then my husband died. He thought he was being good to me but he bought a car just six weeks before he passed away, and I couldn't handle the payments on the house and the car too. And, of course, if the kids know you have any money, they need it. You've had that experience? (Chuckles) Well, we've got a son in Denver who has four kids. He married a daughter of a doctor and she never did a day's work in her life and then to have four kids; she just doesn't know how to handle anything and money doesn't mean a thing. So he got \$22,000 of it.

GP: I'd like to back up, Mrs. McIver. It just amazes me after that coal accident that your husband was able to do anything. Were they able to repair his pelvis?

MSM: No; they never set it. But it grows between there.

GP: Was he able to walk without a cane or crutches?

MSM: He was on crutches for almost a year, but he came out of it and after we moved to Missoula, he drove a school bus. First (he) had the mail route and he couldn't handle that; then he drove a school bus.

GP: Could I back up -- that mail route was in -- ?

MSM: Was from Chinook out to Cleveland.

GP: Was he able to get that because he was a veteran? He just applied for it and got it.

MSM: At that time they don't pay anything, \$72 a month, thirty miles. And then he got the school bus; I think we only had it [mail route] two years and then he got the school bus and this fellow who had the school bus route had a machine shop and he cleaned the machine shop and kept it in order when he wasn't on the school bus for \$18 a week.

GP: I remembered when I made the oral history tape of Lillian, she didn't have a lot to say about the Depression, she said that you would and you certainly have. The Depression had quite an effect on you and your husband, didn't it?

MSM: We bought shoes for them in the wintertime, and in the spring we got sandals. You know, we just had to make everything do.

GP: And were the other people in your family experiencing the same sorts of [difficulties]?

MSM: Oh, I think my mother was. She made her own soap (of course I made soap too). Because we had our own meat all the time and mutton and pork and beef.

GP: And you did canning, you said.

MSM: Dad had never had any experience with anything like that, so the first year we were on the "Gar" farm (I call it that) we killed a couple of pigs and cured our own meat. We didn't have these big crocks like my dad had. Those 25-pound crocks that they used to kill six and eight pigs every year, and then they had their mutton and their beef besides. Mama always canned a lot of beef. We salted our meat and laid it up on the shelf, and you know that was the best meat!

GP: Here is something that I have thought of and I have asked people like you this before. Today there is such a concern about botulism and I have asked people of your generation or even younger, did you ever hear of that? How did the farm women of those days manage to make sure that everything was preserved properly? Were they worried about it? When you did that, were you worried about it? How did you know how to do it?

MSM: Let's see. My experience with that was when Dad was working in the powerhouse in Thompson Falls, and we were living there. I was pregnant with Donald. I went to the doctor there and he said I wasn't eating enough fresh vegetables. So I went to the grocery store and bought two cans of green beans on sale. Well the first one, nobody else ever had it, but I got it.

GP: You got botulism? Ptomaine or something.

MSM: Yes, and that's the reason my older boy was born when he was only eight months old, when I was eight months with him. He was awful sickly when he was little but he got over it.

GP: You have some pictures there?

MSM: Those are my family.

GP: You and your four children. Well, that's certainly a family to be proud of.

MSM: You know, I am proud of my family. We had a hard time getting them through school but all three of them have graduated from college. He's an engineer [pointing] and graduated from Bozeman. Of course this is Kathy and that's Lillian and this boy here, they went to school because they were in the service, on the GI Bill and he's out of Denver and has four kids and he's putting all four of them through school, too, I'll tell you.

GP: Is he an engineer?

MSM: No, this is the engineer. He got mixed up in restaurants and he's run restaurants and country clubs and things like that.

GP: Well, for having been through as much --

MSM: As she has, she looks good, doesn't she?

GP: She looks very good, yes. Now you told me that that was your life, but I'm so glad you showed me this article that was written about you called "Our Very Modern Martha" because I have an inkling at least that you have been very active in your church here in Missoula.

MSM: Yes, I have tried to be, because you come to a strange place. Of course, Lillian had gotten married and she was pregnant. She was in the service too, you know.

GP: Not too long, right?

MSM: I thought I could send Kathy to school here, so that's why I wanted to move here and so, to get acquainted with people [end of Side Two] and of course I met Marjorie Jennings, and I was so enthused over all the hobbies and all the things that was doing and I was just so enthusiastic, I suppose, with..... and Marjorie wanted me to be in it [laughs].

GP: She was an extension agent, wasn't she at the time? So how did that change your life?

MSM: Well, it sure did change my life. Well, I hadn't been in it too awfully long till they wanted me to be Secretary-treasurer of it, 400 women in the county that belonged to home demonstration clubs, 24 clubs in the county at that time.

GP: What did you do as president? What was going on in those home demonstration clubs?

MSM: Well, there were lots of hobbies, and then lots of "How To Dress" -- how to pick things, how to put colors together, how to look for carpeting, how to look for furniture and stuff, and home demonstration work, the lessons were put out from Bozeman.

GP: What part did Marge Jennings have in it?

MSM: She was the extension agent.

GP: I see.

MSM: So I worked under her and it was pretty wonderful. I just went to everything I possibly could, and then I got to going to church. Oh, I wanted to show you. That piece there tells about my tatting.

GP: What you're showing me is a package of notecards — what are there, six in here?

MSM: Ten in there.

GP: Ten in there all tatted by you. This was done recently?

MSM: Still going.

GP: Are you getting these ready for your church bazaar?

MSM: Well, I have so many people wanting them that there were a few years I never got them down to the church at all.

GP: I can see why. Now, did you learn this tatting -- ?

MSM: I went to the Logee School.

GP: Your teacher taught you this at the Logee School?

MSM: That's right.

GP: Now, when you were a young married woman and while you were farming, and raising your children, were you able to do any of this beautiful work?

MSM: No. I did a lot of it before I was married. I used to cut the edge off of my sheet and put [an] insertion in there. But after I got married and my family started, I didn't have time.

GP: I can understand that.

MSM: Forty years, I guess.

GP: Forty years you didn't do it and then you resumed doing it? These are lovely; very unusual. Did you do the drawing on there too?

MSM: No, Claudia Jensen does part of it. Betty Collins does the other, and I have a couple of girls that glue on for me.

GP: I see. Well, they certainly are lovely.

MSM: I've had people order \$100 worth at a time. And there's ten in a package and they sell for six dollars.

GP: Six dollars. That's amazing. It's a good buy. It's a bargain, hand done like that. So you do that for your church? It's a church project? Tell me more about your work with the extension agent and with your church because I know you do more than just this tatting, too.

MSM: Well, I used to go down all the time and do whatever I could down there.

GP: At the church.

MSM: [Nods yes.] I was always a circle chairman or something [laughs]. Or picking somebody up and taking somebody someplace.

GP: I see in this little article it says that you resumed tatting after 40 years, but you have other hobbies too, don't you? You showed me some of this work. Needlepoint. Are you still doing that too?

MSM: I can't do it any more.

GP: But you can do the tatting, right?

MSM: I can still do that. This is what I do now.

GP: Oh, yes. You showed me that. And what about your eyes?

MSM: They're disintegrating pretty fast for me right now. There isn't anything they can do. I've had both eyes operated on.

GP: Cataracts?

MSM: [Nods assent.]

GP: For your age, I'd say it's remarkable that you can do what you do. I think that your family owes you so much thanks for your dedication to their education.

MSM: Well, I don't know. I didn't get that opportunity myself, so . . . but you know something? This is what Kathy does now.

GP: It's lovely. . . . would you call that a beaded necklace?

MSM: It was hard to get her to go to school; we tried to send her up to the university. She was awful good in drawing.

GP: Did she graduate from high school?

MSM: No. She did graduate from eighth grade. She was so good in this drawing that they suggested that we send her out to the university, but they didn't tell her that she couldn't hear, and she

was competing with normal people, so that didn't last very long. We tried to send her different places and they wanted to send her to Kalispell to live by herself. Well, I knew that wouldn't work. So we had quite a time. But you know, she married this fellow with his three kids. The two older ones aren't like they should be. The second boy had some kind of a disease; didn't develop. And the older boy wasn't quite right. The younger one is normal. He had his fifth birthday at our house. He graduated from the university out here; he's teaching in Las Vegas; he's got his Master's degree and the oldest boy, now, he got into trouble, so he spent a little time up at the camp by Swan Lake and that taught him something. But looking at him now, he took a lot of ideas that he got when he lived with Kathy and us. I used to have them almost every Sunday for dinner . . . because Kathy couldn't handle it. I bought almost all their clothes. Leo got after me for that. I said, "Well, they had to feel like they were dressed as nice as anybody else." They had to be that way. David is married; he's got two of the most beautiful little kids you ever saw, a little girl who is 11 and a boy who is 8, and they're just beautiful. I'm so proud of him.

GP: Well, you certainly have been a tremendous influence in all the family members and others of course through the extension agent. I was going to ask you -- I don't think Lillian and I talked about this when I taped her -- how did you feel about Lillian becoming a nurse?

MSM: Well, it's awfully hard when you don't have any money. I had cousins who were nurses and my dad had a cousin who was a nurse that they thought was pretty wonderful. But of course she wanted to get away from home. So she sent away. She wanted to go to Minneapolis or Denver or someplace; get away from home. She wasn't accepted. Her grades weren't good enough. It's awfully hard when you live out in the country and you don't mix with people a lot and then you go to town and they kind of make fun of you a little bit, so Lillian had that problem. She thought she was going to go to Great Falls, but that didn't work out either, but she was accepted in Havre.

Of course, I was thrilled to death. But she got homesick when she went to Havre. She used to hitchhike home to get something to eat (laughs), but she graduated from nurses' training there and didn't have any trouble. She just took it (exam) once and passed.

GP: Sure. She's had an outstanding career and I know you're very proud of her.

MSM: Oh, yes. It's been an awful hard (inaudible) and of course then she went to the service and she met this fellow, got herself pregnant. He was sent overseas and was shot down and died. So she's had a hard life.

GP: Yes. Well, she's had a very rich life.

MSM: Well, we've tried to help her. My brother says we did too much for her, but you have to do those things; you have to.

GP: She's done a lot for herself too. She's a very remarkable person.

MSM: Yes.

GP: I know I've taken almost two hours of your time, Mrs. McIver.

MSM: It's terrible to tell you all my bad times (laugh- ing)...

GP: No; because this is history and if these things aren't recorded, nobody knows about them.

MSM: My sister didn't like my husband. Of course, she married a Dutchman, a German, and I married a Scotchman, and my husband went to war and he got blown (inaudible) and of course there's always a little feeling in there between the men. There can't help but be. And of course Beattie didn't like -- she's always telling me what I should do and none of her kids went to college and they're not as good as my kids. (Laughing) I'm so proud of my kids, I tell you, I can't hardly stand it.

GP: You have a right to be proud of them and your husband and yourself, so --

MSM: We went through a lot.

GP: I think maybe -- I hope at least I haven't worn you out but I think you summed it up well when you said "We went through a lot" and this is probably a good time to stop and say "thank you." It's marvelous to see that smile on your face as you've recalled all these memories, some of which are rather painful. So thank you.