

**Oral History Interview of
Mary Heather**

**Interviewed by: Katelin Dixon
October 12, 2016
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Mary Heather as she describes what living in rural Tahoka, Texas was like during the early 1900s, and traveling once she graduated from college. Heather discusses her experiences growing up during the Great Depression, dust bowl, and World War II.

Length of Interview: 01:01:16

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Discusses her book, <i>Texas Girl</i> and growing up	05	00:00:00
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Keywords

Texas, World War II, Memoirs

Katelin Dixon (KD):

I will start by saying it is October twelfth, and I'm here at the Southwest Collection with Mary Heather again. Mary I'm just going to let you start.

Mary Heather (MH):

Well, I guess I'm going to start by mentioning the book that I wrote, *Texas Girl*, and I've been asked why did I write that book. I think we all want to be remembered, and understood by those we love and know. With this in mind I wrote the book primarily for family, I didn't have any idea that it would be widely circulated, nor the desire that it should be so. Many of these topics were a very private level, and would be of little use or interest to anyone other than family, or those who did not know me personally. Nevertheless you can't write about yourself without involving history, and what goes on around you. So the events that are entrenched in my mind, I will tell from my own point of view, right or wrong, just the way I see them. Starting off I was born in Tahoka, Texas it's a small West Texas town about thirty miles from Lubbock. My father was originally from Illinois, and my mother from central Texas. They met and married in 1924, and I put in an appearance in February of 1925. My father worked in a service station in Lubbock—I'm sorry, in Tahoka, and my mother, as was usually the case in those days, was a housewife. Now for reasons unknown to me in 1929 they decided to move to the country and took up farming. The region and indeed the nation, I believe, and I believe this was unknowing to most people, was on the brink of a disaster that affected the lives of almost everyone. This disaster exploded on the national scene in the fall in the crash of the stock market in 1929, and I'm no economist, and I wouldn't attempt to analyze this, nor the events that caused it, but its results were catastrophic. On the grand level, fortunes were lost, and on the lesser level, jobs disappeared and people suffered, the elderly, the unemployed, and there were many. The physically disabled, and those who had no financial backup. There were no safety nets such as we have today. There was no social security, no food stamps, no Medicaid, no Medicare. People were on their own. The churches and some charitable organizations helped as much as they could but that was merely assistance, it was stock gap, and was not enough. In the larger cities there were bread lines. In the smaller areas the Red Cross came occasionally and distributed beans, and rice and flour, subsistence items. All of this was accompanied by a great deal of discontent, especially in the more heavily populated areas. Even in rural and county, there was quite a lot of unhappiness. I remember as a small child listening to men sitting around and cussing the government. Then to compound this in West Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado, and indeed over into the mid-west, a drought of biblical proportions began. This started in the 1930s, rain stopped falling and did not resume in our area for several years. Crops planted did not come up, if they did manage to come up, there was not enough moisture to sustain them. The top soil of the farmland had been stripped away by excess and unwise cultivation, and dust began to blow. It permeated the air, it found its way into homes, seeping in around windows, and under doors, and finding cracks where no one suspected there were cracks. Many people developed a type of silicosis, which was referred to then as dust pneumonia. This

was especially prevalent among the elderly, and children, and sometimes it was fatal. Cattel died from inhaling the dust. People who found themselves caught out in a dust storm were very much at risk. Those fortunate enough to have land functioning well, as a water source, could raise gardens, and most people did. The women canned and preserved food to last from one season to the next. This was subsistence. Because there were no crops to sell, there was no money. The banks would loan money if there was adequate collateral such as land, but this had to be repaid with interest. Many people mortgaged their farms, and lost them because they could not pay. I believe that if the political situation had not changed in 1932 with the onset of the Roosevelt administration there might have been an out and out revolution in this country. I remember enduring many dust storms, walking home from school through them, and helping to clean up after them, which is almost a daily event. The worst of all, as became to be known as the black duster, which occurred on Palm Sunday on 1935. The day had begun as a beautiful, still bright day, but along about noon we noticed a black line to the north, stretching across the entire east-west horizon. As the day progressed, the bank appeared to be coming closer and higher in the sky, and it hit with a vengeance, just as we were heading for the storm cellar a few yards from the house. We tumbled into the cellar, and slammed the door shut. The wind howled. One could hear gravel, dirt and god knows what else striking the cellar door. When all this calmed down, and we emerged an hour or so later, we found the day again bright, and sunny, and pleasant, except that everything was covered in the black top soil of the Dakota's, Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma. It had drifted like black snow against the walls of the farm building, and covered the interior of the house, or the carpet, black. I later learned that this dust storm extended eastward as far as Washington D.C. and that its fortuitous arrival while congress was in session was instrumental of the initiation of legislation, which provided farm relief, as well as the beginning of land use studies, which were designed to save the farms. My father served on the Lynn County Agricultural Committee for many years, and part of his duties were to enforce the measures, and oversee the measures that were implemented, as a part of these studies. Since money was scarce, as might be expected, the general poverty of the era was reflected in its schools, particularly in the rural community schools. There were several such schools in our county, each serving, I don't know how much area. The general scheme was that each school would have three classrooms, accommodating three grades per room—a book room, a cloak room for hanging coats and stashing lunches. There was no electricity in rural areas at that time, and the lighting came from a wall of windows situated about half way up the wall on one side of each classroom. Another wall would have a row of blackboards. Evening functions held in the buildings were illuminated by Coleman lanterns. There was no plumbing, the basic needs for this were served by a couple of outhouses, one for each gender. A windmill pumped water for the school. A three framed house behind the school—a three room frame house behind the school, was referred to as the “teachridge” and it housed the school principal, and his wife, who usually taught three of the lower grades. The third teacher normally roomed with one of the nearby families. The school houses served also as a sort of community center. Plays would be staged, young people enjoyed that. Christmas celebrations took place there, PTA [**Parent-Teacher**

Association] meetings, and general community meetings, as well as Sunday services, where the principal of the school was sometimes obligated to hold the service. I marvel at the dedication of these teachers, their determination, their tenacity. A great demand was made of them, in addition to the normal classroom teachings, they served as janitors, keeping the building clean, and the heaters stocked in winter. They were expected to coach sports such as softball, basketball, tennis. They were expected to sponsor organizations like 4-H club. Their pay was minimal, and sometimes when no cash was available, it would be in script, which was sort of an IOU that could be exchanged for goods if merchants would accept it. I wonder thinking back on that how anyone would take on such a task, but I must remember that times were hard, and people were desperate for jobs. You've got to salute these people, they all did a great job. Many of them working far beyond what should normally be expected of a teacher. They bandaged sores occasionally, they stanching bloody noses. They were great people most of them. Subject matter in these schools were pretty basic—reading, spelling, writing of course, arithmetic, and in the upper grades, English grammar, and history. There were no art or music classes in our school. Although at one point, one of the truly gifted teachers taught piano lessons on the tinny, old piano that belonged to the school, and she charged a dollar a lesson. For the most part, this is different now, but for the most part in those days, children walked to school, even the little ones, some of them as much as three miles or so. Occasionally someone would ride a horse to school, and there was one girl who rode a donkey. When I was in the fifth or sixth grade, several of the fathers acquired an old flatbed truck, and built a wooden structure on it—fitted some bolted down benches on it and made us a school bus. Very basic school bus. It was painted with aluminum paint, you could see the silver thing as it came over the horizon. Needless to say, there were no cafeterias, no school lunch programs, students brought lunches from home. These lunches were carried in empty half gallon syrup buckets or wrapped in old newspaper, sometimes in paper bags which were carefully used and reused. These lunches varied greatly in quality, mostly left overs showed up in them, biscuits left from breakfast, hard boiled eggs, baked sweet potatoes, the occasional cucumber from the family garden. There might have been homemade cookies, but rarely was there fruit. Most rural schools those days taught through the ninth grade, and if a student wished to continue and go on to high school, he or she had to find a place to live in town. I don't know what the boys did, I think most of them just quit and started farming. For the girls there was a situation known as light housekeeping, where by a young woman could live with the family, and help with the chores. Such as dishwashing, housework, babysitting, ironing, etcetera, in exchange for her room and board, and many of them did that. One of my mother's younger sisters lived with us in Tahoka while she attended school.

KD:

How many would you say—how common was this that women would continue on with their education after a certain point? You mentioned that the boys tended to go into farming at this point, but maybe a rough percentage of how many girls did this, how common was this? Pretty common?

MH:

Not really, I've never really thought about the percentage but I would say probably 25 percent of them may have gone on to high school. The rest of them, they married young, they started farming, and that was their life.

KD:

Okay, please continue.

MH:

In the spring of my sixth grade year, which was 1935, the school district flat ran out of money by the end of March, and cut the school year short. Due to this same lack of money, as well as lack of students I suppose, the school year the next year they cut it back to the seven grades, including only seven grades. However—and this may have been a factor, I hadn't thought about this, but there was now a school bus that could take the children to high school.

KD:

What year did you say this was? That the school bus was—

MH:

That would have been in 1937. So in 1937 I was twelve years old, and I began eighth grade, and rode the school bus. Which was a real school bus by the way, it was painted bright yellow, it wasn't a make shift one. It made its rounds-- I think there were about three buses operating in different areas in the county. It made its rounds to pick up and deliver the kids to the school. It arrived at my house usually about seven AM, rambled through the eastern part of the county and fetched up in front of the school house about 8:30. The identical route was followed in the afternoon, and this resulted in my being the first one on, and the last one off, and spending a significant part of the day on the bus. Apparently the obvious and equitable solution to this never occurred to anyone. I thought the Tahoka high school building was vast. It was brick three story and so different. We changed classrooms for each class. There was a different teacher for each subject. Possessions were kept in metal lockers that lined the halls, and there was finally indoor plumbing. We reported to our homerooms each morning, and there was a supervised study hall in the afternoon. There was also a school library where I began to indulge my passion for reading.

KD:

What were some of the things you remember reading that really stick out in your mind at that point?

MH:

It was fairly varied. I remember, I enjoyed the Louisa Alcott series, *The Little Women*. I also read *Gone with the Wind* at the age of twelve at which may have been a little heavy for my age. I liked biographies, I remember reading—I can't remember the authors necessarily, but about Marie Antoinette, and these were written on the adult level, and Katherine the Great of Russia and I also read a little Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens. I enjoyed novels, but exciting biographies would do too. I enjoyed reading, historical novels particularly interested me, because I liked history, I like to know about the past. I was the youngest student in the eighth grade by the way, and my peer always let me know it. Riding the school bus three hours a day is not particularly helpful, and I constantly had a cold. If I stayed home every time I had a cold, I wouldn't be in school much, so I just kept going even though a good part of the time I felt absolutely miserable. It was one of those days, I was sitting in the study hall, it was late in the fall I believe, feeling just awful, and I noticed a really pretty fourteen year old girl sitting across the study hall from me. I have no idea why but the thought came into my mind, I will live longer than you. In the spring of that year, she was in a car full of kids speeding down the road between Tahoka and O'Donnell when they lost control of the car and it rolled.

KD:

Were you two fairly good friends or was this just an acquaintance?

MH:

No, no she was a classmate an acquaintance. But that was a rather shocking thing, and the idea that I had had that thought, and why, I have no idea why.

KD:

Interesting.

MH:

It was. Now because of the drought, depression, and so on, and the change in the government administration, legislation was enacted to provide some much needed relief. It afforded hope where there had only been desperation. My parents were able to remodel the rundown old house we had been living in. They brought it up to date with some indoor plumbing, butane gas, three extra rooms, and thanks to the Rural Electrification Act we suddenly had electricity, and life became a lot more comfortable. My high school classes that year included English, history, home economics, and algebra. I had absolutely no use for algebra then or now, but I suffered through it, and usually barely squeaked by, but I liked my teachers and enjoyed my classes. In the spring of that year, I made a friend, Eleanor, who would be my best friend for many years. She was even nerdier than I was, which is saying a lot. She made excellent grades even in algebra. We hung out together discussing books, social problems as we saw them, and other nerdy topics. Rarely boys. As I remember, it was the spring of my sophomore year, that the infamous hooky

caper took place. We arrived in the bus, got to the school about 8:30 AM to find the school yard alive with students milling about. The schoolhouse doors were locked, and a sign had been posted saying "Faculty meeting in session, please wait." Okay, we waited, patiently for a while still milling about, nothing happened. The day grew bright, beautiful, it was well after nine o'clock. People were getting really restless, and suddenly someone shouted, "Let's play hooky!" and they scattered like quail. There were a few cars available, one or two perhaps, these filled up, and the rest of the people just ran except for Eleanor and me. The nerdiest of the nerds. When the doors were opened, finally, and the faculty emerged, there we were just the two of us, sitting on the concrete steps waiting. Everyone else, no exception, everyone was expelled. The next day there was a line of disgruntled parents coming to get their kids back into school.

KD:

So what happened that day? Did you just get sent home after that? The two of you sitting on the concrete steps?

MH:

I really don't remember, I was trying to remember what happened. I don't remember. There would have to be a bus delegated to take us home. I don't know if we had—maybe we had class just the two of us, I don't know. It was funny. Another happening, not necessarily just in school, yeah I guess it was. Everyone thinks of West Texas of being fairly mild except for the wind and the dust, but nature sometimes takes a fancy to do something different, and anything could happen, and in Mid-February of my junior year, which would have been 1940, the area experienced one of the most monumental snow storms I have ever seen. It started about one o'clock in the afternoon on Friday, and by two PM, the snow was falling so heavily that the powers that be closed the school early, and we stumbled onto our respective buses and set forth. Well it soon became clear that we shouldn't be trying to go anywhere, you could barely see the road immediately in front of the bus. The snow was not falling, it was flying horizontally. But we kind of trundled on, and as long as we stayed on the pavement we did fairly well. But we had to leave the pavement to deliver some of the kids to their homes, and shortly after we had gotten off the pavement onto a dirt road, the bus slid into a ditch nose down. It happened to be about a hundred yards from one of the student's homes, a big frame two story, ancient house, ramshackled but there. The bus driver shoved the door open enough for us to get out, and said run for the house and we did. We tumbled in, snow covered, freezing, shed our coats, shed our outer wraps, and huddled around the heater, the wood burning heater until we warmed up. Okay, we were stuck there. There was no telephone, no one had a telephone. Our parents didn't have a clue where we were. As most farm families had, they had a good supply of canned goods, other foods. The mother in this particular family had died a couple of years earlier, the young woman, the student, lived with her father and an uncle. We girls, home economic students, all of us, went into the kitchen and put together a big kettle of soup. Everyone ate soup for supper, the boys cleaned up the dishes, and we sat around the fire, told stories, and tall tales, and in general had a

pretty nice evening. The house was cold as could be, and a little bit crowded for such a group, there were about twenty of us. The girls slept three to a bed, piled our coats on top for comfort. I don't know what the boys did but they managed. The next day we all went to the kitchen again, made breakfast. By this time, the storm had blown itself out, and the sky was blue and clear, and the snow was sparkling like diamonds. We went out and began to play, snowball fights, snowmen began to grow, it was fun. Along about mid-morning here came a line of horsemen, our fathers out on horses looking for their kids. It was an adventure one does not forget.

KD:

Yeah, sure. How much snow was there actually, in terms of—

MH:

There were drifts eight to ten feet high.

KD:

Wow. Yeah, that's not something you see in Texas very often.

MH:

It was significant, there were people who died in that storm. The school bus was so covered you couldn't see what it was, it was just a heap of white. Researching this years later, I found a clipping from the Fort Worth Star Telegram. No, no, no, it was the Lubbock paper, I believe, that reported this storm, and actually reported that the bus had not been heard from by midnight that night, which of course it wasn't, and people were very much worried about us, and they were. But we made it in good shape and had a great time. It was during this I think it was the next year, no it was the same year that I began to take typing and Spanish. At that time, I don't think we in West Texas were particularly aware of it, at least the students were not, but there was an international crisis building. Military forces were being increased and the Selective Service Act was put into effect in September of 1940. According to this act men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five were to register for the draft. My father was on the local draft board, it was their duty to determine if people appealed and did not want their son to go for some reason, they could appeal, and the draft board would evaluate this and vote on it. At least in the beginning, they tried to be generous enough, if the son was not necessarily a young man but say a man in his twenties or thirties, if he was necessary for the support of his family he would be deferred. My father was on the board that made these decisions. Which I don't know if that made him popular or unpopular, hard to say. Anyway it was an unpaid position, and quite time consuming. I think they met a couple of times a week. He as a World War I veteran felt honor bound and honored to have that position, and he took it very seriously. I went with him to the courthouse, and typed registration cards for the many young men who came in to register on the first date of registration in 1940 in September. So I got through that year and graduated from high school in 1941. It had always been assumed that I would go to college, and that it would be Texas Tech

because it was the nearest, and least expensive at the time. I think that's changed. [laughter] I would live in a dormitory, which at the time cost thirty dollars a month, including three quite substantial meals a day. My friend Eleanor felt that she couldn't afford this, so she found a place to live off campus, there were a lot a kids who roomed in houses around campus, I suppose still do, I don't know. This particular house had kitchen privilege, and she was able to bring canned food from home.

KD:

How much would this have cost compared to the dorm?

MH:

Ten to twelve dollars a month.

KD:

So fairly cheaper, but you're not getting the meals.

MH:

Quite a lot cheaper in dollars at that time yes. But still thirty dollars for room and complete board was very reasonable, even then. Campus has changed unbelievably since then.

KD:

Tell me about what was the general layout of your area of campus at that time. What dorm were you in?

MH:

I was in Doak Hall. There were two women's dormitories, I don't remember the name of the other one, and two men's dormitories. Doak hall was the original girl's dorm. It was an easy walking distance of the administration building, which is where most of my classes were. Then just around the circle from the Ag building, were the science building, which was generally referred to as the chemistry building, I don't know what it's used for now.

KD:

Still the sciences I think in that area.

MH:

Is it? And then across from that, the English or the library, in which some of the English classes took place. There were also, although this didn't concern me much, engineering buildings, a couple of engineering buildings, and a home economics building, agricultural buildings, and of course the gymnasium, and an extremely basic football stadium with plank bleachers, and no comparison to what we have today. This is a beautiful campus, Texas Tech. Beautifully finished,

coordinated. It was so raw and different then. The wind howled as we walked between classes, and it was muddy in the winter times from the rain, and sometimes there was snow and it was cold, of course, but it was a wonderful experience for me. I liked all my classes except from algebra, of course, I have no use for it. Even with its strict regulation, the dormitory life afforded me more freedom than I had had at home, and I enjoyed it. We had to sign out, I don't think they do this anymore.

KD:

No, no.

MH:

We had to sign out if we were going out after dinner, we had to be in by eight o'clock.

KD:

Was it eight o'clock every night?

MH:

I'm sorry, for freshman for the first couple of months they had to be in by eight o'clock, and then it changed, you could be out until ten.

KD:

Was it later on the weekends, or was it just—

MH:

It was later on the weekends, on Friday night it was eleven, and on Saturday night, midnight. I had no complaints with that, that was fine. I needed my sleep anyways. [laughter] There were a few people who found this a little to restricting, and I understand that there was an occasional entrance or exit through a dormitory window in the back part of the far end of the hall on the first floor. Of course you had to have cooperation of that particular person, but I'm sure that was easy enough to get. I never did that, I just heard about it. Again there were no private telephones, there was a bank of telephones at the end of each hall. Okay, what else?

KD:

How often would you even call home? I mean, how often did you do that?

MH:

I wouldn't at all because my folks didn't have a phone.

KD:

Yeah that's what I was wondering. How common was it even to—

MH:

We didn't have that yet. So I wrote letters, I'd write a couple of letters a week, and they'd write me. As close as it was, and there was bus service, I could go home for the weekend occasionally or they would pick me up. No, telephones—rural telephones were still kind of rare. On Sunday afternoon in early December, I had a date. This young man and I went to a movie, and afterward had an ice cream soda, and we were walking back home to the dormitory, we sat on a bench to rest. He had this hopeful look in his eyes and he said "Do you want to kiss me?" I said, "No!" And that was the end of that. I mean how inept can you get. [laughter]

KD:

Was this just someone you just met in a class?

MH:

I didn't know him very well. He was just hopeful. Anyway that was the end of that. We continued on to the dormitory, and I found it in turmoil. Young women crying, all sorts are going on. Word had arrived about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and some of them had friends, or brothers, or relatives stationed there. It was a dreadful time. I've never seen, since then such coherence, such expression of patriotism, and such determination, as I had perceived in the days and years that followed that. There was food rationing, I don't know if that was a necessity or a psychological thing, I have wondered about it. Each person received a ration book, and they contained coupons that you had to surrender when you bought certain items, such as sugar, certain fats, butter I believe, red meat such as beef or pork, although chickens were free, and turkeys I think. Some leather goods were rationed such as shoes, you were only allowed two pairs of leather shoes per year. Automobile tires were virtually impossible to obtain, and gasoline was rationed. The production of automobiles immediately ceased, and they switched over to the manufacture of military vehicles. It was a very different time. There may have been complaints, I'm sure there were but I didn't hear many of them. We were determined, we were right, this was our country, this was not happening to us, and it was a defining moment in our lives I believe.

KD:

What were some of the emotional state of the campus changing and probably some of the guys going off? What were some of the other changes that you saw immediately directing campus after that instance?

MH:

As a result of the war?

KD:

Um-hm.

MH:

Of course all the guys all the guys did go off to the military. And as I think I have mentioned to you on earlier occasion, there were a couple of military bases, and the young men came in on the weekends, and had dates with the young girls. Actually, the college sponsored an occasional dance or party for them.

KD:

Where would these be held? On campus?

MH:

They were held in the gymnasium. The churches were, I think more active on campus than they are today, and they welcomed the young men as well. One thing that I did remember that was quite different, Day Light Savings time. At one point early in the war they initiated double Daylight Saving time. So that instead of going to class in daylight it was pitch dark, the reason for this always escapes me. There are only twenty-four hours, do with them as you will, but that's what they did. I don't remember that sports—football and so on, I don't remember that that was particularly stressed, because where were the football players? I could've been wrong on that, but I don't think so. As far as other things that directly affected us, I don't recall anything that did. We were very passionate in our feelings about it, and did everything that we could think of to help. At one point, they were urging us, the Red Cross or someone, was urging the women to take up knitting and knit sweaters for refugee children. Well this seemed like a worthy cause. So Red Cross had a little place downtown, I went down and picked up my yarn—they would give you the yarn for this, took it home, began to knit a sweater. The only yarn they had was olive drab, imagine a whole sea of little children, refugee children in these little drab sweaters. I did finish the sweater, I don't know if any child was inflicted with it or not, it was pretty bad.

KD:

Did quite a few people participate though, would you say?

MH:

I'm Sorry?

KD:

Did quite a few people participate in knitting?

MH:

Not to my knowledge, it was just something I did. I learned about it and did it. The dormitories had their—the food staff had its own way of dealing with the food rationing, I'm sure that was something that we were not in on.

KD:

Did you notice big changes in your meal quality or meal layout?

MH:

There seemed to be a little more chicken, we didn't have much beef really, occasionally. Usually it would be in the form of roast beef on Sunday or maybe some short ribs, but it was perfectly adequate, good food. No problem. In my senior year, I got a job as a student assistant in the foreign language office, working more directly with the head of the department. I answered the phone, I did a lot of filing, I sorted the mail, and as instructed, opened and read it, and directed it to whoever it concerned, read it, I scanned it, not really read it. I typed letters, I graded papers, and made myself generally useful for four hours every afternoon. While I was opening this above mentioned mail, I saw that the University of Iowa was asking for suggestions for graduate students to instruct beginning Spanish, and the offer was what I thought was quite good, there would be a stipend, and it would be tuition free. So I asked the department head to recommend me, and he did. So my course was set. I informed my parents of this, they knew I intended to do graduate work, but they didn't know I was going to do it so quickly, and without consulting them at all, but I did.

KD:

And far away too.

MH:

And far away. My father as I said earlier was from Illinois. He had not been back to visit his family since he left in the early 1900s, he had not seen any of them, although they did correspond occasionally. He said, "Well I'll drive you there," and while there we would go to Illinois and visit the family. And that happened.

KD:

How far would that have been from the University of Iowa? I mean your family in Illinois? Fairly close, or what part of Illinois were they from did you say?

MH:

It was at the very tip. It was Massac County which is at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio River, so the very tip of the state. Iowa City was kind of North central Iowa. I never thought of it in terms of miles, I would say what a couple of hundred miles perhaps.

KD:

I guess so, yeah. I didn't know. Did you see your family sometimes when you were in Iowa? Or was it still too—

MH:

No no. Did not. Didn't go anywhere. [laughter]

KD:

Yeah. Probably busy.

MH:

Pretty busy. Anyway, as not exactly a graduation present, although it served as one—because it would be great benefit to me, and I really wanted to do it, I was allowed to go to Mexico City to enroll in the university there for its summer program. My mother went with me, and another friend from college. We found a rooming house, which was very clean, very adequate. Food again was substantial and good, and had a wonderful summer. It was a summer that I remember it with such fondness, and it has helped me throughout my life, it could not have been a better graduation present. After that summer, I did go on to the University of Iowa, and there's where I met my husband. I did teach—I had several classes, about three hours every morning, we had a heavy load. There were and awful lot of young GIs. Congress had enacted a program to assist the young men as they came out, and this was—well the GI Bill was enacted with an idea that it would ease and prevent the stress that was felt after World War I. It would give them an opportunity to reorient themselves to civilian life, to find perhaps a future. Sociologically I think the GI Bill changed America, young men who had never had an idea of going to college found themselves in university, and there was no going back from there, things changed. The change has been so rapid over the years, and so radical. You would not believe you set one end of my life against the other end, there is no comparison. I marveled as I drove on to the campus this morning, at the casual students, how casually they dressed, this would never have been allowed.

KD:

What did you have to wear at that point?

MH:

Wat did I have to wear? We wore dresses, skirts and blouses, sweaters. We did not wear shorts, you did not wear shorts unless you were in gym class, that was okay. We did not wear slacks to school, to class, you could wear them on campus, but not to class. I'm trying to remember if that changed a little bit by the time I graduated but I don't think it had by then. By the fifties it had begun to change, but we definitely wore dresses. We had to—for breakfast in the dormitories you could come in your robe and curlers if you wanted to, no one cared, but for lunch you had to be dressed and for dinner you definitely had to be dressed. They were a little bit formal about that.

KD:

So how do you feel seeing that contrast then of your experience with our very casual students on campus now, I mean that's quite a change.

MH:

Well I'm kind of a casual dresser myself. I really have no problem with it. You know whatever you're comfortable in. I think some people carry it a little far in my opinion, but fine, doesn't bother me. I have seen some vast changes in my life, as anyone has who has lived this long. The changes are such enormous ones sometimes, that I wonder—I'm kind of fearful of what's going to happen in the future. Of course, the technological changes are the most noteworthy. Far from not having a phone, everyone has a cell phone. They're glued to their heads, what would they do without that cell phone? I have one in my purse, it's a great convenience. An old lady out by herself needs a cell phone. The computers, wonderful! I love mine. We would never have dreamed that such a thing could happen. And of course we don't even mention television, that is so taken for granted. It was just a dream and an idea when I was growing up, we kind of knew that it existed, but we were naive enough, some of us, to think that, Okay if we have television—we have this big radio with this screen, can we somehow, are they used the same thing? No, doesn't work that way. As I said, I am concerned for our country. We are divided, as in my life time, never have been divided before. I think back on the cohesion, the unity, and the determination that we had in those early days, and I really kind of fear for our future. But I guess history will sort that out. Of course, it's written by the victors, as we all know, so we'll see what happens.

KD:

That we will. Let me just go over some other stuff that I had that came up. Is there anything else that you want to add?

MH:

No I think I've said it.

KD:

Yeah, I think we've covered a lot. One of the things that we talk about in a lot of our interviews is sort of what you've been eluding to about all these changes that have occurred throughout your lifetime. One of the things I really want to ask you—and I know you've talked about this a little bit, but just sort of being a woman in the twenties, thirties, forties, this hundred year span, what would you tell people of this generation? What's some advice you would give?

MH:

Well I don't really know that I'm qualified to give anyone advice on anything, but I know that our situation has changed to some extent. I think—I think women should determine what they want to do, just as men should. Determine what you want to do, and go for it. There is nothing

these days that a woman cannot do. If you want to be an astronaut, go for it. When I was younger, growing up, particularly in the thirties, very few women worked, only if you were desperate. If you had no man to support you. One or two women I knew did very well. There was an insurance agent in Tahoka, a female.

KD:

What time period was this did you say?

MH:

This would have been in the late thirties and the forties. This woman was a widow, and had no children, but she was an insurance agent, the best one—she was the one who always won the million dollar prize. Our county school superintendent was also a widow with two daughters, she later became a professor at Texas Tech. It was unusual at that time for women to sell insurance or to be school superintendents. You could be a music teacher, that was okay. You didn't make much money. The schools did not like to hire a married woman to teach. Now, if you were the wife of the principal that was okay. I'm referring to rural schools now. The third teacher was usually an old maid, or a widow. I say usually, pretty much always. All that has changed. By the time I was in college there were a good many female college professors. I don't think they were paid as much as the men. Now, this is still something that still has to be worked on.

KD:

Yes, of course. What subjects did you primarily—I know probably home Ec. but what other—did you have any other classes where you had primarily female teachers? Where did they tend to gravitate towards?

MH:

In what period, what era?

KD:

When you were at Tech.

MH:

When I was at Tech. Well, all right, I had several female English teachers, and an excellent French teacher, an excellent Spanish teacher, female. All right, gym class was supervised by a female. That's about all I remember as far as women teachers. As things progressed, of course, they became more accepted. An interesting phenomena, during the war—World War II—since the men were not able, they were all in military, who was going to build all those air craft, you've all heard of Rosie the Riveter. These were jobs were taken over by women who did them just as well, sometimes better. Again probably not paid as much, but they did a fine job. They did everything that needed to be done throughout the society. When the war was over and the men

came back, the women had to step down. Now that, I don't know, that's unfair and yet it happened. I think—I think our situation is much better than it was. I think we have a long way to go. But as with everything else we need to be determined, make up our mind, what we're going to do, and do it.

KD:

That's very good. I think on that note and if you don't have anything else to add. I'll go ahead and stop the recording.

MH:

Okay.

[End of recording]



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