

Oral History 352

Interviewee: Elizabeth Hershey Fry

Interviewer: Julie Mace

Third voice is Ruth Royter

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Julie Mace: Now, you mentioned, Elizabeth, your family and so when did your family then come to Missoula?

Elizabeth Hershey Fry: Well, John B. Catlin was my grandfather and he came to Montana right after the Civil War. He fought in the Civil War on the North side. He came to Montana and he went out to the coast and he went all around here and he finally decided that the Bitterroot was the best place - so he lived in the Bitterroot. He had hotel in Stevensville. He fought in the Battle of the Big Hole with the Indians. He was the leader of the civilians at the Battle of the Big Hole. Later he was a Indian agent for the Blackfeet. He lived with us. He and his wife, and his wife's sister, lived with my family all my young life. I grew up with all of these people in the family.

JM: How wonderful. When your father and mother married, then they [grandparents] came to your house or you moved into their house?

EHF: No. They came to our house. My father took care of the whole crowd for years and years and years. He was an attorney in Missoula.

JM: Now his name was Hershey. Where did he come from?

EHF: He came from Ohio.

JM: He came west from Ohio. When where you born?

EHF: April 5, 1896.

JM: Oh my! Do you remember - were you born in a hospital here in Missoula or was it at home?

EHF: No. You were born at home in those days. If you were lucky, you could have somebody come and stay with you a couple of weeks. My mother had someone, I don't think she was a nurse, but she was...

JM: Probably a midwife?

EHF: She came and took care of her at home.

JM: I bet she had her mother.

EHF: Well, but her mother did not live with us at that time. She lived in Missoula though. They came to live with us when I was about I'd say maybe 8,9,10.

JM: Ruth was saying that your family home was where? On south 5th Street?

EHF: Yes, the Presbyterian Church was on the corner there and they bought our house and tore it down to build their Sunday school rooms. So that's where I grew up, there at that street.

JM: Did Missoula have any businesses there, south of the river like they do now?

EHF: Well, as I remember there was an ice cream store called Eirc's(?).

JM: Oh, of course.

EHF: There might have been one or two others, but very little on the south side. Where I was born on Woodford Street, over here just not very far from where I used to live on Dixon, there was nothing between there and the Fort (Missoula). All that land out there where I lived out by Dixon was just bare lot ground, bare land. There was nothing between us and the University. We had just started that. You could just see right over into the University. Woodford Street was all just vacant land.

JM: There weren't any trees in the valley then either, were there to speak of?

EHF: I can't remember that. I just remember there weren't any houses.

JM: But if you could see all the way across, there couldn't have many trees.

EHF: When I went to University, I lived there on 5th Street. I went to down to cross 6th Ave about a block and I could cut right straight through to the University. Kind of a catty-corner path. It was really just a path. There was no houses and you took a short cut.

JM: Was there an air strip at all out there? An air field?

EHF: No. They hadn't started the air strip.

JM: Nothing?

EHF: I never heard of air planes then. In fact they hadn't very many, they didn't have any automobiles. I remember the first automobile that came to Missoula. It was a Dr. (Joseph) Oettenger and he was just a sight for sore eyes. Nobody had ever seen a car. We kids would just hang around and hope he'd ask us to ride. He sometimes did - around the block just to please the

kids.

JM: And that was the first car?

EHF: That was the first car. I must have been 7-8 maybe.

JM: You must have good memories riding in it and everything.

EHF: Well, it was such a treat you see. I don't think he drove it for more than two blocks, probably, but to get in and out of it was something for us you know. [laughter] We had a horse and what was called at that time a trap. It was a very elegant carriage. The back seat folded down when it was not in use, but when it was in use, you put it up and you could carry maybe five passengers.

JM: Was that pulled with like a pair of horses then?

EHF: No, just one horse, old Doc. We had a barn there on 5th Street (which later turned into a garage many years later). But old Doc, he used to telephone to the house when he wanted something. There was a clothes line, kind of a wire clothes line just out of his stall. He could reach around and kind of give it a little wiggle and it would ring in the house.

JM: And then would you go see him?

EHF: Oh yes! He was wanting water or feed.

JM: He was part of the family in other words.

EHF: Oh yes, he was part of the family old Doc.

JM: Where would you typically go in the trap?

EHF: Oh, all around town. Mother had social engagements and church engagements. She drove. In the summer, we took a long long trip to Lolo, Lolo Hot Springs, where we camped for a couple of weeks for vacation in the summer. It took most of the day to drive to Lolo with a horse. How far is Lolo?

JM: It would be a good twenty, twenty-five miles.

EHF: That is a long way to drive in a day. Then later, when we lived in California, (we lived down in San Francisco for many years,) and we used to come up here, we had our first car. Well my father had had a car before I was married, but this was ours after our first year of marriage. We spent about \$650 for a second hand Chevrolet. It was an open car, it wasn't a sedan.

JM: Touring car?

EHF: Touring car, whatever. It took us about three days to get from San Francisco to Missoula. You couldn't get from Missoula to Spokane in a day. It was more than a days drive.

JM: So when you came up over that pass, Lookout Pass, and between Missoula and Spokane that had to have been quite the...

EHF: Oh yes, that was quite a drive!

JM: Steep?

EHF: Oh yes. That's quite a drive and the roads were terrible. They were dusty and ratty. There was a little pavement between Spokane and Coeur d' Alene and there was a little pavement between Redding and Red Bluff in California and the rest of it was just dirt road.

JM: That was probably what, the 1920's?

EHF: Yes. I was married in 1924 and it would have been about 1925 and on.

JM: I forget that it was like that. You think in the 1900's that things were..

EHF: Well, they were. There were more cars then, of course, lots of cars. We thought nothing of it. Motels were just a building with a bed and a mattress and you carried your own bedding. You folded it on the back seat and sat on it if you needed to. You had your own bedding. There was a toilet - one in a campground, usually and it was usually the other end of the lot from where you were, [laughter] so you just went outside the door. You didn't go that far. [All laugh] It was very primitive, but we weren't choosy. My grandmother used to say, "Them that sat on cushions, don't miss 'em." We just sat on cushions that's all.

We had kind of a trunk that we put on the car, the back of the car, for our vacations. We carried a little bit of groceries in it. We got our own breakfasts and our own lunches - mainly because we didn't have very much money. Then we splurged and stopped at some restaurant for dinner, but breakfast and lunch we kind of ate out of the trunk.

JM: Typically you wouldn't spend more than a dollar a piece for dinner either would you?

EHF: I don't think you ever spent so much as a dollar! Heavens, you could get an elegant dinner for a dollar and a quarter. I remember we used to get a dinner for 85 cents, 75-85 cents. But we didn't have the 85 cents. It is a matter - for instance, I get more pension now than my husband got salary in 1933 when we went to San Francisco. It is just a difference...

JM: ... in the cost of living?

EHF: Yes. When I was first married, after Marigold was born, I fed the three of us on a dollar a

day. Pretty soon you couldn't do that well at all.

JM: And that was down in California?

EHF: San Francisco.

JM: So you were in the rather high priced area?

EHF: Yes, I was in a rather high priced neighborhood. Jerry got a high priced salary, considering.

JM: Which is why you went there in the first place, wasn't it? When you first went down to California then, was your husband still in school?

EHF: Oh no. Well he went down and spent the first year at Berkeley to get his masters degree. He had already graduated from Kansas State and had taught in Montana before I had met him. We were in different parts of California for eight years. We moved from Willits, up north, to San Francisco in 1933 and were there forever.

JM: Ruth was saying that your family also had a retreat, a cabin or whatever?

EHF: Yeah. We have a cabin on Flathead Lake.

JM: Oh, that still is in the family.

EHF: Oh yes, we still have it. When Marigold died- I haven't gone up for several years, two or three years, because we are on an island and getting in and out of the boat and walking up from the shore and all just got to hard for me. So I haven't been going up, but Marigold/Maribell has right along and I wondered with her gone if we would want to sell the place. My grandchildren went up in arms, of course they don't want to sell it. They want it. What they'll do with it I don't know, but anyway it's a very lovely place, but it's just a camp. It doesn't have indoor plumbing. It is just a camp.

JM: That's on Bull island?

EHF: It's on Bull island, which is the largest of the five on the narrows, just off of Polson.

JM: When did you start going there?

EHF: We built the place in 1922.

JM: How did your dad get that property?

EHF: Well, my dad was a lawyer and he did some law work for Mr. Smeed who owned all that land up there. Mr. Smeed only paid him with a couple of lots and then we built the house ourselves. My husband, (I had known him for five years before we were married and he was up

there that summer) he and dad and a couple of men they picked up on the street in Polson built the cabin themselves. My husband said he had to marry me in order not to waste all that time, in order to get the cabin. [laughter] You could see how that would be.

JM: And then you came back every year except a few during the second world war?

EHF: Well there were a few years during the war, WWII, that we didn't come, but otherwise we came every summer. You see, my husband was a teacher and he had from June through September off. And we didn't have much money, you know, to go to Europe and whatnot. The easiest thing to do was go to the cabin and we enjoyed it. We liked it. So we weren't putting any great sacrifice on our part.

JM: When you were a child and went up there... no, you were older when you built the cabin.

EHF: Let's see, in '22 I was 24 years old.

JM: Were your grandparents still here then?

EHF: Yes. My grandfather wasn't. My grandfather died in 1917, the year I graduated from University. But my grandmother was still alive and her sister who lived with us was still alive. They didn't like the cabin though. My grandmother said that she went without indoor plumbing and all when she first came to Montana back in the old days and she wasn't going to do it again. Why anybody would want to leave a good home and go to a camp was beyond her. [laughter] So she didn't go, but Aunt Hat went. She liked it.

JM: Now was Polson even there...

EHF: Oh yes. About what it is like now. I don't think it has changed much.

JM: Just a small town there on the side of the lake. But there wasn't any roads. Or were there roads along the lake at that time?

EHF: Well, there was a road, but it was just a dirt road. It wasn't paved. It would be muddy in season and dusty the rest of the year.

JM: Did it go all the way around the lake?

EHF: It was around the lake.

JM: How would you get out to the camp? Would you go on a boat to get out there?

EHF: There was a bit boat, the Klondike. It used to run back and forth and if we'd put a dish towel out on a pole we had they'd stop for us at the island and we'd get on. They were only in town about an hour. I know they were in town from 12-1 or from 11-12, whatever it was and we

would just scurry in all directions to pick up groceries and the mail and all the things that we could get you know to come back on the boat. We had this car by that time and we usually rowed over. We had a row boat and we'd row over to the mainland and then go around with the car.

JM: Well that's because you also in part of the deal for this house you had what you called a shore station where you could...

EHF: Well, we had that later. When we left it was a good thing to leave the boat on the mainland rather than the island. If you left it on the island how would you get to the mainland? You would have to swim I guess. Anyway, my father was able to get what you call an easement on a piece of land there that belonged to somebody else... just enough to put up a small shed really, a boat house, where we kept our boat and others that we ought to keep on the mainland. We still have it. And of course as we gradually got more affluent he added a motor to our row boat, a about a two horse power or whatever it is [laughter] and then we got a bigger boat with a bigger motor and then another big boat and another bigger motor. So now we don't have a row boat anymore, but we have a-what are those things called that you just...

Ruth Royter: A kayak.

EHF: Yes. We have a kayak, but we also have a... it's kind of a tub... you sit down low and...

RR: An inflatable raft.

EHF: Yes. We have one of those besides two motor boats.

JM: How long did it used to take to row across when you were in the row boat?

EHF: To row across? Oh about 15 minutes.

JM: Oh.

EHF: I rowed all around the country there.

JM: I am sure you knew the whole island then quite well.

EHF: Oh yes. There was only one house besides ours on the island for quite a little while. Mr. Smeed owned all that land and their children the Harrises, and later their children the Denesons. It is the Denesons now. Now ours has gone from Hershey to Fry to Albertsons [?]. It has gone through all the generations.

RR: You all had girl children then obviously because the names change every generation.

EHF: Yeah. Well Grant, is our first boy.

JM: They want to keep it [the island house] in the family. That's nice.

EHF: Grant lives in Helena. He comes over real often and Janet lives in Albuquerque, but she's lucky if she gets up here maybe once a year.

JM: Did you used to go up to the cabin, or the island, and did you spend like the entire summers over there?

EHF: Yeah.

JM: So you didn't have to go for just two weeks?

EHF: No. No. My husband was a teacher and he had all June, July, and August. We hurried home for Labor Day usually.

RR: Now when you first started going back and forth, talking about transportation, how did you go back and forth from California, on the train?

EHF: We went out on the train, but we bought our first car that next spring. The one I was telling you about, you know the one that had no top or bottom. [laughter] When I think about that car... but we thought it was wonderful and it cost much under a thousand. I can't remember just what we paid for it, but cars didn't cost what they do now.

JM: Do you remember how much you paid for gas for your car?

EHF: No, I just don't remember.

JM: Would it have been really cheap compared to what we are paying?

EHF: I image. I just don't remember.

JM: When you were traveling from like California up here to Montana where there gas stations pretty much then?

EHF: And motels like I told you.

JM: So you didn't have to worry too much about getting from point A to point B?

EHF: No, No, there were no worries.

JM: Did Missoula have many motels of that type when you came back?

EHF: Oh yes, they had quite a few. But I never stayed at a motel because my sister lived here and I stayed with her if I didn't go up to the lake. Alice Coffee, did you know the Coffee family?

JM: Oh, the Coffee family.

EHF: Sid Coffee had the drug store and Oakley Coffee was his son and Bill and John Coffee are his sons. They are still alive. They take care of these three.

JM: Was your sister younger or older?

EHF: Yes, she was five years younger.

JM: Then did she remain up here in Missoula?

EHF: She lived here in Missoula all her life and they had a place at the lake too. Although when we first went up they stayed with us. Then they liked it well enough that they bought a place up there.

RR: Now how many people actually stayed around the lake in the summer time? Was it an active sort of social thing or were you pretty much with your own family members.

EHF: Well there were quite a few people. Clara Vincents had a lot of kids - not a lot -- I mean four or five. I can't remember ever being lonesome up there.

JM: When you went up to Polson did they ever have dances in the summer time or anything like?

EHF: No. They had a theater in the summer that put on real good shows and as long as they had them in the afternoons, Saturday afternoon, we went, but when they stopped having the matinee and had just the evening show we didn't go because we didn't want to be out on the lake after dark. We didn't have any lights.

RR: It is just not safe. There is so much stuff floating on the water.

EHF: After dark it is just not good.

RR: Even with long summer nights.

EHF: It stays light until ten o'clock up there.

JM: Where was your father? He was an attorney. Did he practice?

EHF: yes.

JM: Did he have his office at home or downtown?

EHF: Yes. He had an office down in the Higgins Block. He had a job with the Anaconda Copper Mining Company in Bonner. He did all their work and then he did a private practice on

the side.

RR: Well didn't you tell me once about going out to Bonner?

EHF: Yeah. Once in a while he would take us out there for lunch at the Margaret Hotel. It was treat for us. It was quite an elegant place out there in Bonner at that time. The Margaret Hotel.

JM: In Bonner?

RR: How would you travel out there?

EHF: Well there was a street car. These street cars were in Missoula about that time. There was a street car that went from Missoula to Bonner. Sometimes we'd take that and then later in our lives dad had a car, a Hudson Super 6.

RR: You'll have to get pictures to go along with all this.

EHF: It could hold nine passengers. Three in the front seat and three in the back seat and there were two kind of jump seats in between that folded down when you didn't want them, but they folded up when you wanted them up so you could fit two extra people. It was an elegant car. Hudson Super 6 was like what a Cadillac would be now.

JM: Where in Bonner was that hotel? Was it across from the Lumber yard there?

EHF: I can't remember. I just remember thinking it was a wonderful place to be.

JM: It wasn't just a motel then?

EHF: No, No. It was a regular hotel and dining room with waitresses. It was a big treat for us kids when dad would take us to Bonner. We didn't go very often, but when we did we liked it very much.

JM: Now on your way out to Bonner was East Missoula there at that time?

EHF: I can't remember that it was there. I don't think it was there.

RR: So there was an empty place, kind of?

EHF: As I remember it. There might have been someone there, but it didn't make any impression on me.

RR: Probably a farm house or two.

EHF: Oh I am sure there was, but I can't remember that there was any town.

JM: Did you ever go onto the mill property? The Bonner mill, the Anaconda Mill? Did you ever go in there?

EHF: When I was in high school, before I went to college in town, my father got a place across the river from Bonner in the woods there. It was a house, a main room and a porch that went all the way around. Part of the porch was the kitchen then the dining room then the living room and about four sleeping porches. I don't think he paid rent for it, I think they just gave it to him because it was vacant. We spent our summers there for several years. We had a tennis court and lots of company kids. "Linger Longer" we called it.

JM: Now was that, the tennis court...

EHF: All of that we made. It was just a dirt court. It wasn't anything elegant, but we kids didn't know the difference because we never had any better.

JM: So were there other houses there?

EHF: No we were all alone. And it is not there anymore. In fact the woods isn't there anymore. I think they've cut down all those trees. I think they've ruined the spot, but it was very nice when we lived there. We had a row boat that we kept down on the river below our house and just because we liked to we'd go for groceries down at Bonner. We'd row the boat down and get meat, vegetables, our groceries. We could walk very easily, but it was more fun to ride in the boat.

RR: Was the mill pond there? Had the Montana Power people put the dam in? How did you get against the current?

EHF: I can't remember that. I don't think it was there. The whole thing is not there now. I know not too long ago Marigold/Marybell or Marigold/Maribell went with Sandy up there and Marigold/Maribell couldn't really be sure of . . . Of course Marigold/Maribell was never really there. She just remembers what we talked about. She said that she had gone to the place just across from the Bonner mill.

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JM: So you had eight of your friends then come and stay?

EHF: An entire week.

JM: You had a very flexible mother probably.

EHF: My mother was a very wonderful person. [All agree] She must have been. She was feeding these kids. We were having three meals a day or four maybe. [laughter]

JM: And snacks probably.

EHF: You know as I grew up I took all that for granted. I don't think kids appreciate things if they go along when they are kids do you? I think they just take it all and that's just part of the way you live.

RR: That's just the way it is.

EHF: I think I realized once in a while that my folks were more affluent and free with things than some of the other kid's folks, but I didn't particularly appreciate it. I just took it for granted.

JM: That's the way your life was.

RR: Were you indulged by your grandparents and your aunt as well?

EHF: Well, I guess so. I couldn't have been indulged money wise because grandpa didn't have much. That is why he lived with us. I remember once before he came to live with us. I went with a friend to visit him and there was a merry-go-round just around the corner for part of the summer. The first ride was free and the last ride of the evening was free. He gave us enough money to ride all the time between so we went to the first ride right through to the last ride. We had the first free one and the last free one.

[laughter]

JM: Was that set up in Missoula then just over the summer.

EHF: I don't think it was even the whole summer. I think it was just for a couple of weeks. As I remember it wasn't very expensive. I think about \$.10 a ride, something like that.

JM: Was that in a park or was it like a carnival.

EHF: Kind of like a carnival. It just happened to be rather close to where my grandma and grandpa lived.

RR: Now where did they live?

EHF: They lived down on Front Street, east Front Street. It isn't even there anymore. You went down a little hill to get to the creek and they lived close there.

JM: Now is that the Rattlesnake Creek, where it comes through?

EHF: Yes, but the place where they lived isn't there anymore. I tried to find it, but it isn't there.

JM: So that was probably close in there where the motel is now probably.

EHF: Possibly. Anyway, I had lots of fun as I grew up.

JM: Did you go to a public school here in Missoula?

EHF: Oh yes, sure.

JM: Which?

EHF: Well I started at Willard and then went to Roosevelt and then went to the Missoula County High School which is now Hellgate, that was the only high school in town except for the Catholic one. Then I went to University and then later I taught in my high school.

JM: You taught in Missoula County?

EHF: Missoula County was the only high school there.

JM: Was that right after you got out of the university then?

EHF: No. I taught out in the country for a couple of years and then I taught three years at Missoula High. I taught algebra and geometry.

JM: What country school did you teach in?

EHF: Well I taught at Round Butte which is out from Ronan. I taught there one year. I taught one year in Augusta over near Great Falls. I taught two years at Hardin which is down south of Billings.

RR: You didn't teach math there though did you?

EHF: Well I taught everything when [I was] in the country. When you have only about two teachers in the high school, maybe three if you are lucky, you divide the duties and you teach whether you know it or not.

JM: Was that high school then that you taught in?

EHF: It was always high school.

JM: How many students did you have?

EHF: I don't remember.

JM: They must have been very small classes.

EHF: Most of them.

JM: What about Missoula County High School then? Your classes probably weren't real large size.

EHF: 18-20. I remember very little about it really. I just remember I was there.

RR: You were probably so scared that they were bigger than you were that you can't remember.
[laughter]

EHF: They were. I know at Hardin there was a boy that was older than I was. He had been put back some place.

JM: Did the high schools at that time.... that would have been the 20's?

EHF: Yeah. It was the early 20's that I was a teacher. I stopped at 24.

JM: So they probably didn't have athletic teams or marching bands?

EHF: Oh yes, they did!

JM: Oh, they did. Did they have a music program?

EHF: Yeah. They had everything. I shouldn't wonder if they had more than they do now.

RR: Well probably the students had more than they do now because now they have to sort of choose, but in a small student body everybody does everything.

EHF: Yeah.

JM: Everybody got a chance to participate.

EHF: Hardin is where I met Jerry. Many years later when we came through our , Marigold/Maribell [daughter] was just a little girl. "Hardin, Hardin", she said, "That's where we met daddy wasn't it?" [laughter] I always think of that being there.

RR: They are always a part of it.

JM: No matter what.

JM: Did your girl friends that you have in your picture there, did some of them go on to the University here with you too.

EHF: Five of us went to Kappa Kappa Gama.

JM: Oh, all five of you were in the sorority.

EHF: All five of us, Irene [Murray], Lavina [Ainsworth], Evelyn [Thomas], and Alberta [Stone], and I. [1917 Sentinel]

JM: Were they all Missoula families then too? Pretty much had all grown up here?

EHF: They were all from Missoula.

JM: Gosh, you had almost your own sorority just with the five of you.

EHF: One of us would get the others in. It worked that way. Two of the other people didn't come to the university. I guess that is why they weren't Kappas. One went to business college and one went to Spokane. I don't remember anyway. They didn't come to University.

JM: When you were going to the university, did you live at your sorority house?

EHF: No. I was a town girl. I lived on Fifth Street.

RR: How many were in the sorority? How many were in your classes for instance.?

EHF: Well my class, there were six of us, four from Missoula, Evelyn, Alberta, and I. Mr. Dixon was the governor of Montana at that time and Virginia Dixon was one of them, one girl from Butte and one from Great Falls. They are all dead. Everyone is dead.

RR: Did they have a sorority house?

EHF: No. Nobody had a sorority house at that time. We rented a place for the girls to sleep. It was just a small house. It wasn't anything... We used it (members of us) for parties. [laughter] The one that is the sorority house now, Toole House, and the one on Toole Avenue were both Kappas [?]. And they were very generous with their house, they let us have it for parties and things. The Sterling house was also a member house. We had several nice houses in town that we used as if they were ours.

JM: Did your sorority then participate like they do now with different campus activities?

EHF: Well, sure.

JM: The structure is probably quite similar.

EHF: Very similar I think. It is just that they are a lot bigger and they have a house and they have many more people. They have as many in one class as we had in the whole outfit, counting our alumni. [chuckles]

JM: Now your class, you said that there were six of you in your class. You were talking about in

your sorority.

EHF: Yeah. The year I was initiated there were six.

JM: When you went to the university you said that there were six buildings?

EHF: Five.

JM: Five buildings on campus. Do you remember who was president at that time?

EHF: Craig [Oscar J. Craig, 1895-1908] and Craighead [E. B. Craighead, 1912-1915], first and last I think. You could look it up. I just kind of forgot. Having been a Missoula girl, I knew presidents when I wasn't there as well as when I was.

JM: I noticed when I looked through the Sentinel looking at your sorority pictures and that, that some of the names that I came across that were part-I am not sure if they were part of your class-they were girls with the last name of Dunaway, I believe, and Elrod.

EHF: DelMary Elrod [Mary Elrod, 1911] was it. She was ahead of me. She was out and graduated before I went there. Eva[?] Coffee, Margie Ross, Sula and Nora Toole.

JM: Now we have some of our buildings on campus, some of the dorms, are named after some of these families.

RR: Well do you know our time is up.

JM: I bet it is.

EHF: This has been fun.

[END of TAPE]