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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: 211-021
Interviewee: Astrid “Larsie” Sipma
Interviewer: Gladys Peterson
Date of Interview: circa June 1988
Project: Montana Educators Oral History Project

Note: The beginning of this interview was not captured on the audio. Here is a summary of what was discussed before the audio cassette started working.

Astrid Sipma was born in Haga, Syssebeck, Varmland, Sweden, in 1905. She came to the United States with her parents when she was a year old. They landed in New York and then went to North Dakota by way of Canada.

[Audio begins]

Astrid Sipma: —we went to Heimdal. The reason we went to Heimdal is because many of the Swedish people live there. So when Mama [Carolina Danielson Larson] and Dad [Carl Larson] came there, it was just like going to a country of their own.

Gladys Peterson: Did they know people there?

AS: Oh, they knew...a lot of people from Sweden live there in Heimdal. It was a Swedish settlement in North Dakota.

GP: So it was going to a place where they had some friends or maybe even relatives?

AS: Yes, relative. Then [unintelligible] lived up in Canada and a cousin of Mama’s lived up at...Dad worked on the railroad in 1909, they were building it at Dickinson, between Glendive and Dickinson. Mother stayed then up at Heimdal. Then in 1909, we moved to homestead at about 50 miles north and a little east of Scranton, North Dakota.

GP: Is that farther west than Heimdal?

AS: Scranton, North Dakota, is in the southwestern part. We’re way across the state. We had...I don't know how Dad had gotten oxen. He must have gotten [unintelligible]. Anyway, they were loaded on cars at Dickinson.

GP: Railroad cars.

AS: Yeah. Railroad cars. Then we had to take the oxen, haul the oxen and that from Dickinson to our homestead, and we were about, oh, 50 miles southwest of Scranton. Scranton is about 80, 90 miles east of the Montana line. Just east of Baker, Montana. Baker, Montana, and we lived [unintelligible].

GP: Now, when your father homesteaded there, were there other people from Heimdal who went to that area too?

AS: No.

GP: He went alone?

AS: Went alone, but it was a Scandinavian neighborhood. Danielsons who were Norwegians and Gustafsons were Sweden and [unintelligible] are Sweden, Rices were Norwegian. So we settled in a Scandinavian community right there in Scranton, North Dakota.

GP: And did he have 160 acres.

AS: Yes.

GP: And what did he do with his acreage?

AS: He farmed it.

GP: Wheat, was it? Did he have cattle and wheat?

AS: Yes, we had grain. We had some cattle, and he had the oxen—four oxen—to plow the land with. I can still see those oxen. In 1913, he sold those oxen and bought a team of horses—cost 700 dollars. That's 700, then, that was the price of a team of horses at that time.

GP: That was a lot, wasn't it?

AS: That was a lot of money at that time. The bank in Reeder—went through the business and bank in Reeder. In 1916, Dad died. So here mother was left with still that debt, and we lost our home place. That is, through taxes and that. But my brother Art [Arthur] bought it back later on in the '20s when he was old enough to farm the place.

GP: How old were you when your dad homesteaded? Do you remember any of those years?

AS: No, I just remembered the...I don't really remember much except at home. And that's—

GP: You mean living there?

AS: Oh yeah, I remember that. Oh yes, living there. Oh, yes. Dad built a frame house—

GP: You can write on here if you want.

AS: —18 by...let's see, 16 by 24. So we live in that in a couple of years. Then...the first winter or so, something like that. Then after that...then he built, when we raised grain, he built a granary out back of the house. And then he put sod all around that part of the frame house that was built. Then on the south side of the house, he built a 14 by 16 kitchen, made all out of sod. The inside of it, of course, was plastered. Oh, what a mouse haven. Granary was on the other side, and they'd right through the sod and over that. And the kitchen was bad because it come through that. They didn't chew holes through the wood, of course, but in the kitchen. So we'd catch mice at night. One night we caught 60 mice. And you know on the sod windows how wide they were? That was 2 by 4 inches...two inches deep or so. Then I'd set the kettle there, the board there, and then on the board that's through the front of the sod, to the front of the wall in sod. Then we had the table was sitting on the south side and right above the table there was a mouse hole. So we set traps. And one night it caught 60 mice and caught two baby mice coming in from all over the table and caught in a trap at the same time.

GP: Oh my goodness. That was quite a night, wasn't it?

AS: [laughs] Yeah. Lots and lots and lots of mice.

GP: Yes. Now, before I forget, you said your maiden name was Larson.

AS: Yes, yes. Our dad's name was Karl Larson (?), Mama's name was Carolina Danielson (?). She married Karl Larson, so my name is [unintelligible].

GP: A question that occurred to me was when you got to the homesteading place, you didn't have a place built. What did you live in until that was built? Did you tent?

AS: I don't know. That I don't remember.

GP: I just wondered what you would do until—

AS: That was in 1909 we moved there—

GP: And you were so little. Four years old.

AS: Wait a minute, yes, it was 1909 we moved on the homestead so I suppose it was tar-paper shack or something. I don't know. I really don't know. I don't remember.

GP: Well, how long did you live at that spot, you yourself.

AS: Well, I was there all the time until I was...See, Art sold the place after I was married and that. Mother died in '36, and Art stayed there then. Several years after that, he bought it.

GP: So you had a brother. Did you have any other—

AS: Oh, there were seven of us. I was the oldest. I was born 23rd of June, and they came to America the 15th of [unintelligible]. Mother was pregnant with Ellen, and she was born the 24th of July, just about a month after we came to the United States.

GP: Was she born in the United States or Canada.

AS: No, we didn't live in Canada.

GP: Oh, you just traveled through Canada?

AS: We traveled through Canada to get to Heimdal, North Dakota, and Heimdal was a little ways north of Fargo, North Dakota. So she was born there at Heimdal. Then the next year or so, Dad worked on the railroad. So Ruth was two years later. She was born in July 18, 1919

GP: And the others, were they born in North Dakota?

AS: Ruth was born at Heimdal. Then by that time we had moved on our farm. There's where the rest of the children were born. There was Brother Clark. My brother Art. There there's Sister Gladys and Sister [unintelligible].

GP: Do you remember that it was a tough life to farm there on that homestead? Did all of you seven children have to work very hard on that property?

AS: Well, yes, we did but most of it was when we were home, yes, we had to help milk cows and haul water in the two-wheeled cart—haul the water up the hill to wash clothes and that. [pauses] I don't remember too much but other than that, but in 1916, Mother built a house—two-story house.

GP: In 1916. When did you say your father died?

AS: 1916.

GP: Is that when he died? You say Mother built the house. I just wondered what happened to your father.

AS: He died in 1916.

GP: Oh, and then she built—

AS: He died of obstruction of the bowel.

GP: Was he a young man when he died?

AS: He was 37.

GP: Thirty-seven with seven children. So that placed quite a burden on your mother.

AS: Oh yes, [unintelligible]. Hilda was just two years old. She was very young.

GP: So what happened?

AS: Mother stayed there. Mother stayed there, and she rented out the farm to the neighbors. We stayed there then just as soon as I finished eighth grade. I worked my board and room and went to high school. In the summertime, all of us—as we got old enough—we booked out, and I worked at [unintelligible]. There when I was going to high school, and that was hard work because I had to do so much lugging. Go out to milk the cows, lug the milk to the separator house, separate that milk and lug it to the calves. Then there was water to lug and hauling. It was a lot of lugging.

GP: This was while you were in high school you did that?

AS: Yeah, in the summertime. Then when I went to high school I worked for my board and room everywhere that I went. The first year, it was easy, and I stayed part of the year with a family. Then later on they didn't want me to stay there. I can't even remember their name, but then I stayed with another family and went to school at Woodbury (?). That was the first year of high school. That was a nice place, worked for my board and room, and they was great. He drove the school bus, so that went out to school.

GP: Now, did all of you go to high school too, and graduate from high school?

AS: No, the boys didn't. When I went to school then in New England—I went for three years to high school in New England—I worked for my board and room there.

GP: How did you get to New England from North Dakota?

AS: It's just New England, North Dakota, not a town in New England. It's about 19 miles from Scranton, our home. About 20 miles from Scranton. I got home for Christmas then, but later on when I taught school then I didn't get home for Christmas.

GP: Was the reason that your brothers were there...How many brothers were there?

AS: Two.

GP: They didn't go to school because they were working on the farm.

AS: Clark went to high school for one year. That's it. Then he worked out a lot. Then he got married early and had a place of his own that he bought [unintelligible]—

GP: Now, when you were in high school, did you have a goal in mind? Was there something you wanted to do when you got out of high school?

AS: Mother said, "Ruth, you're going to be nurse. Astrid, you're going to be a teacher." So that's what I did. I went to school with intention to teach, and when Ruth graduated from high school she went to nurse's training and became a nurse. My oldest sister Ellen went to [unintelligible] to work for a family there. She went to work there, I suppose, when she was 8th grade—7th or 8th grade—and she lived with them all the time she went to high school. When she went to high school, there were seven miles to Woodbury School. When I went to Woodbury School, I had to board out with somebody—worked for my board and room, but Ellen would ride those seven miles to Woodbury school. She had a horse that when she'd ride and gallop away and went up to the gate that the horses jumped over, and away she went on to school [laughs]—to Woodbury School. That's where she went. Then she went to New England School, and she worked for her board and room to go to school too.

The last year that we were seniors, I worked for a family that year where I did all of the work except make the noon meal. At that time, people believed when they had surgery they couldn't do a thing for a year. He worked at the pool hall (?), and so he had to have his dinner at noon. She had had surgery, something to do with her stomach [unintelligible], so I'd come home then at noon from school and wash the dishes [unintelligible] I carried in the water. Washed the clothes for all of them because they had two little girls. I ironed. Made breakfast, made supper. The only thing I did not do was to make the noon meal because it had to be done, be ready by noon. Ellen was working for one of the teachers there, who [unintelligible] worked for her board and room. At Easter time, we went home for Easter. [unintelligible sentences]

But I stayed at a farm, a couple farms north of New England. One was a dairy farm. But I enjoyed that. I'd get up 5:00 in the morning and milk cows. Milk ten cows. Sometimes had to milk them all by myself.

GP: It was easier than what you had been doing?

AS: That was before. You see, this was the senior year that I had...this was before that, yes. I enjoyed it. All the years that we were away for school, I never did get homesick at that. But one Sunday I got very, very homesick. Chambers—that's a dairy man—he and she had gone somewhere else and I was home with the daughter. That day I got so homesick and lonely, and I cried and cried. [laughs] But in all the years that I was away from home, that's the only time that I really got really homesick and cried.

GP: Kind of like you had to get it out of your system.

AS: Yes. I don't know. I think it was probably because I was left home to babysit their girl, and she was in the first grade or something. [unintelligible sentence].

GP: When you graduated from high school, did you take a test to start teaching, or did you go to college right away or what?

AS: No. That was last year in 1923, when I graduated high school, and that was the last year you would teach without having...teach right out of high school. Then after that you had to have, I think it was, six weeks of training. Then my sister Ellen went to school that summer, and then she had to...No, she didn't. But she taught. She had taught for just two years and then quit. Then she got married. But that was in, oh, around '29 or something like that.

[pauses]

GP: Would you feel better if you just read that now because I know you spent some time writing it and it is complete, and if I think of some questions that might fit into that particular period, maybe I'll just interrupt you if you don't mind.

AS: Oh, that'll be fine.

GP: Why don't you go ahead then because I know you've spent some time on that?

[pauses] Well, that wasn't on the tape anyhow what you read me.

AS: Oh, it wasn't?

GP: No.

AS: You don't want me to start from the beginning do you?

GP: Let's see, does this—

AS: The first year I taught I was 18 years old.

GP: Sure, go ahead. Just start right there then because that's not on here at all.

AS: Oh, oh it isn't! All right. The first year I taught I was 18 years old and had just graduated high school the spring of 1923. I taught a country school about 15 miles east of New England, North Dakota. I had three Truzinka (?) boys: Art in the 8th grade, Abel in the 6th grade, Robert in the 3rd grade. Rose Schweitzer (?), 8th grade, and the Schweitzer twins—a girl and a boy—in the 5th grade. I boarded at Ralph Walker's (?) a half mile or so from the school so walked back and forth to school except for when the snow was deep. I paid 25 dollars for my board and room, and I got 90 dollars a month teaching. I was lucky to start at 90 dollars a month. There was a lot

of that didn't start at that. This was in 1923, I got 90 dollars a month. That was considered good wages. You see, at that time, money—90 dollars—meant a lot more than it does today. In the fall of 1924, I taught the Lort's School (?) about 15 miles north of Hebron, North Dakota. I boarded at Lorts'. Otto was the son who farmed the land, and his sister Frieda did the cooking that year.

Then when I taught there in 1925 and 1926, Frieda's twin sister, Tina, did the cooking. I had around 12 pupils in 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 8th grades. School was only half a mile from the boarding place so I walked back and forth to school. Those were two of the happiest years of my teaching experience, as there were many young folks and we had many parties in the homes where we played all kinds of games. If the winters were cold enough, we would go skating on the ponds. We'd have coasting parties. I enjoyed the German meals of goodies such as kugel (?) and the good homemade breads.

The years 1926 through 1929, I taught the Rice School (?), that I had attended from 1st through the 8th grade. I had six pupils in the 1st grade. Middle grades, I had [unintelligible] 5th and 6th, whatever it was, and 8th grades. As I stayed at home, I paid no board so bought a Model-T Ford the fall of 1926. The summer of 1927 and 1928, I went to Dickinson State Teacher's College and started my two-year course in college. In order to graduate in 1929, the school board got a substitute teacher to teach the last month of school so I could get in the spring quarter at Dickinson State College. I had to make up the two weeks I missed being two weeks late for spring quarter.

I taught in 1929 and 1930 at Reeder, North Dakota. I did light housekeeping and my sisters Hilda and Gladys stayed with me. They were attending high school.

GP: Could I interrupt for just a minute? Were you supplementing your income then when you were doing light housekeeping, or this was before you graduated now? Just wanted to get that straight.

AS: Oh, we did light housekeeping while we were...We rented a room and did light housekeeping instead of...for a place to live while I was teaching and the girls were going to school.

GP: Oh, while you were teaching.

AS: We rented a room and did light housekeeping. That was cheaper than to board out [unintelligible].

GP: I see what you mean. You weren't working at that job, at getting paid for it. It was just where you live that you were doing the—

AS: That is the way we saved board and room.

GP: Now, I understand it.

AS: By getting, renting a room. I had 18 1st graders and 12 2nd graders and the workbooks. So I always had the blackboards covered with lessons and seat work each night before I went home. 1930 and 1931, I taught the Ferguson School about ten miles east to Baker, Montana. I had five pupils in the 1st, 6th, and 8th grades. It was then I met Bill Olson (?) in Baker. Bill Olson and Mama went to school together in Sweden. He had come to America from Mama and Dad did and I did. He first went to Minnesota, and then he came to Baker and he worked on the railroad, laying track and things like that. We got to visit a lot there at Olson's [unintelligible].

GP: Did your mother ever get to see him?

AS: Oh yes. Mama...we were over to Olson's several times [unintelligible], and they were to our house too. See, that wasn't so far apart. See, Baker's only about 20 miles from the Montana line, and we were about 15 miles. Then we [unintelligible] that.

In the year 1931 and 1932, I taught the Medicine Rocks School, southeast of Baker, and we'd visit with Olsons a lot then too because that wasn't very far away.

GP: Could I ask a question? Why were you changing schools? Did you get more money, or did it look like a better opportunity or what?

AS: Well, the reason I didn't...I went from Reeder to Baker because I had three children that were very, very slow in school. This one—the third at the foot of the class—his dad was on the school board.

GP: This was in Reeder.

AS: Yes, Reeder when I taught 1st and 2nd grades. He was in the 1st grade. He was very, very poor at school. His dad didn't want me to teach the next year, because I didn't give his kids [unintelligible]. I didn't believe in giving children marks that they didn't deserve. I didn't have much time to do lots of remedial reading with 18 1st graders and 12 2nd graders. To stay after school, the kids couldn't hardly to that either. I didn't have time to do it during class time on school days. So when the school board didn't want to rehire me, I showed the superintendent his marks. I showed them the workbooks to show what work the student did. We did have papers and things and some were workbooks.

GP: Okay, fine. So then you...Go ahead now with what you have there.

AS: Then I applied for a school in Baker, Montana. Wrote to the superintendent in Baker, Montana. Applied for school there [unintelligible], and I've been in Montana ever since.

GP: Oh, I wondered how you got to Montana.

AS: Been here ever since. In the year of 1931 and 1932, I taught for Medicine Rock School, southeast of Baker. I had five pupils in the 1st, 5th, and 8th grades. The school was near lower hills made of rough, steep rocks where we'd play hide and seek in the fall and spring, and in winter, we went coasting. When we did that, we'd have no recess in the winter so we could have an hour's time to eat and go play as we had only a half-hour noons in the wintertime because the people didn't...wanted their kids to come home early.

GP: Because it would get dark.

AS: Get dark early. That way we had just a half hour at noon so then we had no recesses, put the recesses together with the half-hour noon, that way we got an hour to play. Because by the time we had eaten lunch and put our wraps on and gone—

[Break in audio]

AS: —three pupils left to go to school after the two 8th graders passed their state exams.

The two years from 1934 to 1936, I taught the Skohl School (?) southeast of Baker about 20 miles. I had about seven pupils: 1st, 4th, 6th, and 8th grades. I boarded at Glen and Lillian Hansen's (?) the first year. Lillian's father had a gallstone operation the Monday of the first week that I was there, and he died on Saturday from the operation. So John who was working in the apple harvest in Antioch, Washington came home for his dad's funeral. Lillian and Johnny—brother and sister. That was the first time I met Johnny. We were married in June 1935, so we moved a shack near the schoolhouse where I stayed during the week as it was too far to drive each day. We didn't have but one outfit to drive either. See, we were married the second year I taught at the Skohl School, we were married at the Skohl School. We were married in June the year before.

GP: What was his last name?

AS: Sipma.

GP: Oh, so I didn't catch that. I wondered if you'd been married before. Sipma. They didn't care if you were married over there at that time?

AS: Oh, no. No, not when you taught school.

GP: Because, let's see, what year was this?

AS: This was 1936. I met Johnny in 1935... [pauses] No, in the fall of '34 when he came home from Washington.

GP: Because I have also talked to teachers who say that when they were looking for jobs at that time, teachers were a dime a dozen. This was during the Depression now, and no married teacher could get a job or if you got married, you had to quit.

AS: No.

GP: But that didn't happen to you?

AS: Oh, no, no. [laughs] I was married in '35, and taught more since I've been married. [pauses]

After Christmas in 1936, [unintelligible] asked me to finish teaching the 1936 and 1937 school's term at a consolidated school south of Mott, North Dakota. She and her husband were teaching that consolidated School. 5th, 7th, and 8th. He had gotten a job in the post office in Mott in January 1937. So John and I moved to Mott then, to the consolidated school south of Mott, and I finished the school term teaching the upper grades.

GP: What did John do?

AS: John got a job in the spring working for some farmers doing spring work. Run tractors and work for the farmers. He worked for the farmers running tractors and things like that.

GP: Now, you're talking 1936. This is the middle of the Depression. How was the Depression going on there? Was it a tough time at those farms?

AS: I don't know. Of course, we never noticed too much ourselves.

GP: You didn't? Because you both were working?

AS: Yes, but he got only a dollar a day, working daylight until dark like they do on the farms that way.

GP: Now, were people losing their property?

AS: No, I don't think so. Not that I know of. No.

We stayed in the teacherage in the basement of the school. But then when Johnny worked at the places, he stayed the nights there. With the intention of quitting teaching the summer of 1937, we went with his sister Netta and husband Floyd Hansen (?) to Antioch, Washington. The men got jobs combining in the wheat fields near Ritzville, Washington, while Netta and I stayed in the cabin we had rented in Antioch. The men came back in time for apple harvest so John booked for J.D. Bone (?) picking apples again. He had gone out there several falls before. He started in 1931, he went there, and had worked in the apple harvest for J.D. Bone. Being no

work around home or anything like that, we went to Washington to work in the apple harvest. I got a job as tail sorter in the apple shed where they packed the apples into boxes. They started in September, and this was, oh I suppose, the last part of September.

In middle of October, we got a call from Irvin Cox (?), asking me to teach Prairie Rose School, as the teacher they had hired quit at the end of the first month of school. Now this school, Prairie Rose School was just a couple miles north of our place, and that's where the girls went to school.

GP: Now this was North Dakota?

AS: Went back to North Dakota. [pauses] Wait a minute...No, this was at Baker. Because we lived at Baker. When we got married we lived south of Baker.

GP: Oh, so the girls you're talking about were your own children?

AS: Yes.

GP: Oh, I thought you met your sisters.

AS: No, my own children. So we quit our jobs and packed up and came back home, and I started teaching last part of October. I taught Prairie Rose School for three years. Then I taught the Oakley (?) School in 1940 and 1941. I stayed in a teacherage in the school. They had the teacherage right in the schoolhouse. On September 2, 1946 [1941], Lee Kent, our boy, was stillborn. So I didn't teach then in 1941 and 1942 because of that. I was in no condition, of course, to teach after that being sick from the—

GP: When was he born?

AS: He was born September 2, 1941.

GP: But you already had two daughters?

AS: No.

GP: Oh, you didn't?

AS: No, no.

GP: They weren't born yet.

AS: September 2, 1941, Lee Kent was born. But I was really sick from the poison from the stillborn boy. 1942 through 1944, I taught the Chimney Creek School. That was a little farther

from home, and since it was farther from home, then I did light housekeeping and stayed in the schoolhouse. Then Ruby Ranver (?) was the girl that lived north of us, and she was in the eighth grade and their school closed. They didn't have pupils enough to run the school so she stayed with me.

GP: Where was your husband?

AS: He was home on the farm. Johnny stayed home and took care of the cattle, so—

GP: Now, this farm you're talking about, where was it? Not the one that your mother had. This must be a different property that you got—

AS: Oh, I should tell that. I forgot about that. When we were married, John was herding sheep. He and his brother Jake had sheep. They had rented the Matson (?) place. Matson was a man that had...was a conductor on the railroad for years, and he bought them that place. Then afterwards he moved out of there, and we rented the place from him.

GP: This was in the Baker area?

AS: This is near, south of Baker near Knobs. Knobs was the post office [unintelligible].

GP: So your husband stayed there then while you were teaching and living in the teacherage?

AS: Yes, and we were too far away from the schools. The Prairie Rose, now, was the school where the kids went to school. So it was just two or three miles from the school.

GP: Eventually you had two daughters, is that right?

AS: Let's see, then 1942 through 1944, I taught the Chimney Creek School and Ruby Ranver stayed with me. Karen Anne was born January 30, 1945, and Janice was born September 10, 1946. So I didn't do any teaching then for a while. Then the girls were big enough so that in 1950 to 1953 I taught Chimney Creek School one year. Then later on I taught Belmont (?) School about 1955 to 1956, something like that. By that time, Karen Anne was ready to go to school...Or go to high school, I mean. But before I mentioned that Karen Anne, when I taught the Chimney Creek School, I had Karen Anne in school there with me. I taught her for 2nd grade...3rd grade. When Karen Anne was ready to go to high school, we had to go to Baker then for her to go to school. Janice was in the 7th grade in—Karen Anne was 1st grade. Not 1st, she was—

GP: Freshman.

AS: Freshman in high school. So I got a job teaching 1st grade in Baker in 1958 and 1959. In the meantime, in '58, we had come out here to see Jeanette (?) and Oscar, Johnny's brother and

wife—Sipma. The lived here south of Darby. When we were here, the Lenskis (?) that lived in that house across the road—you notice the house before you turned up [unintelligible]—they wanted to sell, and they had 152 acres. And we wanted to buy a place out here so that the kids could go to high school. Because if we'd stayed there, it was either I go into town with the kids and Johnny stay out on the farm alone, or else it was the kids stayed in town alone and we were out on a farm. We didn't want that. So we sold the farm. Krieger (?) wanted the farm, so they got money from...the federal government bought the place. Then we moved out here, and they [unintelligible]. [unintelligible sentence]. We moved out here then and got here June 3, 1959. Bought the place the fall before. [unintelligible] was Johnny and Janice together in the pickup loaded up, and brother Clark and [unintelligible] came with their truck loaded with machinery and stuff like that. Brought his tractor and different things. Machinery and stuff like that. Then Karen Anne and I were the last behind. I was so tired from staying up, getting ready for the packing and getting the books closed for the school. That even if she didn't have a driver's license, she drove us there. She'd learned to drive before she was just barely—

GP: Before she could see over the steering wheel.

AS: Yes. Someone was there one time and they saw the pickup coming couldn't see anybody behind the steering wheel. [laughs] There it was Karen Anne.

GP: This is 1959, you said that you moved out here?

AS: Yes, but this was when she was a little, I mean. She'd go out in the field with Johnny, and Johnny wanted the pickup back to the house. Otherwise, he'd have to walk back and get the pickup. So he'd get on his machine and do whatever it was he was doing—plowing or whatever it was—then he'd put the pickup in low gear and she had learned to steer before and she drove right to the house. When she got to the house, turned the key off. She had learned to drive early then, to steer a car, a pickup early.

GP: So, what was she, about 14, 15 years old then when you moved out here? Or less than that?

AS: Let's see...She was [pauses; counts] 13.

GP: She was 13, and she did the driving from the Baker area?

AS: Yes. Most of it.

GP: So you got out here and you got settled in and in pretty much the same spot then. You bought land right in this area.

AS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, not too far from Jeannette and Oscar. Jeannette and Oscar lived down here at Connor (?).

I'm thankful we had the two girls. Otherwise, we probably would still be sitting out there near Baker. There's nothing there. Even the spring that we had on the mountains there was dried up. Bonnie (?) and Clarence (?), Johnny's brother and wife, they were born and raised there, and they don't know anything else. They lived there and they like it. But when we went back there last summer it was just nothing. No crops. The buildings are gone. We bought a place, bought some land, from the county. So we had 1,150 acres or something—something over 1,000 acres of our own, and we built a house in that place. We had used brick—a block, cement blocks—for the basement. We built that house in '52. We lived in it until '59. Then a neighbor there finished it. We didn't have the bathroom—the stool and the shower—in the upstairs. We had the stool down in the basement. Of course, that sink and that in the bathroom. Cox's finished the bathroom—put the bathtub in and all that. [unintelligible sentence]. But we took showers downstairs.

GP: But when you went back last year, the place was not in very good shape. Is that—

AS: No, they let the dogs dig alongside side of the house and those blocks. So the house was...It's sad that a new, brand new house like that stands there vacant.

GP: But you're not sorry you left the area?

AS: Oh no. No, no. Thank god that we live out here, and thank god that we had two girls that we had to bring out here to get the high school education.

GP: Couldn't they have gone to school in the Baker area?

AS: Yes. Johnny staying out there and me staying out—

GP: Oh I see, you would have been separated.

AS: Yeah. It was 37 miles. They couldn't go back and forth.

GP: Yeah, I see what you mean. Yeah. So you were thinking of your girls. Well, now did you get into teaching right away when you moved out here?

AS: Yes. When I moved out here, I did substitute teaching in the 3rd grade.

GP: In Darby?

AS: Yeah. [long pause]

We got settled in our new home and ready for school again. This time we'd be a family and not separated through the weeks as we were down on the farm 31 miles from us while we were

living in Baker. I taught the first grade in Baker when the girls were going to school. Here I got a job substituting in the 3rd grade in 1959 and 1960 and in 1960 and 1961, and taught the 3rd grade in Darby. The fall of 1961, I had planned not to teach when the neighbors with children of kindergarten age asked me to teach kindergarten so we fixed up a room in the basement of our house [unintelligible], and I taught kindergarten for eight years. I really enjoyed teaching them. Didn't make too much money as I only charged ten dollars a month and bought quite a few supplies outside of their books and pencils. I taught kindergarten for eight years, and then Darby started their kindergarten classes. I was 65 years old that summer so I was ready to quit teaching.

When we moved out here, we bought some milk cows so sold milk and cream to customers, which meant cream separator, milk bottles, and milking machines to keep clean in the milk house, so kept us busy. When school started, Karen Anne did the milking chores, and Janice helped in the house, so kept us busy. Some nights I wouldn't get home until 8:00 from school. By the time I had checked work and prepared lessons for the next day.

Now, here I wrote something that was when I was still teaching another school.

GP: That's fine. Just go ahead.

AS: Oh. When I taught the O'Donnell School (?)—this is before I was married—I stayed in the teacherage, which was built in the yard of the O'Donnells. They lived about a fourth of a mile or less from the school. I had 22 to 24 pupils in all grades, but the 2nd grade. When we had a hot lunches those two years, each family brought something for the stew or soup, such as carrots, potatoes, meat, and so on. Two pupils were the cooks for the day, and they peeled the potatoes and got stew ready unless it was already fixed up. The heaters made a good cook stove to heat the lunches or cook them as necessary.

I had several pranks played on me when I taught this school. One morning I opened my desk, and there was a dead snake in the front of the little drawer. I just took it out and threw it out in the backyard and never said a word about it. [laughs] I was used to grass snakes as a kid as they were often snakes crawling into the sod walls of our house and granary, and I used to play with them. So that was nothing that scared me. [laughs] One day I noticed the children in the room next to the north wall were snickering and looking at something on the floor. So I went over from my desk in the southwest corner to see what the attraction was. There was a poor mouse barely able to move between the desk there and the wall, because Ted Brewer (?) had brought him to school in his pants pocket. It was rather starved for air and sort of paralyzed so it moved very slowly. I picked up the poor thing, went out on the porch and crushed its head with my foot, and then threw it into the hot stove. Never saying a word to any of them. Too bad I disappointed them in not screaming or something when I saw the poor mouse. [laughs] But that's what they planned on.

Another time they put fresh horse manure on the porch. Several rode horseback. So I said to Raymond Madler (?), "There's something that doesn't belong on the porch. Will you please take the broom and sweep it off."

He said, "I didn't do it."

And I answered, "I didn't say you did it, but please sweep it off." Later on, I found out Ted [unintelligible] had been the culprit. [laughs] And the one that you'd least expect. Never again did it happen since I didn't raise Cain about it.

Mother had sent me a package of goodies that someone at Scranton, North Dakota, who was going to Baker, and they left the package at the bank in Baker so I wanted to leave right after school, the bank before it closed for the day. I left immediately after school in my Chevrolet secondhand that I'd bought on the sale the year before. As soon as I was on my way, the ones who were getting horses ready and visiting and so forth starting yelling and screaming and having a great time. The schoolhouse wasn't too far from several people. That night, while in bed, I wondered what I should do to punish them. I knew which ones had walked home and who remained. The next morning I said to the children, "All those who yelled last night come to the front," so they did. I said to them, "Now you have to yell until you come and apologize to me for screaming last night as soon as I left." Boy, they all started out very enthusiastically, but then the smaller ones apologized so they went to the [unintelligible]. I said, "Keep on yelling."

Finally Jimmy Crawford came up, an 8th grader, and said to me, "Miss Larson, what do you want me to do?"

I said, "Are you sorry you yelled last night?" I said, "When you tell me that you're sorry that you yelled last night." So he did.

But the two girls, Ida Crawford (?) and Florence Madden (?), do you suppose they could come up? No sir. So I told them to keep on yelling. Then after a while it got quiet, and they wouldn't come up and apologize to me, so they wrote all kinds of crazy stuff at the blackboard. Well, that was [unintelligible] so we never had any classes that morning, all morning. I said to the girls, "Now, girls, suppose Miss Lyman (?), the county superintendent, had come when you were...happened that way, she would think, 'I wonder what kind of parents those girls have.'"

[unintelligible], but when I mentioned that [unintelligible].

GP: They didn't want their parents to know about it? Did they ever apologize?

AS: Well, they I kind of did, yes. [unintelligible]. But they never yelled again. Never.

GP: Well, it worked. These have certainly been some interesting stories you've told, Larsie, about your teaching career and your early life. I don't want to prolong this. I need to be somewhere else by noon, actually, but I—

AS: [unintelligible].

GP: No, that's all right. Is there anything else you'd just like to add before we run out of tape here and run out of time?

AS: I have thoroughly enjoyed teaching, all of it. Although the first years when I started teaching, when I come to think of it, I don't know as I was a very good teacher. First place, I didn't know much about it. But later on, then as I had taught several years, then I felt that I really did teach them a lot. When I taught at...well, at one time, they didn't teach phonics in 1st grade, but that's something that I really stressed that way. I taught phonics to older children and all, because a lot of them had never had had it. I thought phonics was very important when I taught 1st grade readers.

GP: So you're not sorry your mother said, "Astrid, you're going to become a teacher."

AS: No, no, no. No, no. I've enjoyed it, and I've taught Sunday school too and I've enjoyed it. Ruth is a good nurse too.

GP: Is she?

AS: Yeah. Of course, she didn't do nursing so very long because she got married and that, but she was—

GP: She didn't go back to it then?

AS: No, not after she married and had her children and all that.

GP: What about your other sister?

AS: Sister Ellen?

GP: Yes.

AS: She only taught two years. Then she got married. She died of cancer two years ago, and my oldest brother died of cancer ten years ago.

GP: Let me ask you one more question or two here. Did most of them stay in North Dakota, or did they move from there?

AS: My brothers and sisters?

GP: Yes.

AS: Most of them moved away.

GP: Most of them moved away. Did they go West? Did any others of them come to Montana?

AS: No, well, they went on to Washington. Brother Art's in Oregon, Ruth's in Washington. Clark stayed there.

GP: He's the one that came back and bought the place from your mother?

AS: No, that was Art. But he sold that, and he and his wife live in Oregon. My brother Clark got married and bought a place east of Scranton. His widow was here the other day, her and her daughter and two grandsons.

GP: So for the most part they left North Dakota though?

AS: Yes, there's none in North Dakota. The only ones there is just [unintelligible]. Art is in Oregon, Ruth is in Washington, Hilda is in Oregon—my other sister—and Gladys...Oh, I take that back. Gladys is in Bismarck. She lives in Bismarck. [unintelligible].

GP: Did your mother tell her what to do with her life?

AS: No, no. She never told—

[End of Interview]