



JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH: BLANCHE LAWRENCE

INTERVIEWED BY: HOLLY BERGDORF

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PLACE: CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

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INTERVIEW TOPICS
CEDAR RAPIDS: THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1--When were you born? Where?
- 1--How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
- 1--What are your parents' names?
- 1,2--Where did you go to school?
- 2--Are you married or single?
- 2--Did you raise a family? How big?
- 2--What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

1. Transportation

- Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
- 61-62 --Trolleys (the Interurban)
- 7,34,62 --Horses and First Automobiles
- 35 --Mud roads and the seedling mile
- 62 --Hunter Airport and the first planes
- 58-59 --Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

- 33,44 --Newspapers
- 40-41 --Radios
- Advertising
- 41-42 --Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

- 19-22 --Motion Pictures
- 31 --Cedar Rapids Parks
- 18 --Dances
- Carnival Week
- Chautauqua
- Community Theater
- Little Gallery
- 24-30 --Symphony Orchestra
- 22 --Circus
- Greene's Opera House
- Amusement Parks (Alamo)
- Camps
- Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)
- 19 --Vaudeville 23--Vascha Heibnitz

2. Famous Characters

- Cherry Sisters
- Grant Wood
- Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
- Marvin Cone

3. Lifestyle

- 4,19,31--Life before air conditioning/indoor plumbing/electricity
- 45--Winter Activities
- 44-45--Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
- 31--Clothing
- 42--Toys
 - Saloons/Taverns
- 17--Farm Life

4. Family Life

- Household Help
- 39--Women's Roles
- 4,9,11,35-38,46,60-61--Childrens' Activities/Behavior
 - Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)

5. Ethnic/Minority Life

- 21,13-14,47-49,53-54--Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
 - Indians
- 54--Segregation of Blacks
 - Jobs Available

C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community

1. Education

- 3,10,11,54-56--Cedar Rapids Schools
 - Coe College
 - Mount Mercy College
 - Cornell College

2. Government

- City Services
- Streets/Roads
- Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)

3. Medical pg 49-53

- Hospitals
- Patient-Doctor Relationship
- Broken Bones
- 52--Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
- 51,53--House Calls
- 51--Home Delivery of Babies

4. Business and Economy

- Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
- 13--Local Brewing Companies/Home Brew
- Retail Businesses /Department Stores
- Professions
- Banking and Finance
- Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
- Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
- Farmers Market
- Mills on Cedar River
- Buildings Erected
- Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
- Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)

5. Attitudes/Values

- Children/Discipline
- 11,12,57,58--Sex/Petting/Dating/Sex Education
- Charity
- 56--Divorce
- Work
- 56--Working women, Voting Rights for Women
- Patriotism (World War I)

D. Historic Events in and Outside the Community

1. Catastrophic Events

- Clifton Hotel Fire (1903)
- Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
- Bank Closings (1933)
- Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
- Public Library Murder(1921)

2. National Historic Events

- Womens' Suffrage
- World War I
- Roaring 20's
- 13--Prohibition
- 3,14,16--Great Depression
- 15--F.D.R.
- 34--World War II

Blanche Lawrence was born in 1916 on a farm outside of Cedar Rapids, the daughter of Godfrey Frank and Marie Vtipil Stolba. She grew up in the house next door to her current residence in Cedar Rapids. When Mrs. Lawrence entered school at the age of five, she spoke only Czech. She began violin lessons at the age of eight and, at the age of fifteen, she joined the Cedar Rapids Symphony under the direction of Professor Joseph Kitchin. Mrs. Lawrence has been a member of the symphony ever since.

During this interview, Mrs. Lawrence's husband Leslie was present. His comments are indicated by the initials "LL."

HB: Where were you born?

BL: In Cedar Rapids or just outside of Cedar Rapids on a farm.

HB: When were you born?

BL: 1916, November 12.

HB: Have you lived in Cedar Rapids all your life?

BL: Yes.

HB: What were your parents' names?

BL: My father was Godfrey Frank Stolba. My mother--do you want her maiden name?

HB: Yeah.

BL: Marie Vtipil. V-T-I-P-I-L.

HB: Where did you first go to school?

BL: Hayes School which is no longer here.

HB: Where was it?

BL: Just a block from our house, but it is now a stenographical school, I think.

HB: How long did you go to school there?

BL: From kindergarten through sixth, and then I went to Wilson Junior

High School and went to Grand High School which is now the Board of Education, and that's the extent of my formal education.

HB: Are you married? I'm going to record you're married.

BL: Oh, yes.

HB: And how many children did you have?

BL: We had two children, eight grand children, and two great grand children.

HB: What has been your occupation during your adult years?

BL: Music, always music and homemaking.

HB: We'll start back with you when you were a youngster.

BL: Oh, dear.

HB: What was your first memories of Cedar Rapids?

BL: Of Cedar Rapids?

HB: Ah, the community around...

BL: Yeah, I guess my first memory of Cedar Rapids was when we moved into the house just next door to us and going to school and not knowing one word of English.

BL: How old were you?

BL: Five, but I do remember--I don't remember that actual move, but I remember first being in this house. We had gas lights, and I thought that was wonderful cause previously we just used a kerosene lamp. And

I had a real patient teacher so it wasn't long before we were conversing as we should.

HB: I take it you spoke Czechoslovakian.

BL: Czech. That's right.

HB: And your whole family had spoken it?

BL: Yes. My mother was born in Czechoslovakia, and she'd remembered coming over on the ship, which is very, very tragic trip because they lost a child at sea and had to bury her there at sea. My father, I think, was born in Cedar Rapids. He never really mentioned it, but I think he was born in Cedar Rapids. At any rate, my father's father could speak English. He was the only one of my grandparents that could speak English.

HB: So when you were a child that age, when you started learning to speak English did the rest of your family learn?

BL: They all spoke English. I don't know why I had such a hard time. That is my mother and father, you know. I don't know why I had a hard time with it, but apparently they spoke the two languages together, you know, which my mother did until the day she died.

HB: What was school like when you first started going?

BL: Very delightful as I remember it. Teachers were very patient; I was so scared to death of all my teachers that I wouldn't have said, "Boo." I've always had allergies, and I can remember one time being in school and being called on to answer a question, and I stood up to answer and

HB: Was it Saturday night?

BL: Probably. I don't remember, but probably it was.

HB: How old were you before they got indoor plumbing and electricity?

BL: That I don't remember, probably twelve or fourteen--somewhere around there.

HB: So, when you were young, though, you still had the outdoor stuff?

BL: Right.

HB: So, what did you do in the winter?

BL: Froze to death! One of our biggest pleasures was to get, in the summertime, getting a bucket of water and a brush and painting the red barn. Of course, it just left it red, you know, but we spent hours doing that, just literally hours. And, of course, I don't know if you're going to record this or want to record this or not. In the wintertime, of course, we used pots, and then the adult of the family got rid of it. I suppose out in the outhouse, but I do remember that vividly. As a matter of fact, in our garage, the front left wheel of our car is going to go clear down because that apparently was where the outhouse was. I don't remember where it was here; I do remember over there. Plus, we had a chicken coop and chickens in the yard. They were fenced in. They weren't allowed to run loose.

HB: Were animals allowed in the city then?

BL: Chickens and geese and ducks were at the time. I don't know--did they have goats. I think maybe they had goats too. Yeah. There were no restrictions that I know of or that I can remember.

HB: So did your mother sell the eggs or anything?

BL: No, we used everything. Sunday dinners were chickens. If other people around the neighborhood had chickens and if they got loose and flew in to our yard, my mother was very unhappy with that. So our chickens always had cropped wings so they couldn't fly over the fence, which I didn't know they could do, but they fly fairly well when their wings are like they should be.

HB: Did you have a lot of brothers and sisters?

BL: I had one sister younger than I. I'm the last one left in the family, and I have been now, oh, maybe eight, nine, ten years.

HB: So you didn't have any brothers or anything while you were young.

BL: No brothers. My aunt--I had two boy cousins, and my mother had the two girls and so that's the way our family was divided up. In fact, I didn't know much about little boys at all. Well, until I got married and had a little boy of my own. They were just friends. That's all, you know.

HB: What did your father do?

BL: He worked at what is now Wilson Company. It was Sinclair & Company

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HB: What did your father do?

BL: He worked at what is now Wilson Company. It was Sinclair & Company

BL: at the time and then eventually Wilson's bought it. You know where-- Wilson's is now. It's about what about maybe two--two and a half miles from here.

LL: Oh, not that far.

BL: Isn't it that far?

LL: I suppose.

BL: Well, now that's all right. My father walked to work regardless of how cold or hot it was and walked back cause we didn't have a car. We used streetcars. We had to walk down 16th Avenue, pick up the streetcar. One of my aunts was the first in the family to get a car, and I used to go visiting either in Solon or Marion every summer to visit relation, and they come to pick me up in this open-air car that, you know, had side windows they put up which didn't keep out the cold at all or the rain or anything.

HB: How old were you about?

BL: Oh, I was small when I started visiting--maybe eight, nine years old--not very old at all. But I looked forward to these visits and usually I went at thrashing time, which was the worst time for me with all my allergies, but, nevertheless, I enjoyed it tremendously.

HB: What did your father do at Wilson's or Sinclair?

BL: Yeah, bookwork.

HB: Bookwork. So he was like an accountant or--

BL: Well, I don't know really what he was. He did a lot of...

He did all the checks for the...

BL: Yes, that's right, and he did a lot of signing of his name. I know he used to bring a lot home--to work at home. I suppose it would be work that he just didn't finish at work and wanted to bring home. It was all mind work--mental work. In fact, my father was better at mental work than dexterously.

HB: Did you mother have an outside job?

BL: No. In order to bring extra money in for a couple of years she had the school teachers from Hayes School; they'd come to the house to have their lunch, and they paid her. I don't remember what it was, but I know especially by our times now it was just a pittance. But she had about eight of them and just had to feed them lunch and that didn't last too long, but there was really a time that we were desperate for money as I remember it because she always did make a lot of our clothes, just everything, and you didn't waste anything. I see families nowadays if they eat half a piece of steak the other goes in the garbage. Oh, we just didn't.

HB: Was this time that you were financially in need or whatever, was that closer to the Depression or was that earlier?

BL: It was probably during the Depression time, although we never did have a lot of money. I can remember vividly asking Santa Claus for a car one year; I got a wagon because, you see, the little toy cars cost a lot more than the wagons. And looking back on it, it's probably harder

on my folks than it was on me.

HB: So you don't have too many memories of what the Depression was like or how hard it hit us?

BL: No, The only thing I can remember about the Depression is my folks saying in one form or another, "We just can't do it. We don't have the money," and that's all. The only thing they managed to have money for was I took violin lessons, and my sister took piano lessons and that was kept on til my sister rebelled quite a bit. So they dropped her piano lessons, but I just always liked the violin lessons so they kept on with that.

HB: What age did you start when--

BL: At eight. I was eight when I started.

HB: And how much did like a lesson cost?

BL: A dollar.....for my first teacher, and the second teacher was a \$1.50. I never ever paid more than a \$1.50.

BL: Was this for each session?

BL: For each lesson.

HB: How many lessons did you have?

BL: One a week. I had delightful teachers, Jan Fiala. J-A-N, was my first teacher, and then he moved to Chicago so we had to change teachers. So my parents sent me to Flora Hromadka-Taylor who taught me the most I ever knew--just a tremendous lady, and that after I was married and

had one child, I decided I wanted to do some more studying. So I studied with Joe Kitchin at Coe College, and when he left, I decided I wanted to do some more studying, and I studied at one time with-- (her name escapes me now). She was a concert mistress with the symphony for a year. And then two years ago, I went to Iowa City and studied with Don Hains, and I would have done some studying with him last year, except our mornings and afternoons didn't jive. When he was busy, I was free. When I was busy, he was free.

HB: Going back to when you were in school and so forth--what other memories do you have, like what type of schoolwork did you have to bring home-- a lot of homework?

BL: No, I didn't. I can't believe it that I didn't--maybe it came easier to me than some other student, but I didn't have to. We had, in grade school, it was primarily reading, writing and arithmetic. Although you know, it was language and music, singing and that kind of thing, and I think the only gym we had (so-called gym) was when we went outdoors for recess. And up at Wilson, I began taking--well, I planned to go to college, and you had to have two years of foreign language, so I started with Latin, which was a hideous language--just a hideous language. My second language was French, which is most beautiful language, outside of our English language. Then we had a small orchestra, I take that back, we had a very small orchestra at Hayes School. Maybe, as I look back on it, visualize it, maybe about ten of us--little tiny tots. And then at Wilson, we had a real good orchestra. Mr. Moehlman was our orchestra director. He's no longer living. He's a very fine man, very fine musician--plus our vocal singing, languages. We have

art then too. I don't remember art per se, but it seems to me we had art in grade school too. But there was not a lot of outside curriculum; it was all pretty well rounded in the reading, writing, and arithmetic.

HB: And you said you went to school up to...

BL: To Grand High, yeah. The high school courses were pretty much the same as they are now, except orchestra was only twice a week, and we didn't get a full credit for orchestra and it had to be taken out of our study halls. So I had probably one or two study halls per week, but still I have no recollection of bringing a lot of schoolwork home. I did bring home some in high school, but not an awful lot, but apparently I didn't need it cause I was a straight A student. But I liked the orchestra. The only thing I remember about high school is our family doctor now is Maurice Estes. I would never, never, ever have made it through physics had I not had his help. And I didn't take biology because I couldn't "cut up animals," but I did take chemistry and that came fairly easy to me, but not physics. So I know I wasn't cut out to be a scientist.

HB: What memories do you have of like being a teenager or, you know, growing up and stuff?

BL: Oh, growing up.

HB: You know, I mean, you know was it hard?

BL: Yes. It was very hard. I was very timid for one thing. For another, I had very strict hours--up until the night before I was married I had

to be in at eleven o'clock, and we had been engaged for about a year and a half, but I still had to be in at eleven. No dating during the week--no dating whatsoever. My folks had to, yes, it was all right if they knew the boy. If they didn't know him, it was just out. That's it, but I was too timid to do much of anything or to try my own wings very well.

HB: What age did you get engaged?

BL: We got engaged on my seventeenth or eighteenth birthday. I don't know, but I know my whole family thought it was way too young.

LL: Eighteenth. I think.

BL: Well, then we would have been engaged only six months because I was eighteen in November and the following June we were married and all my plans for college went out the window. I no longer was interested, but my interest in learning never died.

HB: What if you had gone on to college; do you know what you would have majored in?

BL: Yes, music.

HB: Did many girls your age go on to college or ...

BL: No. Most of them got married either right after high school or shortly after.

HB: In the community you grew up in--it was the Czech community, right?

BL: Yes.

HB: Did you have much contact with other parts of Cedar Rapids, you know?

BL: No, not really except downtown--we used to call it downtown. I guess from us it would be uptown. We'd either have to take the streetcar, which is murder for me because I got car sick from here downtown, and so I would have preferred to walk it, which we did quite often. I had an Aunt that lived on the southeast side, Aunt Emma, and that was about the only contact I had with the east side.

HB: Do you remember anything about downtown, you know, from like the '20s or '30s back then?

BL: Yeah. Denecke's, Newmans, you know, West Denecke's at the time. Now it's Woolworth's. Killians was the big store downtown, and Martins was just starting I think, and they didn't have all the eating places. They had Bishops, of course, and then The Butterfly I think it was called, which was just around the corner from Bishops. Those were the two main dining rooms downtown and 16th Avenue, which is just down from us, was just what it was called--16th Avenue. It had a few little grocery stores. It had a store where you could buy chicken feed or horse oats. You know that kind of thing--two bakeries, several privately owned meat markets--no such thing as what I call beer joints. That was out, just out. In fact, people made their own beer and wine at home.

HB: Well, this would have been like during Prohibition when every-- thing was out and so forth.

BL: Yeah, but that was a Czech trait because my grandfather made home brew, and I don't know about home brew, but wines in Czechoslovakia.

So this was a thing with him. My grandfather would have been highly insulted if somebody came over, and he couldn't have offered them a glass of wine and if they refused it, oh, he was pretty badly hurt.

HB: So did Prohibition--how did it effect the rest of the Czech community in other ways?

BL: I don't think so. Not as I recall.

HB: How about like the Depression? Do you have any memories of how it effected other people around community?

BL: No. Some of the youngsters in school looked pretty raggedy and that was to be understood too. If you didn't have money, the first place it was going to go if you got any was for food, not for clothes. So, maybe as I look back on it now, we were one of the luckier ones cause my father worked all through it.

HB: So did any of the bank closings have, do you know?

BL: I don't remember. I don't think my folks lost any money. My grandfather did. My grandfather on my father's side came over a fairly wealthy man from Czechoslovakia, and he ended up just about as poor as anybody could be, but he was a quite a wealthy man. My mother's family was not wealthy, but they both settled around Cedar Rapids, (one outside of Marion and one, well, it was off Mount Vernon Road--as Mount Vernon Road is now I couldn't tell you exactly where). But his house is still standing. It's been remodeled and all, but it's still standing, but he lost enough money that he just never did re-

BL: cover from it.

HB: So do you know anybody, you know, that any relatives or relations or anything?

BL: No. I don't because in the first place we didn't have enough or make enough money to save it so there was nothing in the bank. If they had money at all, it was in a drawer somewhere at home, you know, and that amounted to, at the most, probably \$200.

HB: Do you have any recollection of, like Franklin Roosevelt when he first became president or anything like that?

BL: Roosevelt I do. Now you're not talking about Teddy Roosevelt?

HB: No. When he became president of the United States.

BL: It's strange the first thing I can remember about--the only thing I can remember about him first going in was the fact that he was such a dignified gentleman, and he was so crippled. Those are the only two things that I really remember about him, and I remember him as a tremendously fine president. Of course, I was much younger maybe there were a lot of things about him that weren't so fine, but the things I remember about him were very fine.

HB: Do you remember any of the, like programs that help the poor or anything?

BL: I don't remember that there were any.

HB: You don't. Any that helped, you know...

BL: No.

HB: Do you know of anything like in Cedar Rapids that, you know, people tried to do--to help with anything like soup kitchens or lines?

BL: There might have been; I don't remember that. The only thing I do remember is quite often some man, who looked very poor, would come to the door, and some of them would say, "Lady, can you give me something to eat?" And others again would say, "Lady, is there anything I can do for you for something to eat?" And they were never turned away.

HB: So did your mother just find some work for them or ...?

BL: Just make work, you know that kind of thing, and or else she'd say she didn't have any work for them and fill a plate with whatever we'd have, and there were always leftovers--just always leftovers. So she always gave them something to eat, and you notice the other neighbors did too if they came around. So nobody was turned away. I don't think that would happen now; we would be afraid to open the door to a stranger that much. My mother never fed them in the house though; it was always outside on the grape harbor, but that's the only thing I can remember about poor--oh, poor people would go into a store. I remember being in a place, a sandwich shop (it wasn't a sandwich shop as we have now, but it was where you could buy sandwiches), and a man came in and said he had no money, but he was very hungry so the waitress went back and talked, apparently to the owner, came out and made him an enormous sandwich. So people didn't go hungry the way they are now, by the thousands, but they got help from individuals--individual people got help from individuals let's put it that way. Can you remember anything else?

LL: Is is all right if I talk?

BL: Oh sure, go ahead.

LL: Now your grandfather got a personal letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt.

BL: Oh, that's right.

LL: When he sent in a way to help the farmers, cause he was a farmer, her grandfather. Now I can find that.

BL: Find it. It's in the bookcase. I had forgotten about that. My grandfather was another person who just never quit learning. Les, I think the letter is on the bookcase up here.

LL: You think so?

BL: Yes, I do. If you can't find it, I'll get it. He's was always, what do you call it when you mix two different plants together? I want to say cross breeding, but that isn't what it's called for plants.

HB: Grafting?

BL: Grafting, yeah. And he got some real interesting things. He had a small orchard on his home, and he worked with that and then this, whatever it was that he sent, he got a letter from the president's office at least. And we also have some papers from him when he was paying taxes; like two and three dollars a year, which is, you almost don't believe it, but then, of course, that was before me again. That was during his lifetime.

HB: Do you have any other recollections or anything of, you know like early '30s?

BL: Early '30s, let's see how old would I have been?

HB: I would say about fourteen, fifteen.

BL: No. My first recollection really, going beyond my teenage was after we were married. The over 39 and dance halls, and I don't think I'd have been thirty. Down where, oh, let's see, is on the corner of Third Street and A Avenue, I think. Where the overpass goes. There used to be a dance hall called Danceland, and they had dances there once a week. Did you find it?

LL: Yeah.

BL: Well, that's before me; maybe she doesn't want it.

LL: Here's the one before that and here's the one that was in the paper on it.

HB: Well, you can kind of tell what it's about and say what's on the tape and stuff. Do you remember what age you were when you went to Danceland?

BL: Well, yeah. I was married at eighteen or eighteen and a half, and it was from there on that we went to Danceland, but when we used to go to Danceland when we were engaged.

LL: Yeah.

BL: But we had to leave at intermission because I had to be home at eleven o'clock.

HB: Do you remember what kind bands or what did they have there?

BL: Oh yes, it was all live music, and it was good size bands.

LL: Big name bands.

BL: Big name bands and some not so big named. Lawrence Welk was at a little place outside of Cedar Rapids at one time. Oh, gee, I don't know. I was so much in love I didn't care who played, you know.

LL: Emil Flint.

BL: Emil Flint, whom you wouldn't know at all, but he was a pretty big name at that time. too.

LL: Oh, they were all big name bands then here or close.

HB: What else did you do like in the '30s? You know you were young then, so forth--what else?

BL: Yeah. We went to movie once a week after air conditioning came in because we didn't have air conditioning at home, so we took once a week to cool off. I still remember that, oh, it was so delightful and then when you came out, of course, it was twice as hot, you know, and once a week they had--they gave away things; things like dishes, one piece, you know, a plate or something, and I can't remember how you got it, but if your name was called maybe if you had a certain number you got that dish.

I can remember vaudeville. It had one short movie, one short news reel, one short comedy all black and white of course, and then vaudeville and gradually vaudeville, and it was in acts, and they come out on stage and put a great big cardboard naming whatever it was. And

they'd--and that was only after the Paramount and the Iowa Theater came, or did they have them at the State, which was then called the Strand? My stars, you can't imagine the things you forget. And then gradually the vaudeville acts got smaller and smaller until they weren't. And the organ always played music for them. Sometimes the organ played during the movie; it was very exciting. The organ played like "William Tell Overture," and that kind of thing or if it was a chase especially "William Tell Overture," and if it was a romantic movie then he played soft background music, but the organ was a very vital part of those early movies cause they were silent you see.

HB: Were the movies believable?

BL: It was an escape; it was dreamland pretty much so. The hero, it's true, always wore a white hat, and the villain always wore a black hat. The hero, it's true, always came in at the last minute to save the heroine, but they were an escape, and they were good.

I can remember right across from the Iowa Theater is the candy store now was Kresge's Dimestore, and it was the biggest dimstore in town. And among other things they served were rootbeer. You could either get the foamy kind, which came in a glass about 12" high--a stein, and it was all foam; or you could get a stein, which was just half the size, just rootbeer, no foam. And so my mother would take me and my sister, we were both quite small--maybe I was about ten. Was the Iowa Theater here when I was ten? Oh, it was after the Iowa Theater got here. And we would always go to Kresge's Dimestore first and buy a hot dog and one of the rootbeers and that was our lunch, then we'd go to the theater, then we'd come home. Once a week we did that, and I guess it carried

over after we were married, but they no longer had the rootbeer and that kind of thing. But that was a big deal. I mean a hot dog and a rootbeer.

HB: What movie theaters did you go to? What were their names?

BL: The State Theater which was ... the Strand.

HB: Where was that located?

BL: Where the State Theater is now on Third Avenue and between Third and Fourth--it was the Strand.

LL: I know but I don't know what it is now.

BL: Anyway, it's the theater between Third Street and railroad tracks, and it's on Third Avenue. Then the Iowa Theater--when it was new it had an enormous ear of corn as it's sign, and I can remember feeling resentment as an adult when they took that down just a few years ago. And it was green--the greenery on it was green lights and the corn was yellow lights. It seems to me there was a theater on Third Street where the community theater is now, but I don't remember the name of it. We used to go there once in a while. And there was another--

LL: It's either the Olympic or the Columbia.

BL: The Majestic Theater which was on the corner of Third Street and A Avenue. Is it A Avenue?

LL: Second Street.

BL: Second Street? No, Third Street. Yeah, well Second or

Third Street. I don't know. But the Majestic they usually had some kind of vaudeville in that, long after the other theaters stopped. And then it was closed because it was deemed unsafe so the building was eventually torn and the building that is there now was put up there.

HB: Do you remember any names of the vaudeville acts or anything?

BL: No. I have no idea. There was always a comdey act and always a dance act and the dance act was either tapping, two men or a version of ballroom dancing, I guess, with a man and a woman.

HB: Do you remember anything about the Cherry sisters or anything?

BL: No, I don't except what I've heard from them--about them I should say.

HB: What other kind of amusements--do you remember anything about carnival week or anything like that?

BL: No. We managed when we were youngsters, my father always took us at least to watch the circus unload or to go see the circus, and I have an Aunt Blanche who quite often took me. Those were big times in my life because here again it cost money to go in; everything that cost money was very important. But if we didn't get to go to the circus, we at least got to watch them unload and that was very interesting.

HB: Do you remember what the name--was it Ringling's or?

BL: I don't remember, no.

HB: Do you remember?

BL: We had Barnum and Bailey, seems to me was one. Yeah, Barnum and Bailey.

HB: Do you remember the little gallery or anything like that?

BL: No.

HB: Do you remember--what about like community centers like the YWCA?

BL: Had the YW and the YMCA, but I never went to either one. Of course, at that time, girls were not allowed to go YM, and boys were not allowed to go to the YW. I was so wrapped up in music from the time I was eight years old, and a lot of these things, I just wasn't interested in, so I didn't go.

HB: Did you go to any music events or did you listen to any?

BL: My teacher got--now I don't know, looking back on it, whether she bought the tickets or whether they were given to her for student use or what, but I remember very vividly one time being given a ticket to hear Jascha Heifetz, and I was in junior high school. He was a very famous, well-known violinist. It was at Coe College in the music building. I don't think it's the auditorium that they have now, 'cause that burned down, didn't it?

LL: Yeah, the first one.

BL: And, it was so crowded that they had seats on the stage, and I got one of the seats on the stage which I was absolutely thrilled to death, because, as I say, I was terribly interested in the violin, and I could see everything he did up close. And I just thought he was absolutely wonderful.

A cat screeches in the background.

BL: We don't care about you.

HB: Any other places you went to listen to music or any big occasion?

BL: No, not really. We had a wind up Victrola. I still have it downstairs; of course it doesn't play, but you bought your record, well more or less, you wind it up and you put your record on there--so scratchy. So we always had a record at home--a record going on. Then my folks bought a used piano, and my sister start taking lessons; and I always fooled around on that and made my own music. Oh, and when we went out to visit my grandmother and grandfather, (the Stolba relation, my father's parents) my father, who played any instrument there was, had a pump organ. And I just could never wait to get out there to sit down. How my family stood it I don't know. From the time we got there to the time we left for home I was at that organ, and it was delightful. It was one of these that had a lot of butterflying on it; it's a lot of cut out scroll work and everything. A lot of stops, and I'd sit and pump my life away on that thing and try all the different stops on it. It was fun.

HB: Do you remember like the symphony, I mean back in the early days in Cedar Rapids?

BL: Well, I was invited to join when I was fifteenth years old. There were no auditions, per se, like there are now. You got an invitation through the mail if whoever was in charge of it thought you were good enough. And, of course, everybody knew everybody else. Every teacher knew every other teachers' students, and Joe Kitchen, who was a pro-

fessor of music at Coe College, was the director of the orchestra at the time. In fact, he was one of the organizers of it. So when I was fifteenth I was invited to join, and I started out by playing clear back in second violin section, which they did with all students who were invited to join. And gradually worked myself up to till I was principal of the second violin section, and they were very careful. They took very good notice of who could do what or who couldn't do what. And then eventually I was put in the first violin section; I've been there ever since. But Joe Kitchin was the first director of that, and he had it for years. He never was paid for it; at the end of the year he got a \$300 honorarium. That was it. He was librarian, choosing music, passing it around. He was janitor; he fixed the chairs got them all arranged. He was business manager cause he had the charge of hiring and firing. He was just a very, very lovely gentlemen. I was very fond of him. Then he was I guess you would say he was fired. Although I hate to use that term for him, but eventually we got a committee, and the committee thought after all these years we should go professional. So they hired Henry Doenicke, who was, well, he was our second director. Several of my friends and I--or several people I knew and I--there was about half the orchestra let's put it that way, We ended up by dropping the orchestra because Henry, while he was a nice enough fellow, was made up all of temper. And most of us are and were in music for pure enjoyment of it and if you can't enjoy it you just don't. And then he was fired and Rich Williams came in who was delightful until his last year because he was getting ready to move, and I think probably he didn't care as much. And then this man, Christain Tiemeyer, who was by far the best man we've ever had musician

wise, personality wise. I'm very fond of him. I like the music he chooses; I like the way he directs. He never looks directly at one person; he looks at the section, but you know whom he's referring to. You know. And I think perhaps we have the best orchestra now too.

HB: Way back when you decided to change or whatever when was this about when the change occurred?

BL: In the orchestra?

HB: Yeah.

BL: I don't remember. I really don't.

HB: Do you remember how old you were maybe about?

BL: Well, I was married wasn't I?

LL: Oh, yeah. You were married when you started.

BL: And I had one child already so I would guess.

HB: It was more into the '40s or...

BL: Yeah. Early '40s because my second child was born in '44, and it was before he was even a thought. So I would say--let's see she was born in '37--the early '40s is a good way to put it. Probably the records are at Coe College or you could find out in the symphony history too, you know.

HB: Do you know why they changed or why--you know...

BL: At the beginning?

HB: Yeah.

BL: I think, as I say, that the committee finally decided that Joe wasn't doing as much as he should do and that we should go professional. That's the only reason I can find because I never found anything wrong with Joe. The only thing I might have found wrong with him was the fact that he did kind of play favorites because he knew who could play and who couldn't and obviously he was going to favor those who could.

HB: What's the difference between going professional and being what it was before?

BL: You sign a contract and you get paid, and before there was no contract. If we felt we couldn't go to rehearsal, we just didn't go. Now, you've got to be pretty ill or dead before you don't go although I think contracts are made to be broken. You've got a contract and if someone says I'm not going there's no earthly way you can make them go. However, with a contract you have the union behind you. I remember one time one of the girls got fired very unfairly, and she took it to the union and she ended up getting her job back symphony wise. She's still playing, and I won't even mention her name cause everybody knows who she was.

HB: Before it was professional--like when you were fifteen starting out was it often that they had students as young as you to start out in symphony or was it...?

BL: Yeah. Eleventh or twelfth grade was pretty much average. The year I was invited to join a friend of mine from Washington was invited to

join. I think there were the two of us, Virginia and I.

LL: I think she was from Franklin though.

BL: Virginia was in Washington.

LL: I didn't think Washington was there then.

BL: Yeah, because I was in Grant, you see, at fifteen. I'm sorry I lost track of my thought.

HB: Well, you were pretty young when you started.

BL: Yes. I was, and if the director even looked at my direction I just wilted.

HB: What music did you play or was it your classical or was it...?

BL: Oh, it was always classical. Joe started a (I should call him Professor Kitchin, but he was a personal friend of mine too) what was called Coe Promenade orchestra at Coe College and got some of us going and then, I think what that was was a drive for union members because I hadn't belonged to the union until then. Those of us who joined that orchestra had to join the union and so now and from that time on everything we did had to be paid for. We couldn't play gratis. While I would get around that quite a bit by accepting the check and endorsing it and turning it back--particularly churchwork. Well, I just can't charge for churchwork that's all there is to it or schoolwork, you know that kind of thing. And that's perfectly acceptable to the union, but I resented having to become a professional. I still hate to say I'm professional. I consider myself an amateur, and I'd rather

be an amateur, but there's no way around it.

HB: Since you went over to professional did the whole thing expand?

BL: Not right away, no. Those of us who were union members got paid the others didn't. Then they decided they had to expand. They went to Coe College for students; they went to Iowa City for students. They went to Mount Vernon for students, or for musicians not for students necessarily because faculty played too. And then it gradually worked into the fact that the union members get paid according to union regulations. The other people get a small stipend or approximate stipend, always their mileage, so now everybody gets paid.

HB: Can you tell me anything else about...Go ahead.

BL: About symphony?

HB: Yes.

BL: We always did classical music. The Coe Promenade Orchestra, oh that's where I got. The Coe Promenade Orchestra did light music and some semipops, and we didn't do the heavy music, but the symphony always did the heavy music, but not on the grand scale we do now. We do things with soloists that are brought in. They are worldwide fame, and now this last concert, the one I was unable to play, took seven people, I think, out of our own orchestra as a soloist. They're as good as some of these that go around performing--for you know traveling musicians (which is not putting it well, they're just fine musicians) and that's their livelihood. But and when the orchestra was first started if we had a soloist at all, it was somebody from Cedar Rapids that could play

well.

HB: So you didn't bring in when you...

BL: No.

HB: Did at anytime did any big musicians ever come through Cedar Rapids?

BL: Like the one I was talking about, Jascha Heifetz. We'd get those once in a while. It was on the community concert series, and I used to have tickets for that and finally I dropped it because it became a donation for me, I've always thought. I thought when I was younger, and I still think that Cedar Rapids should have something like a clearing house so that a symphony rehearsal wouldn't be held on the night of a community concert or that kind of thing, you know. Because I always have a rehearsal, not always, but this happened a good nine-tenths of the time on the night of a community concert program, and I didn't get to go. So I just stop buying community concert tickets. What were you going to say?

LL: Nothing.

BL: I thought you were.

LL: I was but it slipped my mind.

HB: Do you remember anything about Greene's Opera House or anything like that?

BL: I remember the name. I don't remember anything about it.

HB: How about other, like amusement or recreations like the amusement park or the Alamo or whatever its called?

BL: I don't remember any amusement parks, but here again we wouldn't have had money to go. We did go to the park once a while to eat when our children were small, which would have made it later on not when I was a child. I'd have my meal cooked on the stove; we'd decide on the spur of the moment to go to a park to eat it. And that again was before air conditioning so obviously it was cooler in the park, and we'd pack pots and pans and take dishes and children and go out to the park and to eat it. And then we'd go around to the zoo. Bever Park had quite a big zoo, no swimming pools, but Bever Park had a big zoo, and they had in both parks swings and slides and tedder-todders and that kind of thing, and we'd go there or if the schools or if a group of us had picnics we'd go there. Ellis Park had a beach at the little pavillion by the river. It was a big beach; it went out quite a ways and lifeguard. And so we did go there once in while too, but then that closed up in a hurry.

HB: Did girls when you were that young--did you wear bathing suits and stuff to...?

BL: We wore bathing suits and bathing caps, and the bathing suits were very concealing! They weren't the kind of pictures bloomers that kind of thing you know. But the bathing suits and the tights underneath and the tight skirt over it. And they were fairly short, but the skirt was over the--and you weren't like this; you were like this, which I know the tape recorder can get. But they were very concealing; nothing at all like now.

HB: Do you remember what other things that girls had to wear when you were young and stuff like that or...?

BL: Well, about the only thing I remember most is our gym suits, which were the most God awful hideous things I'd ever seen. I went to Skol for a while and the girls then wore black bloomers. They were very foamy, came to the knees and white blouses. Well, I didn't get in on that, but when I went to Wilson we wore our gym suits, which were blue, one piece, sleeveless, that buttoned clear up to the neck, and bloomers that maybe came half way from the knee to the hip. Again very concealing. They had a belt, but you wore the belt loose.

I remember a sewing teacher up at Wilson. We made clothes for ourselves, and I never could wear any of them because they were always so loose and so big, and I was always so small. She apparently had one size, and we made everything to that size. And they never fit me. I was always the smallest one of everyting. But those awful gym suits.

HB: Any other strange going ons, you know what you'd think of now is you know that you have to...

BL: No. One thing I do remember that's kind of funny. As a little girl when we wore our little dresses, (which were short which were just knee length or a little bit above the knee) we lifted up our skirts before we could sit down, and as I grew up our skirts got a little bit longer. And one thing I had such a hard time remembering not to do was to lift my skirt up before I sat down. And we had knee highs, which were the same as they are now, but that was all the style because, you see, your skirts came down half way to the ankle, and the knee highs were fine. And I walked to Grand High. You know where the Board of Education is? I lived next door, and it's on Second Avenue and Fourth Street West--Fifth Street?

LL: Fourth, yeah.

BL: A good two miles, and I walked there. I must have had some homework because I remember books in one hand and my violin case in the other hand and having what I called "frozen assets" from the knees up to the thighs. I was just frozen; it was that cold. And my fingers were frozen, too, because there was nothing you could put on your hands that would alleviate, you know, carrying it like that.

LL: No busses or nothing like that?

BL: No busses, no, and streetcars didn't go anywhere near there, and I don't believe we'd have money to pay for the streetcar.

END OF SIDE ONE - BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

HB: Do you remember anything like in newspapers? Did you read any when you were young?

BL: Yeah. I always read the newspapers, and we always had news. I've forgotten what they were called, but once a week at school we had the small newspaper come out. And we had, in addition to studying the small newspaper at school, once a week we had to cut out some item out of school. I can remember being awakened early in the morning with, "extra, extra" you know came out. They had to put the "extras" out. That's the way we got our extra news. And, when war was declared, or that type of thing, you know.

LL: Lindberg kidnapping...

BL: Lindberg kidnapping. "Extra, extra." That was thrilling for a youngster to be awakened like that. It was an awful way to get the news; it was old before, you know, before you ever got it.

HB: Do you remember any big headlines, you know, that affected...or you know, I mean that really impressed you or something when you were a child?

BL: The thing I can remember was when war was declared. I think it was when I was in junior high. I thought it was so thrilling, and, of course, there was nothing thrilling about war, but at the time I thought it was so thrilling. That's the only thing I can remember about that.

HB: When war was declared in Europe, you mean?

BL: Yeah, right. I look back--I'm horrified at myself, but that was my honest to goodness reaction to it. I thought it was wonderful, you know, but outside of that, I won't remember anything about war. Coupons didn't come out, I think, until we were married for the later wars, did they?

LL: Yeah.

BL: Food coupons, that is. That was unpleasant. You saved up your coupons. If you wanted to have somebody over for a meal, you saved them up so that you would have enough coupons to get enough meat, for instance. And saved up your gasoline coupons so--I loved to ride. I've always loved to ride just anywhere. And, of course, that was out.

HB: Did your family ever have a car, like when you were a teenager?

BL: Yeah. My folks finally ended up buying a car, and it was saved simply for the most important things. And here too again, it was open sides and then eventually they bought, you know, cars the way they are now comparably where they are now.

HB: Do you remember how old you were?

BL: No. I don't. Must have been my early teens cause I remember having a car pretty much. Something about cars and living here, this was in my teens too. Mallory Street was not paved at all; it was all dirt, all mud. He had a car. Les had a car when we were dating, and he used to come and pick me up and take me to symphony. And one time he wasn't coming; he was late and finally he came. He had gotten stuck down in the second block, and I don't know how many people had to go and help him out. Needless to say, I was late for symphony rehearsal that night. I don't know why I'm laughing cause that was so dire, and he was stuck clear up to the hubcap I think.

LL: And Dad got the neighborhood man to come down and shove me and got me out.

BL: That's another thing--the neighbors when I was a child I remember this, too. We used to go out and play ball in the street, and the neighbors all got together. Every daddy was out, whether it was a boy or a girl, every daddy was out. You don't see that kind of chumminess between parents and children anymore. We did it with our children, but then our children either don't have-- although I must say, our children have done pretty well by theirs, too. But our daddies had time to do this with us. They had time; Mothers would sit on the front porch and call encouragement to one or the other of us, you know. The others of us would line up against on the lawn and watch. We have sidewalks, but not paved streets. And my stars, the streets were just loaded with all of us--one block. It would get everybody get out, and it would be enough for two teams. Well, we had a lot of kids about my

age at the time. That was fun. I think the youngsters nowadays really are missing a lot because they don't have to use their imagination. Everything is made up for them. We had to make up our imagination. We made mud pies. I mean we really made a whole meal of mud pies. We named everything that it was. We had dolls that were (I mean this was when I was younger too) kind of on the cupie order. Their legs were together, and their arms would move just one direction, and their heads wouldn't move at all. And we made clothes for them, and we knew exactly what we were making. How crude they were, but we thought they were wonderful. Use cigar boxes or cheese boxes and things like that for their beds or cradles regardless whether we--I mean if we had a baby doll it was a cradle. If we had a lady doll, it was a bed. Oh, that was fun. Out of regular match box, (not one of these little match-books) but it was a box about 6" x 3" x 2" tall. We made buggies with cardboard wheels that didn't move and that was a buggy for our baby--little baby dolls. Those were all ceramic (cement we called them). And then they brought out cellulite, which was, oh, you'd look at it or touch it a little bit heavy and it would break. Then gradually they went to the type of thing they have now. But we didn't want rag-dolls because cement dolls were the things and teddy bears. Teddy bears were our little boys and girls too.

LL: Always have been.

BL: Yeah. They've always have been.

HB: Do you remember like when you were a child or do you remember being disciplined fairly heavily?

BL: Oh, yes. I was always disciplined--I never. If my mother said--what-

ever my mother said I did. There was no arguing. There was no talking anything over like you do now with youngsters. You did it. It was good because I said so, that kind of thing. Discipline, it was all with capital letters (not only capital D, but all capital letters.) You couldn't say, "I'll do it later," but you did it right when you were told to do it. Bedtime, I can remember bedtime first being dark then it was 8 p.m., then it was 9 p.m. I don't think my bedtime was ever past 9 p.m. until I was of dating age, and as I say I had to be in by 11 p.m., which was really murder.

HB: Do you remember were parents--was the father or the mother more the one that disciplined or...?

BL: In my family it seemed more my mother, but she never says, "Just wait until your daddy gets home. I'll tell him." But I think my mother was disciplinarian in our home.

HB: Did you get spanked or was it just more or less she told...

BL: I never got spanked, but I can remember getting slapped two or three times, which was something, to me, so degrading that I never did it to my children. I just--to me slapping or spanking is just saying, "I'm bigger than you and that you're going to do it," you know. But our children were allowed to reason with us, you know. We usually got our own way, but we explained to them why we thought they should do what they should do. And then if it was very important, they still didn't want to do it. We said, "I'm sorry. You're going to do it and that's it."

HB: Do you remember like when your mother, you know and so forth I mean

I know you were young and so, but like when women got the right to vote. Did your mother go out to vote when voting came?

BL: I don't remember that, no, but I do remember my mother having her haircut. My mother had hair that was down below, oh it was almost to her knees, and it was so thick. And my Aunt Blanche (I refer to her a lot; she was the youngest of all the children. They had quite a good size family and also I'm her namesake so I knew her better than I knew anybody else) was the first one to have her haircut, and she was over quite often and since my sister was born at home, (the same as I was) but my sister was born in the house next door. My aunt was over there with us for quite a while til my mother got back on her feet again. Well, all right, my sister was about a year old, and I came home from school one day and I looked and I started saying something to Aunt Blanche and she turned around and it was my mother. She'd had her haircut. She hadn't told anybody not even my dad and went down and had it cut, and I don't remember to this day--I remember feeling like crying, but I don't think I cried, but my dad wasn't too happy about it.

HB: Did they have a fight or anything?

BL: Not that I remember, no. My dad used to just clam up when he'd get mad. It was more than anger. He got mad, and he was quiet.

LL: He was the 'old school' though.

BL: Yeah.

LL: Long hair was the way it should be.

BL: Yeah. Well, I think most men like long hair now.

HB: How short was it when she got it cut?

BL: Oh stars! Almost shoulder-length you know and no style to it. I mean it was parted and just combed.

HB: Did she save her old hair or anything like that?

BL: I think she saved her hair, but I don't remember now what she did with it. No, she could have sold it you know.

LL: I think she ended up selling it.

BL: Did she end up selling it?

LL: I think she did.

BL: But I don't remember her going to vote when they first got to vote. She always voted later on, but I remember nothing about when women first got to vote. I just remember nothing about that, but she always would see how my dad was going to vote and then she'd go down and vote like he did.

HB: So she didn't really take too much of...

BL: No. She just thought he knew. Well, my dad had more of an education than my mother did. She had to drop school when she was three--or in third grade and go to work. That's how hard up that family was, and she hired out as a housekeeper if you can imagine. And so she never had a lot of education--that is formal education. Things she learned she learned just by being a good listener. In fact, she got

her v's and w's mixed up til the day she died. So I suppose she figured that my dad knew, and he took his politics very seriously. He was a Democrat from the word 'go' so was my mother.

HB: Did that influence you fairly heavily?

BL: No. I don't remember voting until we were married, and I registered as a Republican. I don't ever remember voting Republican. I vote the party not the--I vote the ticket not the party. Let's put it that way. I never have voted a straight ticket and never want to. I can remember my folks voting a straight ticket occasionally, not very often, but I resent having to declare myself either a Republican or a Democrat. I'm not an Independant. I guess what I am is a Demo-Republican.

HB: Do you remember like the radios. Did your family have a radio or...?

BL: My grandfather was the first one to have a radio, and it was a battery radio. And, oh, the static if you got a word out, you were very fortunate, and it was about the size of your tape recorder only it was high. There were rounded tops. I don't remember my folks having a radio. I remember us having a radio, but it was the same kind. But gradually they got clearer so that you didn't get as much static. My grandfather was always one of the first to have anything new when it came in. He would have been a fine person to live in this day and age because he was for the new, and he had to try it out. If it wasn't good, he discarded it. But he had to try it out.

HB: So did your family then...?

BL: My family got a radio, but it was just one of these small table models

they call them and that's all.

HB: What kind of things did you listen to on the radio?

BL: I don't remember that there was much of anything except talking, a little bit of music, and I don't think you could have it on morning, noon, and night could you? There weren't things on morning.

LL: Most stations were. They had the Crosby radio, that's the first ones that come out.

BL: Crosby radio?

LL: About that long and about that wide.

BL: But I remember as a child I wasn't that impressed. All I could think of was oh, the noise, you know. and it was noisy that I remember very vividly. But when we went out to visit them my folks were thrilled with it. My grandmother didn't think so much of it, although she couldn't understand that much English, but my grandfather, my mother, and father just sat around the radio. He had earphones, and he'd, grandpa, would usually use the earphones. Well, he was De'da. We call him De'da. He'd use the earphones and the rest of them would just sit around just listening to it. And it would fade in and out, and you would see them watching and all of sudden they'd bend clear down so it would be right against the radio to hear it, you know. And you couldn't get any stations that were very far from you, just not at all.

HB: Do you remember did you have a telephone in your house?

BL: We had--did we have one? Yeah, I think--the one I remember is at my grandparent's house and at my aunt's house in Solon. You picked up

the receiver, rang the bell, and then operator came. I have one of the old-fashioned phones in there now--doesn't work, of course. When the operator came, you told her what you wanted and on the farm, especially, everybody had their own ring--like two longs and a short or two shorts and a long or long, short, and a long. And it rang on all the phones so that the people that wanted to could all pick up their receivers, you know, and listen in on everybody's conversation. Oh, Lord, that was funny, but you could hear everybody on our phones when they first came in. We had to give operator our telephone number--the telephone number we wanted. And it was now--this is very strange--6927J was our telephone number I think next door there. Why the J I have no recollection. But you gave operator the number for, and they were comparable for other people. But they no longer rang in every home. They rang only at the party, you know, where you were going.

HB: Do you remember anything else about like--I remember you talked earlier about the newspapers and so forth. And when you were in high school and so forth did you read a lot or, you know like books or otherwise?

BL: Yeah. I've always read a lot. I've just always read a lot. We used to have a branch in the library down on 16th Avenue, and it was open maybe about twice a week, and I was down there at least once a week. I can't tell you now the books I read, but from the time I could decipher letters I was reading. I just always have read a lot.

HB: Did everybody or did most of them...?

BL: No. Not everybody. No, I don't remember. And in school too, I can remember some of us had a lot articles in the paper that--National Geographic. If we could get a hold of a National Geographic, and

take an article or a picture from that to school, oh we were in seventh heaven. My folks did not subscribe to magazines. Here again it was a matter of economy. They just couldn't afford to, but the paper. Of course, I started at the funnies, you know, and now I start at the front page and go--I think as most people do, but I read the funnies first and then went back and read the paper and mostly, here again, it was local news. There was some national news on, not a lot of overseas news as I remember at all, but mostly it was local. And there was another paper in Cedar Rapids besides the Gazette. I can't--the Republican was that the name of it? I think it might have been, and I liked it because there was a rivalry between the two, and you got more news; and they were more--or if a teacher, for instance, gave a recital, (the recitals were always written up) and it gave the names of the students that were in. Well, the Gazette would no more dream of doing that than anything. If an adult club had a meeting, it was in the paper, and it was--I remember this as a child--these things were in the paper. And they talked about them at great length. So is was a lot of local news. Was our second paper called the Republican? It was wasn't it?

LL: Yes. Cedar Rapids Republican.

HB: Do you remember like holidays; you know like Christmas, Thanksgiving, and so forth?

BL: Yes.

HB: How did you celebrate?

BL: Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter were all family days and as a child

we'd all eat together at one big table, but then afterwards the men would all go in one room and the women first would clear the table and go do the dishes and then they would sit in another room. It was always segregated. And gradually as we grew older, you know, became mixed family. I still like family gatherings, and we still have family gatherings pretty much. This Christmas, this Thanksgiving, and this New Year's our family was altogether.

HB: Do you remember were there big celebrations in town or anything, you know for Fourth of July or Memorial Day?

BL: Oh, yes. We always have fireworks on Fourth of July. Memorial Days I think are the days we went to the cemetery. They had big parades there, always a big we used to call it 'doings.' Czech National had their celebrations in Czech obviously. Other cemeteries had their 'doings' in English, but it was-- and Veteran's Day was a big day too--Armistice Day we called it. And Fourth of July we saved our pennies like crazy so that my father could take us down to Vavra's Grocery Store, which was the first grocery store down here--that is from here, and we picked out fireworks and things that we scratch on the sidewalk and they'd sparkle and go off. Sparklers were always good. Cap guns were always good. Firecrackers of all sizes. These big cherry bombs, is that what they call them?

LL: Yes.

BL: I don't remember of anybody really getting hurt except one person, and it was somebody I didn't really know well. One of these, they were about that round--"Son of a Guns" I guess we called them and scratch them on the sidewalk and sparks would fly up, you know, and

somebody got a spark in her eye, and I don't remember now how much or to what extent her damage was. But that's all I can remember. We were careful. We had--what was it called?

LL: Punk.

BL: Punk and we have that lit. We'd hold the firecracker to it and immediately throw it and let it sit for half an hour if it didn't go off cause we didn't want it going off in our face. And snakes, oh that was the most fun. I think they still have snakes. Sidewalk was always marked black where the snakes were, but then gradually they-- and at the parks they had enormous firework celebrations, down here at Riverside Park that's all the further we had to go. People had rockets in their yards. We'd sit out on the porch or go to the neighbors to see the rockets. That to my way of recollection was the most dangerous cause they came in all sizes too and some of it would go up and come down with a fizzle, just maybe about after six feet in the air. Others would go maybe sixty yards, quite high.

HB: Do you remember like winter activities? Do you remember doing anything special?

BL: Yes. We were the last house, that is we and the people across from us, going up the hill except the first house directly across the street and the one across the street from that. Otherwise it was all fields, and here again, my father went with us. Parents always went with their youngsters. We took the sleds, there was a sled in every family, and you didn't go down on your stomach like the kids go down now. Daddy sat in back and guided the sled, and we took turns sitting in front of him, and we went top of the hill and came on down. And

we could even slide, as I recollect, for a while in the streets because traffic was so scarce and just... Well, we could play ball in the streets there's not much traffic. So we slid around in the hills here. As we grew up, we kind of got too big for that and didn't do it until after we were married; then we used to go Ellis Park and take a round piece of tin and just have more fun going down. Kids don't do that now. It's got to be their (I sound like I'm about ninety years old) kids don't do that now, but they don't. Everything's made for them.

HB: Do you remember going ice skating or anything did you do?

BL: First year I went with him; he bought me pair of ice skates, and I tried and tried until I finally learned and gave it up within, oh first winter. I have weak ankles and I never could keep my ankles from going together so I was never much of a ice skater.

HB: Did you ever roller skate or anything?

BL: Oh, always roller skated, but not at roller rinks. We didn't have roller rinks. As I said I grew up in a house next door so we'd roller skate. As I learned it was right in front of the house. Then when I could go to the corner and up to the alley, which made it a good block or half a block maybe, then gradually I was allowed to go around the block, never further. That was our roller skating, and they were ball-bearing roller skates, and I don't think they even make them now. And they were the kind that screwed on to your shoes. You didn't buy shoe roller skates now. We had little keys for them that were split up the center of them, and I remember putting one in my mouth one time and getting it caught in this little piece of skin that goes in your--

oh, I can remember going screaming in the house. I don't remember how my mother or father whoever it was got off, but they got off. I had a sore mouth for a long time after. Needless to say, the roller skate key never went in my mouth after that. But that was fun. Here again, the kids go to roller skating rinks and everything is...

LL: Shoe skatees and everything.

BL: Shoe skates and they go round and round and round and unless they're going in it for profession they don't learn any fancy, we didn't learn any fancy moves either, but at least we skated where it wasn't organized. That's what I was going to say. Everything is so organized now that youngsters have no opportunity to use their imagination, which bothers me.

I can remember sitting in grade school learning arithmetic, which I liked too, but at first I wasn't very fast about it, and I used to get my hand in my lap and count on my fingers 12, 13, 14, 15. Now all they got to do is push a button, and the calculator tells them what it is. So I think the brains are going to atrophy.

HB: Did you have to do chores around the house?

BL: I had to wash dishes. That was my chore. Oh, and I hated it with a passion. My sister and I took turns washing and drying, but that was all. I didn't know how to cook when I was married. My mother was such a wonderful cook that I don't believe she thought once of teaching us. I still, as a Czech, do not make kolaches, but I never had to learn because when she made kolaches, she made enough for all of us. I did learn a lot of Czech recipes, but not kolaches. Then my son-in-law's mother is a very good baker, and all my aunts were very good so I've

never needed to know how to make kolaches. That's one regret of my life is that I never, but I remember eating at home. We always had homemade bread, homemade rolls, homemade hosky. Everything was homemade; you couldn't go to the store and buy cookies. Friday was cleaning day. Saturday was baking day. That was it. You just had to do things like that. These are little twisted rolls. We'd get those at the bakery. Sykora's Bakery is the only place that makes what I call bonafide Czech bakery. There a little hosky --twisted hosky, slony hosky and salted hosky... and my mother used to make those and so I buy them by the four dozen now and keep them in the freezer and get them out two and three at a time a day. And then there are just like fresh, but even the Czech bakeries kolaches are not the like the homemade ones. But my aunts and my son-in-law's mother, who's a very good friend of mine by the way, make them like they should be made.

HB: Did you have any a certain Czech customs that you use to do round holidays or anytime of the year were there special things? Do you remember?

BL: No. I don't remember particularly except I went to Sunday school, but not church per se, but every holiday we went to church. That is big holiday--Christmas holiday and Easter holiday. Otherwise I don't remember any necessarily Czech costumes. Do you?

Well, the cooking. Yeah. Goose, baked goose or roast goose was always a big thing for holidays it was either goose or duck. So we got away from the goose because goose is notoriously greasy. No matter how you bake it, it's greasy. So for a long time we had duck, oh, and sauerkraut, zely. You couldn't have poultry without having zely.

That's a carry over; we still do that and knedlicky, dumplings. You had to have knedlicky at holidays and so gradually--we still have the zely, the sauerkraut, but gradually we've gone to turkey. (1) It's better for you. (2) It's not as fattening. Noboday was concerned about getting fat. You ate and if you were roly-poly that was good. You were healthy, but if you were thin you were very unhealthy, and let's get you fed up. You're so skimpy. That type of thing.

HB: So people did not diet?

BL: Oh, diet was a naughty word.

HB: Were people very sick?

BL: No. Stamina for people was wonderful except if they got ill. For instance, like gall bladder or anything serious you just knew they were gonna die. There was no cure for it. Tuberculosis, pneumonia--I had double pneumonia, which my mother called 'double pneumonia' which is nothing more or less then pneumonia in both lungs when I was two years old and they all had me dead. But I was stubborn then as I am now, and I just didn't die. But you didn't have the wonderful medicines you have now, and I remember very vividly the small pox vaccination first came in. My mother got my sister and me down there to have our small pox vaccinations, and you suffered agonies for weeks after that. Your whole arm got sore. You had a very great fever and the sicker you were the more apt you would have been to get small pox, and I still have enormous scars on my left arm from it. They had little--they stood about a half a inch up. They were plastic, and they were about an 1 1/2" in diameter that you put over the sore place so no-

body could hit the actual spot, but that was a major undertaking because they were not all that sure that it was really even safe.

HB: So you were pretty young when you had that?

BL: Yes, I was quite young, and my sister was even younger than I. I was in grade school when I had it. I can't tell you the exact age that I had it. I do remember missing three or four days of school because my arm got red down below the elbow.

HB: Did you have like all the childhood diseases like?

BL: I didn't have whooping cough. I had chicken pox. I had measles. As I remember it it was a three-day measles cause I wasn't very sick, and I wasn't sick very long.

HB: Did they go around in epidemics like the whole school got them?

BL: Yes. They seem to, and there was a lot of, I don't know what they call it, but glands along the side of my neck would swell up. I suppose it was a form of flu.

HB: Mumps, maybe?

BL: No. It wasn't mumps. I never had mumps or whooping cough, but we didn't have medicine for that. The medication for that was get a lot of sun, let the sun get right at it. That kind of thing.

HB: So when you were sick did your parents coddle you very much or did they just--

BL: No. I just stayed down. I had to stay down, and whether you were

taking medicine or not--if you were taking medicine, you had to stay down. It wasn't like now. The kids take medicine and the minute they feel better they can get up and play. No, we had to stay down til we took all the medicine. Calcidine pills, I have no idea what they are. I remember taking tons of those when I was a child--every cold calcidine pills.

HB: Did a doctor prescribe them?

BL: Oh, doctor prescribed them, right. And you couldn't get them without a prescription, but I think every doctor in Cedar Rapids prescribed calcidine pills.

HB: Did the doctor come to you to see you?

BL: Oh, yes. Doctor made house calls. My sister was born--well, I was born at home too, but in the county. But my sister was born in the house next door, and the doctor came down, and I was not quite or right about seven and my dad wrapped me up in a blanket and brought me over to this house. They knew the young couple that lived here, and I remember sleeping between them and the next morning I went home and there was this baby. I don't remember my mother being pregnant, nothing. All I knew, and I didn't know I was gonna have a baby brother or sister. They just brought me over here and then came and got me in the morning and there was this baby, and my mother was in bed. "Why are you in bed?" You know that kind of thing. And I remember--I don't remember being jealous as such of my baby sister, but apparently I was because I can remember as a big child, and of course the baby buggies then were great big wicker monstrosities. I remember trying to crawl on the buggy and

tipping it. She wasn't in it fortunately, and my mother asked, what in the world was I trying to do. "Well, you ride her around. I wanna ride too." Oh, dear!

HB: Did you ever go to the hospital or anything or...?

BL: I went to the hospital to have my tonsils out. I was about three; I was quite young, and I don't remember any of it except that it was an unpleasant experience for me. You didn't prepare children in those days for anything. You just took them and well, now we're here in this big building and they're gonna fix you so you don't have sore throats anymore. And I suppose, you know, because I don't remember any of it, but I remember being scared to death. I remember it as a horrible experience and that's all I remember.

HB: Do you remember anything like a other diseases that went around like polio? Did it affect anybody near to you?

BL: Polio. The closest it ever came to me, I don't remember it as a child, but the closest it ever came to me was some friends of my mother's and father's. We were already married, and these friends had lived in California, and they were visiting my mother and father, and Les and I were over there. And two days later she was in the hospital in Iowa City with polio, and she died a day later. And so we were all terribly concerned. Probably selfishly, probably sensibly that we were all going to get it because apparently we'd been with her right at the time she would have given it. But I don't remember it. I remember it when our children were small. There were polio epidemics, and we suspect that our daughter had a touch of polio when she was about three years old because she was terrible, but the doctor didn't know what was the matter with her, but

we rather suspect that's what was the matter with her then.

LL: She was just listless.

BL: Yeah. She was just out of it almost in a coma for several days, and we talked to Dr. Block a few years after that and described the symptoms and all to him, and he response is that what she'd had. But you see they weren't as adept at diagnosing it then as they are now. So we really never had any what you call close experience with it outside of her.

HB: Did doctors prescribe very much medicine back then or did they just...?

BL: Yeah. If they had to come out the house, they usually prescribed something and then if shots came in. If they had to come out the house, they usually gave you a shot or give our children shots. But there was no question about coming to the house. I mean they expected--they wanted to do this, and I don't recollect that you got charged a lot more for house call then you did for an office call.

LL: About \$6 I think.

BL: Yeah.

HB: Going back to like the Czech community or anything. Do you remember anything how Cedar Rapids or I mean related to the Czech community or anything like that?

BL: No. There was no discrimination if that's what you mean. No discrimination what so ever although there was a tendency to laugh up the sleeve at someone who couldn't speak English, but it was never done to the person's face. I mean they were never insulted. There was not

a lot of that kind of thing going on then. People were nice to one another, which I don't always find. I find some people will talk down, well, to even young students. I don't like that and I don't recollect that there was anything like that. Although when children went to the store, they were overlooked for the adults. The adults were always taken first. That is about all I remember about that.

HB: Do you remember any of the other minorities, like the Greeks, the Germans in town or anything?

BL: No. I didn't know about any other minorities, blacks. We weren't to associate with blacks. They just were not to be associated with. Nobody talked against them, but they were--I hate the term but it's a term that was used when I was a child was 'nigger.' We were not to even associate with them. I rememeber one black girl in our class, was it in Hayes School or was it in junior high, but she was pretty much left alone so almost every family had that feeling that they were below us so to speak, which I'm glad that's over with, that kind of thing. Through the grace of God that we're not black, I guess.

HB: Do you remember anything about the other schools like the other colleges or anything like that? Like Mount Mercy or Cornell or anything that--

LL: Well, you just got through playing at Mount Mercy.

BL: Yeah.

HB: How about other Cedar Rapids schools? Were the schools themselves were they fairly well conditioned or so forth? Did they give good education?

BL: Yeah. I think they did. Classes probably were larger than they would have liked now, but somehow or other if there were 30 in a class it wasn't considered large. Now, if they have 30 in a class, they think it's horrible. I see no reason that a good teacher can't--if a teacher can get the student's attention, she can teach them and if they are half way decent students and want to learn they can learn. There's no reason they can't. My classes were never smaller than 30 and still I never had trouble learning. We used a lot of phonetics in school, which they don't use now. Do you know what they are?

HB: That's pronouncing your vowels and so forth.

BL: A has a different pronunciation when it's with e, or when it's with i, or when it's with w. That kind of thing. I rememeber being absent one week from school, and I don't know what it was I had, but I was gone long enough to be absent for a week and when I came back the teacher said, "Blanchie, (I always had the ie on my name) we'll let you take somebody else," and I've forgotten who it was now. We went to the back of the room, and she had a list of cards that must have been about 2" thick and we went through all the phonetics. Th had a certain sound. Sh had a certain sound and so she caught me up on my work. The teacher did. She was instrumental in my catching up on my work. I don't believe teachers do that nowadays unless the students specifically goes up to her. It's up to the student to catch up on the work they've missed. Teachers seem to have more of an interest, and I'm not putting down teachers; don't misunderstand me, but it's a job to them. Where with the teachers that I had as a youngster it was--they liked young people, or they would not have been in the work.

HB: Were most of your teachers women?

BL: All of my teachers were women. I didn't have a man teacher til I got up to junior high and Mr. Moehlman for the orchestra director, and I had an art teacher that was a man. I've forgotten what his name. When I got up to Grant High was the first I really got acquainted with men teachers because there were as many men teachers as there were women teachers.

HB: Do you remember anything else for like attitudes and values? Like how did people view like divorce or--

BL: Oh, divorce was a no-no. If you married, you were married for life. We have had a divorce in our family, and it just about threw me for a loss and, looking back at it, it was a necessary divorce and things have worked out very well, but it was a disgrace to divorce when I was a child. A divorced woman was just a fallen woman I guess, you know. Strangely enough, men weren't fallen men. It all fell on the women; they were the fallen women.

HB: Do you remember anything like did other mothers work or do things like...?

BL: Most mothers did not work.

HB: If they did?

BL: That's outside the home. Their work at home was cut out for them. I can remember my mother scrubbing clothes on a washboard and then the first thing she got was some kind of a wash machine that you move the agitator by pulling a long handle back and forth with your arm, which was still work. Floors had to be scrubbed on hands and knees so they worked, but

didn't work outside the home. I don't remember anybody's mother working outside the home.

HB: Going back to like when you were a teenager and stuff. How did people view, I mean you said you had to come home so early. Did people view that if you were out any later you were doing something bad?

BL: Oh, of course. You couldn't be trusted any further than they could see you, you know, and I often wondered if they didn't trust me that much what did they do when they were young. Of course, my folks were held in even tighter than we were, but so many of these parents, the children--the young people had to come in earlier. Why? There had to be a basis for that reckoning. I mean just because a young man and a young women were together didn't mean that were being "bad." Oh, yeah, you just didn't dare be alone.

HB: Did people talk about it or did it just more or less--that's a bad thing?

BL: They looked down their nose, and they talked about it too. "Did you know so-and-so. Did you know she was with so-and-so alone til such and such a time a night?"

LL: 2:30 in the morning.

BL: Yeah.

HB: Oh, that was quite the scandal then?

BL: Oh, yeah, and of course, sex has always been sex. We can't rule that out, and probably there was just as much of it then as there is now. It just wasn't as common as it is now and where now it's perfectly legitimate to have a child illegitimately so to speak not then. Not only the mother

suffered, but the child, the offspring suffered, too. No, I think times are a lot better nowadays.

HB: Did mothers explain things to daughters?

BL: Oh, my stars! I knew nothing when I got married. I knew nothing about when I became a young lady. I thought I was dying because I found blood, that kind of thing. Oh, my no. That was a "no no" all the way through.

HB: So, who explained things to you and...

BL: Well, when I was in grade school, junior high school, and I went up to my teacher in a very hushed tone of voice, scared to death, I said, "Can I please go home. I started to bleed." Well, she knew, bless her heart, right away what was the matter and so she sent me home, and I told my mother and then she said--how did she explain--this is going to happen to you every month. It's nothing to worry about. That was my explanation, and if I hadn't had a wonderful man for a husband, I don't know what I'd done when I was married. I went into marriage knowing absolutely nothing.

HB: Going on to Cedar Rapids events--big things that happened. Do you remember anything about like when the floods came, like in the '20's?

BL: Yeah, the floods. I had friends who had to come to grade school. Their Daddy had to take them in a boat up to, would have been a block and a half down and then they would walk to school. We had water in the Riverside Park. There were no such things as build-up dikes that they have now. People by Riverside Park just automatically moved out. They had water clear up to their bottom windows, didn't they? It was really mur-

der. There was no flood control as such.

HB: How long did they last? Do you remember or anything did it go on for quite a while?

BL: You mean how long did the water stay or whether they make the dike?

HB: Yeah.

BL: Oh, anywhere from a week to two.

LL: Yeah. Something like that.

BL: And 16th Avenue you couldn't shop down 16th Avenue. That was all water. You just didn't; you just waited til the water went down. They cleaned the stores before you could go to the stores and in the spring of the year you knew that we were going to have floods so you stocked up. And, of course, it's a Czech trait probably all the old people did this. I don't know, but it's a carry over for me. You never waited til you used your last sack of flour, for instance. You were always one or two sacks of flour ahead, which made murder when we had food stamps because we had to stay ahead. I mean the world could come to an end and if you didn't have any more flour you couldn't bake--or sugar that kind of thing. So you always stayed ahead or on laundry needs. Of course, I can remember my mother making soap. She made her own laundry soap. The kitchen smelled to high heaven of lye because there was a lot of lye, but we were always ahead and especially when the spring floods were going to come. We had all that stuff ahead because we didn't know whether it was going to last week, or a month, or what.

HB: Do you remember anything about the big factories in town like Douglas

StarchWorks or Quaker Oats?

BL: Yes. My husband remembers that. Where are these pictures? Is this Penick --what was this?

LL: That was the Sinclair.

BL: Parents did when we were kids. Families would go back and forth, neighborhood families and the children would go. The children wouldn't be left at home. For instance, the second house on the corner, catty-corner across the alley though, and my family were very good friends and they had one girl my age and they'd come back and forth to visit and play cards. And we children would go in another room and play "Office." This was funny. We'd play office; in the olden days you didn't--they didn't charge something. You didn't go to the store and charge something and press a button, and it would go up to the office. They had a little thing that they put your charge thing in and gave it a shove, and it went a long way along the wires and all the way up to the office. After they'd check it over in the office, it came down and either it said, yes you can charge this, or no you can't; so when we played office at home with little kids, we strung up strings to make that little thing and got little toy kettles and shoved them back and forth as those in the store. Yeah, Graemer's was a big store at that time too, and I can remember theirs most vividly. Every now and then, well, the clerk would have a place where she could lift up and call in and say so-and-so is sending up, and she'd send it. No, they didn't call in, they just send it up didn't they?

LL: Yeah.

BL: And so that was something that they changed.

LL: One thing you played so much when you were a little girl was hop-scotch.

BL: Oh, hop-scotch. I had to show my grandchildren how to play hop-scotch. They never heard of it, maybe you haven't either. You know, kind of like an airplane, two-1, two-1. I just about killed myself hopping. I got arthritis in my left knee, so I knew I couldn't hop on that, but also I'm carrying a lot more weight than I did as a youngster, but I showed them. And, they thought it was wonderful, simple little game like hop-scotch. See, they don't know these things, and they're missing out on so many things.

HB: Do you remember anything else about the businesses or anything in downtown, stuff like brewing companies or different professions or anything that...

BL: No.

LL: No. I notice she has Lyman Building. I don't know what the date was, but, of course, I knew all about it. I was told about it, so I didn't see it, but that was quite a big event here in town when it happened.

BL: See, I don't remember that.

LL: I don't think I...

HB: It was 1913 that it collapsed.

LL: See, I was only three years old then.

BL: One thing I do remember that has nothing to do with building, but it's a very vivid recollection of mine--we'd get on the streetcar down on Sixteenth Avenue and have to transfer downtown for a Marion streetcar, drive to the end of the line, and my grandfather would meet us with (depending

on the time of the year) in horse and buggy, or horse and sleigh and then we'd go in that two miles out of Marion to his--their home and then we'd have to watch the clock very carefully in order to make the (took about two hours to go by horse) to get back in time before the last streetcar would leave for Cedar Rapids so that again we could transfer coming home, and that was fun. Yeah, grandpa met us. There at the Hunter Airport. I remember the open cockpit airplanes, My dad took (I was the daring one of the family) I wanted to go in the airplane, and my father wanted to go in the airplane. My mother wouldn't come anywhere near it, and my sister was afraid, but my dad took me, I think as I look back on it, over my mother's objections, and we went around; we flew around the Cedar Rapids, just made a circle around Cedar Rapids. That was one of my big thrills in the open cockpit in the airplane.

LL: Do you remember when we flew on the three-motor Ford plane from Hunter's Airport around Cedar Rapids?

BL: No. I don't remember that.

LL: We were married.

BL: I don't remember that. I do remember as an adult flying in a small, four-seater plane with a friend who was just coming through Cedar Rapids, and I said, "Gee, I've never ridden in one of those little things. I'd love to," and he says, "Come on, I'll take you around." I asked him if he cared he said, "No, go ahead." And less than a week later, the man was killed in that plane. That was a horrible feeling--extra's newspapers, telephone operators.

END OF INTERVIEW

