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Interviewee: Grace Streit

Interviewer: Annie Pontrelli

Date of Interview: November 6, 1991

Project: University of Montana Centennial Oral History Project

Annie Pontrelli: This is Annie Pontrelli interviewing Grace (is it pronounced "strite"?) Streit on November 6, 1991. Grace, why don't you first tell me when you came to the university?

Grace Streit: My family lived in Anaconda and my sister was here. She was a senior when I entered as a freshman.

AP: What year was that?

GS: 1912. I graduated in 1916.

AP: Why don't we just follow these questions here? Okay, what led you to the University of Montana?

GS: Well, we lived in Anaconda and my sister was over here and my family liked it, thought it was good to be away from home, but not too far away from home. We could go back and forth. I always loved Missoula and I always loved the university. I had visited my older sister who was three years ahead of me and I had visited her in the dorm. All of the women lived in Craig Hall, there were 70 women, out of town women. There was also a faculty table for meals and student waiters and it just wasn't very big then.

AP: What was the campus like?

GS: The campus was very pretty and there were the five buildings around: Craig Hall (which is the math building now) where all of the out-of-town women lived, and then the Science Hall, and then Main Hall, and then the library. Then there were a couple of frame buildings between Craig Hall and Science Hall that were occupied by, oh, piano music, and practice rooms, and things like that. The voice department was in the top of Main Hall, where the tower is.

AP: What did you study?

GS: I was an English literature major and I guess, well, that's it.

AP: Do you remember any of your favorite classes?

GS: Oh, I think the English literature classes were my favorite, and that was my major. Dr. Craighead, he entered on his first year, the same year I did and they fired him by the time I was a junior!

AP: Do you remember him very well?

GS: Oh yes!

AP: What was he like?

GS: We liked him.

AP: Did you?

GS: He was a southern gentleman and we were for him. He got in wrong with some politicians in the state because he thought the institutions of higher learning should be concentrated in one place, preferably Missoula, not Bozeman or Miles City or any place else. He antagonized some politically powerful people from these other towns, but we thought he was just fine. He was there three years 1912 to 1915. His daughter still lives in Missoula, she lives down on Second Street, but his sons are dead. He had two sons. One of them was in my class, and one was a couple of years older, and then the daughter was a little younger. The men are dead, but Katherine is living, in Missoula.

AP: Oh she is? I didn't know that.

GS: There were 200 and some students when I was a freshman and by the time I graduated, there were over 500. It had made quite an increase, but you see there was a college in Bozeman also and there was a school of mines in Butte and Dr. Craighead thought it would be a good thing if they were all in one place. So, he antagonized the people in those other towns and they didn't want to lose their part of the university.

AP: What changes have you observed over the years?

GS: Well, we didn't walk on the Oval, we walked around the Oval. We kept hours; we were supposed to be in on week nights at 10:30 I think it was. We had house rules. There was a senior student who was the house president. The out-of-town women ate three meals a day there, if they skipped breakfast that was their doing, but they served breakfast, lunch, and dinner. No coffee breaks or anything like that, just three meals a day. Student waiters that were earning their board by waiting on tables. There was a faculty table where the dean of women sat at one end and one of the professors sat at the other end. The professors that didn't have their wives and families in Missoula ate there. I suppose there were ten or twelve at that table. Then the waiters as I said, were students (laughs) and we had a joke about one boy who said to one of the seated students "Tea or coffee or milk? Will you go to the dance tonight?" (laughs)

AP: What did you like best about the university?

GS: Oh, I liked everything! I thought the university was wonderful, but I had never been to boarding school. I went to grade and high school in Anaconda and I had traveled, but I had never gone to school any place else.

AP: What did you like least about the university?

GS: Oh I just thought the university was wonderful. There was nothing I liked least about it. My sister wrangled it so that I would have the head of the English department as my advisor, and that was Dr. Reynolds. He later went to Colorado, but he was my advisor. Then Miss Corbin, for whom Corbin Hall is named, was an English and literature teacher. She was rather heavy-set and she would sit calmly in her chair and smile. If you smiled back and said "Yes", you got an A, and I got an A. (laughs)

AP: Who were some of your other favorite teachers?

GS: I liked Miss Corbin and I liked Dr. Reynolds who was the head of the English department. When I was a senior they opened a home-ec department in the Craig house, a white house just off of campus. As you go down University avenue, there is a white house and they opened a small home-ec department. The main one was in Bozeman. I liked Miss Edmunds who was in charge of the cooking part of that. We girls would cook stuff and invite our boyfriends to come to the Science Hall and eat it. Of course, it was so small, we knew everybody.

I had a teacher in high school, a Miss Roundtree, who I talked to about the university. I said my older sister had had a misunderstanding and had not pledged to a [sorority] because of the misunderstanding. I said to her, "I'm not going to join one of those things because Daddy thinks they're silly!" and she almost cried.

She said, "If a group invites you that you like, why you join them." Which I did. I had no more than gotten on to campus when the girls got after me to get my older sister to join, though she had been bid by the other groups also during her years, but she was independent and she was the president of the dorm. She was more serious minded than I was, I was little light hearted. (laughs)

AP: What sorority did you join?

GS: Kappas.

AP: Kappa Kappa Gamma?

GS: An initiation fee?

AP: No. It was Kappa Kappa Gamma?

GS: Yes.

AP: What were some of your fondest memories?

GS: Well, my father had gone to McGill University in Montreal and he thought well just "kid stuff" you know. I think it cost 15 dollars or something like that to join and he would give me the money to do that if I wanted to.

AP: What were some of your fondest memories in your time at the sorority?

GS: As I said, I loved everything about the university. When I was a freshman all of the women, including those that belonged to sororities, lived in the dorm with the out of town women. We just had a suite on one floor [of the dorm] on the campus and the Delta Gammas had a chapter room at the other end of the hall. There were only two suites. We all knew each other and were good friends except at rushing time.

I have kept up... (Is that a piece of gum?) Well I liked the sorority. I roomed with my sister my freshman year in the dorm and as I say, she had had a misunderstanding and she was independent. But I was no sooner friends when the girls said, "Well you got to get Alice to join" which I did. She and I roomed together in the dorm. Then when I moved to the Kappa suite, I had a room with a girl who was a Theta and we were good friends. I dated her brother sometimes. What else about that?

AP: That's fine. Tell me about some of the activities you were involved in.

GS: Well, I was not an athlete. Girls persuaded me to come out and try to play handball and they never asked me again. If I would see a ball coming I would run the other way. I never could catch it. I just was not an athlete.

We had some kind of a literary society or something like that where we had meetings once in a while. I took music. I took as much as could be included in my English major and then my parents paid for me to have other lessons afterwards. Is the name DeLong [DeLoss] Smith familiar to you? Well he had his studio up in the tower of Main Hall and we would climb up those stairs and go up there. There was a girl that was married; she was our age, but she married a man they said her mother had her eye on herself, but she didn't get him, she got him for her daughter. Anyway, she was 23 years old and she showed us her diamond ring with 23 jewels in it. She was very proud of that. But, Mrs. Smith would accompany for Mr. Smith and you couldn't help doing what they said when you were with them. Then when you tried to practice by yourself, it didn't sound right at all. (laughs)

I liked Dr. Reynolds who was in the English department and Miss Corbin. I liked Miss Edmunds who came when they got the small home-ec department in that white house I was telling you about.

We had something in the science building, I'm trying to think. I guess it was a cooking lab when

they had a small home-ec department. We could take it as an extra subject if we wanted to take some home-ec. A certain amount would go toward our degree, but then any more than that you paid extra for.

My parents sent me, I wasn't self-supporting. They paid for me to go. It's like that girl we were talking to about my childhood: I said, "Well you can't get satisfactory answers about my childhood because I had a very happy childhood!" No horrible tales to tell about misunderstandings, we had a very good family life. My parents had lots of friends and we traveled and I really was privileged growing up. I had advantages, no question about that, but after I came to the university, I never wanted to go anyplace else. My sister would have liked to have gone to McGill where my father had graduated, but she stayed in Montana.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

AP: What were some of the university traditions you remember?

GS: We had Singing on the Steps. We didn't walk on the Oval, we walked around. We went to watch the football squad: they liked to have the girls come over and watch them practice and we would do that, we'd go and sit in the bleachers if we had time. If we didn't have outside jobs, we would go just to be there. Of course, one of the outstanding things about my college life, I met my future husband, a college romance. (laughs)

AP: Tell me more about that.

GS: Well, it lasted as long as he did. You see, what can I tell you about that?

AP: How did you meet him?

GS: I met him at a dance, that's the way it started. Oh, we loved to dance! I had another boyfriend who was a good friend and we were together in English classes and our English work certainly fit in, but our social habits weren't the same because I loved to dance and he didn't dance. Dances in those days were different. You didn't just go and hang on to the one person all evening, you danced with a lot of people and you liked to have different partners. When my husband-to-be would be away on a football trip, I would go to a dance with somebody else and it was all in fun. I was young and had never been to boarding school and maybe my reactions were what I would have had if I had gone to a boarding school. I was only 16 when I came. They would have dances at the Elk's Club.

We would go on hikes. It's a wonder more of us didn't get into trouble. We be gone all day you know! (laughs) We'd climb over Mount Sentinel and down the other side. I had a very naive little friend: she took her lunch once in a Kotex box! (laughs) She didn't think anything of it, but we thought her box...she'd better have had a paper bag!

The boys groups would invite us to what they called "firesides" at their house and perhaps you'd dance a little bit to the Victrola music or something like that or sit and look in the fireplace. Oh, just sociability.

Regularly we did keep hours. I think it was nine-thirty on weekdays and ten-thirty on weekend nights, unless you were at a party you could have permission to stay out until 12. Well, I hooked my husband! (laughs)

AP: That's your greatest accomplishment at the university? (laughs)

GS: I took part in the honor society called Penetralia that later became Mortar Board. One of my friends who did not belong to a social fraternity made it a point to join Mortar Board because she

wanted her daughter to have that background. She didn't have a social fraternity membership, but she wanted her daughter to have it.

My daughter was very active when she came to college. She was president of Mortar Board for a while. I remember when they came and told me, I was home ironing, I just wept I was so thrilled and pleased about it. But I didn't join it, it cost ten dollars and I needed ten dollars for my living. (laughs) I think I liked the way things went.

AP: Would there be any memories you would want to relive?

GS: Once I felt very badly, I didn't vote against her, but I hadn't encouraged a friend of mine to be a member [of the sorority] and I knew that the Theta's were going to invite her the next day. That night before I thought that I had kept her from being a Kappa: I never voted against her, but I never promoted her at all. But she waited and went Kappa and we roomed together when we were seniors.

It was all so small and so different. We knew everybody in the dorm and I suppose it was an experience like modern girls have going to a boarding school. Alice was president of the dorm. She stuck out this misunderstanding she had had. She had wanted to go back to McGill University in Montreal where my father went. I guess Dad might have sent her, but she stayed and we had the one year together here.

We were glad when the home-ec people...They took our engineering school away and we thought that was going to take all the nice boys. They sent us the pharmacy and the engineering school went to Bozeman. I was very much in favor of consolidation, but I would have rather had it in Missoula than in Bozeman or Miles City or Glendive, someplace else.

[Responds to written queries]

I haven't had a favorite time. Every new day is an adventure—not so much now that I'm sitting around. (laughs)

I don't think the university changed me. You see, when I was first married, my husband was in the service and I lived with my people in New York. So that was living at home, it was different than when I was at the university. I was out of school by then.

No, I don't think I would say that the happy college days are over. I enjoyed the happy college days, but I've always looked forward to every day. People have been nice to me and I suppose I've been reasonably nice to them. Each day was something to look forward to.

AP: How about this one? [indicating to a question]

GS: Well I believe in being active in the university affairs and if you are called upon to be on a

committee and do something, do it!

AP: How about that last question?

GS: I think it's nice to be active in what is going on. That's it.

AP: Any other memories you want to share?

GS: No, I just like the university and I like Missoula. My sister was over here three years before I enrolled, so I had visited here and I never wanted to go to any place else or go east to college or anything.

We'd hike all over these mountains. My husband was always a good one to... (laughs) He borrowed a wagon truck and we all went on a picnic in that. Of course, I got to sit on the seat with him and then our friends were swaying back and forth in the back part of the truck. (laughs)

Ours was college romance that materialized. I had lots of friends in Anaconda. They were nice young men. They went to the school of mines in Colorado and then they came to Anaconda for their practical work at the smelter. So, we had nice young men friends that were a little older than I was for instance. There's something I want to tell you about. I guess my forgetter is still in operation. I think that's about all I know.

[Break in audio]

One thing, I believed in studying every day and not waiting and cramming the night before an exam. I worked on that principle and got good grades. Also, I was taking work I liked. We had fun living in Craig Hall. When I was a junior, women's fraternities were allowed to have houses and we moved to a house on...oh, it's kind of near the university. The Theta's moved into a house that they had built. It was a better house for the purpose than an old home. These old homes on Gerald Avenue that were occupied by university groups. The Sigma Nu's built a house too.

Only a small student body like that, you knew everybody and as I say, it probably was an experience that other people had in high school that I was having in the university.

We could go home for weekends. There was a train called the Butte Sub. Do they still have that? It goes from Missoula to Butte to I think Salt Lake. We could catch the Butte Sub and get off at Warm Springs, where the nut house is, and our parents would meet us there and drive us the 11 miles to Anaconda.

Everybody didn't have a car. You wouldn't think of getting on a train to go that far now, you'd drive the distance. My father was manager at the smelter and one of the perks of his office was having horse transportation. There was the surrey, I don't think it had a fringe on top, with two seats and then the driver. My father hired a driver, but the vehicle belonged to the company; it wasn't ours.

Then when my father got a car, Tom learned to drive it, then we left Montana and went to Toronto, Canada after I had graduated.

But I was the only one in our family who went through grade school, high school, and college in the same town. The others all had to change at some time. My younger sisters went to high school in Canada, you see, and I was that much older, I was out of school. I think we've answered all the...

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

Annie Pontrelli: I have to prop you up like a doll.

Grace Streit: That was a long time ago. My sister was down here at school and I visited her and went to that track meet.

AP: The eighth annual interscholastic meet in 1911.

GS: The picture (unintelligible). A traveling company stopped in Missoula and the boys couldn't afford to take us, but the girls would get tickets and go to the theater.

AP: [Reads] *Chocolate Soldier* in 1915.

GS: Do you remember that music?

AP: No. February 8th 1915. These are some old pictures Gracie.

GS: Now this house is over on Beckwith. Look at us in our aprons out in front. Then Mr. McCullough had a roadster and borrowed a toboggan and took us for a ride behind that. This house is still there. Those were the Sigma Chi's one year.

AP: Here's some more pictures. Is that you?

GS: These were good friends of ours, we did lots of thing together. I think Arlene is still living. Oh, that was a paper game, you know.

AP: Fill in the blank?

GS: You filled in blanks—just a souvenir from a party. These are wedding invitations.

AP: What's this?

GS: This was an orchid from somebody else, not my husband.

AP: Who are they?

GS: That's my husband. We would go hiking on the railroad tracks. You know, down from the Van Buren Bridge and we'd hike up as far as Spring Gulf. We did an awful lot of hiking. That's my brother-in-law, the one that's the writer. These are people's wedding announcements; they wouldn't mean anything to you. I kept notes in one of those.

AP: Oh it's a dance card.

GS: Can you see what that is?

AP: It says Wisconsin 1916.

GS: Oh Wisconsin. You see, when they took the engineering away from the university, a boy I had gone around with went to Wisconsin. He must have sent me that. We had all kinds of picnics. This was the first Forester's Ball and those were the programs.

AP: What was that like?

GS: Well it must have been about 1915. They always had programs and you'd dance with a lot of different people. This is after we moved into this house on Connell right over here. The one in the striped blouse was our house mother. That house is still there. It was Rudder Uhauf [?] at that time. The house mother has the striped blouse on and those were just friends of mine that lived there.

I went to the Kappa convention in Estes Park and these are souvenirs from that. That picture was the picture of the University of Colorado where we stopped for a day after leaving the park. That is my husband up there on the stile, before he was my husband. That must have been at the thing in Estes Park because there were people from all over the United States there. She was the art teacher at the university [Eloise Knowles]. We went around a lot with this couple. They were Missoula people and his mother would have us over sometimes for breakfast. That must have been on a corsage or something. Then these are wedding invitations.

Do they have a Coed prom anymore? Some girls dress as boys and the party is just a girl's party, but some of them are dressed as boys. Then we had a program just for real boys.

Road shows used to stop in Missoula. I don't know. Must have been Dean Stone right here. This is my friend that didn't dance. This is where (that house is still there on Third Street) the house mother wouldn't let one of the freshman girls go there because she thought she was too unsophisticated to be out that way. There's another coed prom thing. That's the girls' glee club and the football squad [1914].

That's my husband. That's my good friend Anne Richt. That was the Kappa chapter—not very big. This is one of the wagons my husband borrowed and took us on a picnic. The day that we played Syracuse was my first Thanksgiving away from home. I stayed to see the game and had dinner with a family here in town. Is that me? Yeah, I guess so.

One of the girls made little rhymes for place cards. They called me "Matusa". What year is that? [1916] That's the year we graduated.

See, we weren't very big. This is in Estes Park the time I went to the national convention. We had

one girl who was very clever and she would make little programs for things. She was in our class.

There was the football squad here. That was in Estes Park. This was the men's glee club. This was the campus shack. I've got a blank page. You see, we liked to dance with different people. We certainly had enough chaperons! One thing they would have a tug of war and the sophomores and the freshman would try to pull each other across the slough that's down by the Van Buren Bridge. That's my husband.

AP: Is that you?

GS: I must have been dressed for the coed prom. (laughs) That's a girl I roomed with.

[Unidentified speakers asks Streit to recite something]

GS: [Recites] "I've got pretty pink petty from Peter. I've got a pretty blue petty from John. And one green and yellow from some other fellow, and one that I haven't got on; And one made of lovely red flannel that came from an Amsterdam store, and the point that I'm at, is that underneath that, well, I haven't got on anymore."

[End of Interview]