

Maureen and Mike

Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Archives and Special Collections

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: library.archives@umontana.edu

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

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: 270-064

Interviewee: Elizabeth Hershey Fry

Interviewer: Annie Pontrelli

Date of Interview: November 5, 1991

Project: University of Montana Centennial Oral History Project

Annie Pontrelli: This is Annie Pontrelli interviewing Beth Fry on November 5, 1991. Beth, the first thing that I would like to hear about is just your years at the university, what lead you to the university, and we'll just begin the tape that way, then we'll go on from there.

Elizabeth Hershey Fry: From the house where I was born on Woodford Street you could look straight across to the university with nothing in the way, no houses, no anything. When I was about two years or three years old my mother heard me say I was going to the "only bossy" and she didn't know just what I meant by that. She didn't know if it was cow or something. It seems that I was planning on going to the university and I was skipping the grades and high school entirely and just going there as soon as I could walk and talk. (laughs) So, I started really early going to the university, but I did have to wait a few years. They didn't take four year olds at the time. I had to wait until I was through high school.

AP: But you always knew from the very beginning that that was where you were going to go?

EHF: I knew from the beginning that I was going to the university.

AP: What did you study there?

EHF: I majored in English and mathematics, and I took a little of everything. You could say it was general.

AP: Do you remember what the campus was like?

EHF: Yes, I remember it exactly. When I first talked about the "only bossy" it was two buildings, Main Hall and the science building. By the time that I got there in 1913, it had added three buildings: the girls' dormitory, the library, and a gymnasium. So there were five buildings on the campus.

AP: And Missoula wasn't that developed either?

EHF: There was practically nothing between the university and the river. On the other side of the river was the town.

AP: What did your parents do?

EHF: My father was a lawyer.

AP: In downtown Missoula? When you went to the university, what was the proportion of females and males? Were you in the minority?

EHF: Well, probably a little bit, but there were lots of girls. I don't remember. I wish I remembered how big the university was then. I imagine it was in the hundreds rather than the thousands. Probably it could be looked up, what was the population of the university in 1913, but I just don't remember.

AP: Okay. Do you recall some of the classes that you took?

EHF: Well, I remember professor Shoy, Dr. Elrod, DeLoss Smith.

AP: What was Dr. Elrod like?

EHF: He was in biology.

AP: Do you remember what he was like?

EHF: Oh yes. He was a very nice man. I knew his family. Mary Elrod was a friend of mine. He lived down the street from us. We knew all these people personally. Professor Shoy lived on the next block, on Fifth Street. We knew his wife and his son. People were close in those days, kind of a big family.

AP: You remember what the campus itself was like, but do you remember what some of the social standards were? Some of the rules and regulations that they had on campus?

EHF: Well, I know back in those days men didn't visit girls in the dormitories, in their rooms. I understand that since then, they move in for the weekend.

AP: Things have changed since then! (laughs)

EHF: It may not be of any interest, but the year I was a freshman was the first and only year they had what they called "sophomore pledging". Instead of being rushed for a week or so like it is now, we were rushed all year. It must have been very hard on the girls who were doing it, but it was kind of fun for the rest of us.

AP: What do you mean rushed all year?

EHF: Well, instead of it being all over at the end of September, they were still rushing in January.

AP: Just having parties in the Greek system?

EHF: Parties every week or so, but we had a lot of fun although it was hard on the people who were putting on the parties.

AP: Were you in one of the sororities?

EHF: Yes, I became a Kappa Kappa Gamma.

AP: What was that like?

EHF: Well, it was very small compared to now. There were six of us who were pledged the year I was. They all were very good friends of mine—always.

AP: What kinds of things did you do in the sororities?

EHF: Oh, the same kinds of things they do now, I don't know.

AP: Parties?

EHF: We didn't own a house at that time, although the house that they have now, the old Toole house, was one of our party houses because we had two girls who lived there. Two of the Toole girls were Kappas. They were very generous with their house and we used it for our parties. It was before we owned it.

AP: So you were there from—

EHF: 1913 and graduated in 1917.

AP: Then what did you do from there?

EHF: I taught school for seven years.

AP: Here in Missoula?

EHF: The last three in Missoula. Then I was married in '24 and moved to California. I lived in San Francisco for about 50 years. I went to Maryland for...How long would that have been? Seven years and then moved here, back where I started from.

AP: Getting back to the university, you had mentioned some of your observations about the campus and the town. Who was the president of university at that time? Do you recall that?

EHF: Craighead.

AP: What was he like?

EHF: I didn't know him personally. I mean, he was just there, you know.

AP: Were there a lot of organizations and different kinds of extra-curricular activities going on campus, do you remember?

EHF: Yes. About the only thing I did besides Kappas was Glee Club. I didn't have such a beautiful voice, but they were always short on altos. DeLoss was a good friend of our family, so he let me be in the Glee Club, although rightfully I wasn't good enough for it. It was fun anyway.

AP: Did you have dances and Forester's Ball and things like that?

EHF: Oh yes, all kinds of things like they have now, I imagine.

AP: What changes did you observe over the years? This may or may not be an applicable question.

EHF: I don't think that it changed much in the four years that I was there.

AP: Have you ever had an opportunity to go back and make that comparison?

EHF: Well, of course, it doesn't have any comparison at all now. I couldn't find my way around probably now.

AP: Did you live on campus at all?

EHF: No, I lived at home.

AP: All four years?

EHF: All four years.

AP: What did you like best about your years at the university?

EHF: I liked everything. I can't remember anything I liked best—the friends I made probably.

AP: Who were your favorite teachers? You mentioned Dr. Elrod and Professor Shoy. Were there any others?

EHF: Oh yes, there were lots of them. I can't remember their names, but I remember them. I had lots of English courses, of course, and I took French and German and a lot of things I don't know anything about now at all. You can forget your whole college education by the time you're 95.

AP: Is that right?

EHF: Yes, it's true. You just don't remember any part of it, except just the fun parts.

AP: What were some of the fun parts?

EHF: Well, places we went and things we did.

AP: Where did you go?

EHF: Oh, we did an awful lot of hiking. People didn't have cars then like they do now. We did lots of hiking up Pattee Canyon, up Mt. Sentinel and back and front and sides. I can't remember.

AP: More outdoor activities?

EHF: You can't imagine life without a car now, but we didn't have cars then. Oh there were a few cars, but most of us didn't have cars and we didn't know people who had cars. We didn't miss them because we had never had them.

AP: Streetcars?

EHF: Yes, there was a streetcar that went from downtown to the university. There was also another line that went out Daly City.

AP: Daly City?

EHF: Daly City is Tom Orshone's place.

AP: Why did they call it Daly City?

EHF: I don't know. It was just the name of it.

AP: Was it a whole town?

EHF: No, it was just part of Missoula. I don't remember why it was called Daly City. Probably somebody by the name of Daly lived out there or something.

AP: Do you recall some of the more prominent families in town?

EHF: Oh, the McLeods and the Sterlings and the Keiths and Hershey (that was my father). We were all prominent then because there weren't so many of us, see.

AP: Do you remember what the population of the town was then?

EHF: I just wish I remembered the number at the university. It's probably someplace that can be looked up.

AP: There were about 135 at the end of the 1890s. (unintelligible) You already told me about some of the activities you were in. Do you remember some of the traditions that took place on campus?

EHF: Well, Singing on the Steps. It started back then, before my time.

AP: Did you have the lighting of the M at that time?

EHF: Oh, we didn't have any M yet, I don't think. I don't know when the M was started. We climbed Sentinel lots of times, but I don't remember whether it was to see the M. I just don't remember when the M was started. I lived in Missoula all my life off and on and I forget when what happened to which, you know, how you can. Even when I was living in San Francisco I spent every summer up here at Flathead Lake, so I never really left Missoula. That's why I can't remember when things started.

AP: They probably had started the Inter-scholastic Meets then?

EHF: Yes.

AP: That was a big deal because that was on campus.

EHF: Yes, that's kind of before I was in high school. Long before I was in high school they had them.

AP: Did they have the Bearpaws and the Spurs when you were going to school?

EHF: I can't remember. I can't remember when they called them that. I just don't remember.

AP: What were your greatest accomplishments during your years at the university?

EHF: (laughs) I can't remember any.

AP: There must have been some! You got through.

EHF: Yes, I graduated.

AP: That's one.

EHF: I never flunked a course, but I was never anything outstanding that I can remember. DeLoss Smith didn't want me in the Glee Club because I wasn't good enough, then he came around and said, "Oh Beth, you've got to be in it because we need the alto." So that's how I scraped by in a lot of places. (laughs)

AP: The First World War was going on?

EHF: That was at the end when I graduated in 1917. We were just barely into the war and there were hardly any men that graduated with the class. They had to all put on their uniforms and were gone. Most of my classmates went. That was just the year I graduated, a few months before I graduated.

AP: What were some of the challenges you had during your years there?

EHF: I can't remember any challenge. Getting up in the morning and getting there is a challenge, sort of, but that's probably not what you mean.

AP: Well, if that was a challenge. It's considered a challenge. You probably had some awful storms and things back then?

EHF: I was a good walker. We lived down on Fifth Street. The house was torn down by the Presbyterian Church to build their Sunday school rooms. That's where I lived in my growing up years. There were quite a few houses on this street. You could walk down Fifth Street a block past Higgins, east, and you could take a straight line to the university. There were no houses there, and there was a path that went from Fifth Street to the university.

AP: If you had the chance to go back in time, what would you do differently or what memory or experience would you want to relive?

EHF: I think I would have done everything exactly the same. I would have had the same parents, the same husband, the same daughter. I've enjoyed my life very much. It's been very blessed and I've been very lucky.

AP: What period of time was your favorite or most memorable and why?

EHF: I can't remember anything that stands out particularly. I think it's all memorable.

AP: How did the University of Montana affect or shape the person you are today?

EHF: Well, you see I wouldn't know what kind of person I would have been if I hadn't gone there. (laughs) Probably everything that happens to you affects you some way. You don't know what the alternative would have been.

AP: Was education or higher education a priority for most people back then?

EHF: Yes, everybody I knew went to the university. At the time I started at the university, my folks said that when I got through the university, if I wanted to go someplace away from Missoula (see, I

had spent all of my life in Missoula) if I wanted to take an extra year or two after that I could. But by the time that time came we were in the war and the whole thing changed. It just wasn't possible. I didn't have any particular ambition to it, it was just a way of taking a trip away from home.

AP: Did you come back to campus after you graduated?

EHF: Oh yes, I lived there you see.

AP: So you visited the campus?

EHF: I never quit.

AP: Do you remember what your commencement was like?

EHF: I remember it was kind of sad because there were no men, practically. You know, gone to war. We were all nervous about the war. You know how that would be, if all your friends were going. Women didn't join then as much as they do now. There were army nurses, but I just didn't happen to know any. None of my women friends went, it was all men.

AP: What advice would you want to give to today's university students?

EHF: I'm not very good at giving advice. Go and do the best you can. Don't cut classes, don't cheat. Make good friends and if you can learn a little something on the way, that's awfully good. (laughs)

AP: Okay. Any other observations, insights, or memories that you'd like to share?

EHF: I went back for my 50th anniversary.

AP: When was that?

EHF: That would be '67 and an awful lot of people I had known were gone. The ones that were there I knew, but couldn't remember their names. You know how it is after 50 years, but it was fun.

AP: I bet that brought back some memories too.

EHF: Yes. I stayed with my sister Alice Coffee and Opie her husband was still alive then. He went out of his way to make things pleasant for me. I had a very nice time. I've never been to any other anniversaries as such. I've done things with people, but I've never gone to any other anniversary.

[Break in audio]

AP: Now that's the Sentinel from what year? 1918.

EHF: I don't understand that, the way they do things.

AP: What do you mean?

EHF: My picture and all is in 1918 and I graduated in 1917. It's a year off.

AP: Oh, look at that.

EHF: That's both sides of my house.

AP: Wow. And this is the commencement invitation or announcement?

EHF: Invitation, yes.

AP: Nineteen seventeen, the 20th annual commencement.

EHF: So here I am in the 1918 book as a senior, when I graduated in 1917. They're completely off!

AP: They came out with the Sentinel every year?

EHF: Yes.

AP: There's a horse and buggy, look at that. And this is the house that was torn down when they put up the Presbyterian Church.

EHF: They built that as an extension.

AP: Oh okay, on the other side of the Presbyterian Church.

EHF: Yes. See the Presbyterian Church is just beyond this, along here at the end of the block [indicates to photo]. We were at one end of the block and they were at the other.

AP: Kappa Kappa Gamma, look at that. How many girls were in your sorority?

EHF: These are the girls that came in when I did. We were seniors that year.

AP: It was established in March of 1909. This is Howard Toole. That's a familiar Missoula name, and Thane. This is George Weisel.

EHF: Weisel was a Toole. There she is there, a Toole. That's why we used their house so much because we didn't have a house of our own and we just used theirs.

[Unidentified speaker in background]

AP: Okay, okay. Edna Rankin. Do you remember all of these people? And Doris Prescott. I'm assuming that's a relative of Clarence Prescott on campus. His sister? And Ainsworth, another familiar name. Okay, Dean of Journalism. Florence Dixon, Alberta Stone.

EHF: She died very soon after she graduated. Maybe three or four years afterward, but she died young. (unintelligible) I don't know about all of these, whether they're alive or not. I haven't kept track.

AP: The fashions were quite different back then, weren't they?

EHF: Well, in a way. Things come and go.

AP: Now the Sentinel has all different fraternities and sororities listed?

[Unidentified speaker in background]

AP: Oh did they? They don't have the Sentinel anymore to my knowledge.

EHF: What do they have instead?

AP: I'm not sure they have a substitute. They've got the Kaimin which is the paper.

EHF: Well that's just the paper.

AP: They don't really have the [Sentinel]. There are too many people. The enrollment is so high right now. It's become very difficult. Now what is this?

(unintelligible)

AP: How strange. A horse and buggy. Are you in this picture?

EHF: I probably am.

AP: Are you the little girl in that picture?

EHF: About eight I would imagine. I think I had about eight years (unintelligible). We had to have a bigger house because my grandfather and grandmother and my grandmother's sister all came to live with us. Three elderly people besides my sister and I and my mother and father, so we had to have a big house with six or seven people.

AP: Great photos.

EHF: Yep, that's the way we did things back in those days.

AP: Now this also looks like it has some stories and all kinds of things.

EHF: I didn't have the 1918 book, but I'm a senior in this book, so Mary Jo found she could buy it. They had an extra one or two out at the archives.

AP: That's great.

EHF: See, that's the book I should have been a senior in, but I'm just a junior, you see.

AP: Ooohhh. It's too bad they don't do these in order.

EHF: I have three of them now. The '17 and the '18 and the first one.

(unintelligible)

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

[Unintelligible conversation for several minutes]

EHF: —pictures in there are a Paxson.

AP: Oh, this is a Paxson?

EHF: My grandfather lived with us all my growing up. He died in (unintelligible).

AP: Now did you meet your husband on campus?

EHF: No, I met him in Hardin, Montana.

AP: And you taught in Hardin for how long?

EHF: Two years, and I was in Missoula for three before I was married.

[Break in audio]

EHF: So I've been in school three times (unintelligible).

AP: So you were pretty progressive for back then. Were there that many women who worked to put their husbands and kids through school.

EHF: It was just one year for Jerry. He did it all himself one year.

AP: That wasn't that common, was it, for a woman back then to be working?

EHF: I think I was unusual.

AP: You were a liberal woman back then—or liberated.

EHF: I was already liberated. That's Grandma and that's Mother. I can't tell (unintelligible).

AP: A wooden sidewalk.

EHF: And a fence.

AP: Now was this a home that A.J. Gibson built, by chance?

EHF: I don't know.

AP: He was a—

EHF: My father had it built when I was about eight years old. Oh yes the flood was in 1908 and took out a lot of houses. The bridge went out at Stevens Avenue. That was a very exciting time. I, unfortunately, had the measles at the time, so I couldn't go to all the festivities. I was very mad. It was bad luck. All this excitement and here I was home with the measles—gosh!

AP: The whole Missoula valley flooded?

EHF: No, the river there.

AP: The Clark Fork?

EHF: The river between the downtown and out here. That Higgins Avenue Bridge is a new bridge. The old bridge went out with the flood. It was very exciting because houses were swept down the river. (unintelligible) (laughs) You can laugh now, but they probably didn't laugh then. It was their house and their rocking chair.

AP: But your house was fine?

EHF: Our house was farther out. We were on Fifth Street, see. We were six blocks at least, from the bridge. The Missoula Mercantile Company was the big store in town. It had everything. What do they call it now?

AP: The Bon Marche.

EHF: It was the old Merc, but anyway.

AP: Do you remember the Florence Hotel?

EHF: Oh yes. That was the place we went for lunch.

AP: Here's a thing in the Sentinel that says, "The Florence is one of the finest hotels in the state of Montana. Rates are one dollar and up. The rooms perfectly kept and contain every modern convenience. Thirty-five cent luncheons."

EHF: Yep. Different times, different places.

AP: Did you go to many dances?

EHF: Oh yes, they had quite a lot of dances.

AP: Did they have dance cards back then?

EHF: Yes. Do they now?

AP: No, but I remember looking at a scrapbook and seeing the dance cards.

EHF: How do they do it now?

AP: Oh, they pretty much ask whom ever.

EHF: But you don't know who you're going to dance with time after next?

AP: Right.

EHF: It was nice in a way, to have it all planned for you.

AP: How did that work?

EHF: Well, the man that you were with traded dances with his friends and your friends. You filled out the card so you knew by the first or second dance what you were going to do all evening.

AP: So the guys would just come up to you and say, "Can I sign your dance card?", is that how it went?

EHF: Yes, it was generally done by the men. A man could ask you especially, but usually you raised your card. We all knew each other, it wouldn't matter. I don't know—

[Unintelligible conversation for several minutes]

AP: —the library and then it became the law school and it's the psychology building.

EHF: I don't know. I couldn't find my way around out there now.

AP: Do you know what Penetrabilia is?

EHF: It says in there that I am, but I'm not. Whoever gave me benefit—

[Unidentified speaker in background]

EHF: —why they put me in when I oughtn't. I'm pretty sure I'd remember if I was.

AP: Maybe they went by grade point though?

Unidentified Speaker: In another place where it lists members, she's not on that list.

AP: Do you remember Eloise Knowles?

EHF: Yes.

AP: What was she like?

EHF: Nice.

AP: What did she look like, do you remember?

EHF: No. Would she be in one of these books?

AP: She might be. She was one of the first graduates from the university.

EHF: (unintelligible)

AP: Was Eloise teaching when you were?

EHF: Yes, she was, yes.

AP: Do you remember the Forester's Ball? Were you involved with any music groups?

EHF: I was in the Glee Club.

AP: As far as playing any instruments—orchestra or band?

EHF: I didn't play any.

AP: Now did the Glee Club just sing at Singing on the Steps?

EHF: Here we are. Oh no, we sang at—

AP: Now are you in this picture?

EHF: I should be.

AP: What was your maiden name?

EHF: Hershey. I'm right down here. I'm an alto.

AP: This handbook—the M book—did they hand that out to you as a new student?

EHF: Evidently. I don't know. I can't remember that. Evidently they gave it to all the freshman with all the information in there that you need.

AP: They have class schedules, college calendar, book exchange.

EHF: I didn't use it. (unintelligible)

AP: A calendar from 1914 and 1915.

EHF: (unintelligible)

AP: Oh, there it is. [reads] "Presented by Elizabeth Hershey Fry and Alice Hershey Coffee in memory of their parents Belle and Catlin Hershey."

"'Son of a Gambler' cannot be printed in a Y.M.C.A. handbook, you have to learn it by ear."
(laughs) Now these are all cheers I'm assuming.

EHF: Some.

AP: [reads] "Who Howls Tonight." Now are these songs that you learned in the Glee Club?

EHF: No, we did better than that at the Glee Club. These were just things we sang at games and so on. (unintelligible)

AP: Do you remember any of these?

EHF: I remember all of them.

AP: Do you? Do you remember how they go?

EHF: Pretty good.

AP: Can you sing a little?

EHF: No, I don't think so.

AP: "College Days", isn't this the one that was sung at Singing on the Steps, or what Singing on the Steps ended in?

EHF: Oh yes, a lot of these are for Singing on the Steps. In fact that's what they did sing on the steps.

AP: I thought I read somewhere that they always ended Singing on the Steps for the evening with

"Old College Chums".

EHF: Yes, well, that's it I guess.

AP: Was this the song, "Old College Days"?

EHF: [sings] "The days may come, the days may go, but still my heart in memory sees those college days of long ago." It comes back to you sort of. I haven't sung one of those in a long while. They had it for Singing on the Steps and they sang some too at ball games as I remember.

US: Don't they sing the Alma Mater afterwards?

AP: I don't know where they do at each game, but I'm also curious how the melody goes because I've read where that was the last song of the evening when they did Singing on the Steps. I had never heard it before.

EHF: I think probably the place has gotten bigger, it has gotten harder to do a lot of these things. [sings] "The days may come, the days may go—"

AP: [Reads song] "But still my heart in memory sees those college days of long ago. Through youth, through prime, through the days of harvest times, I shall recall through all the (unintelligible) the college days of long ago."

Did you go to any of the athletic games, the football or basketball?

EHF: Oh I went to everything.

US: (unintelligible)

AP: They did the carol on it?

US: (unintelligible)

AP: Oh, okay.

US: (unintelligible)

AP: No, they do it for a touchdown.

US: (unintelligible)

AP: They do yes. They're trying to bring it back to be a bigger deal.

US: We weren't ever sure of what it was going to be or about what it should be, but it was always sung.

[Unintelligible conversation for several minutes]

AP: They had it at the end of the day?

US: Yes. (unintelligible)

AP: Had you been on campus much longer than that?

US: Yes. (unintelligible)

[Unintelligible conversation for several minutes]

AP: They have a lot of temporary housing like barracks and things, didn't they?

US: (unintelligible) there were three of us in a double room with two beds. There was a bed and a couple of us.

AP: Do you remember what room? (unintelligible) Very interesting, maybe other things that you can think of?

EHF: I can't think of anything. I'm sorry I can't remember them. Probably there were lots of nice things to remember, but I just remember it was very pleasant time and I can't remember much of anything else.

AP: Okay. (unintelligible)

EHF: Oh yes.

[End of Interview]