

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Depression Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 763

MARY LANER

Interviewed

by

Daniel Flood

on

October 19, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: MARY LANER

INTERVIEWER: Daniel Flood

SUBJECT: school life, restaurant business, games, farm life,
family life

DATE: October 19, 1975

F: This is an interview with Mrs. Mary Morley Laner for the Youngstown State University Depression Project, by Dan Flood, at Mrs. Laner's home, on 7444 Southern Boulevard, on October 19, 1975 at 10:00 a.m.

Before we begin the actual interview, let me point out to you that Mary Laner has led a very active life having been a former waitress, singer, WAC [Women's Army Corps], and graduate of the Ohio School of Massage. She is currently teaching English to the seventh grade students at Poland Middle School. Having experienced so many different facets of life would rightly call for an interview on these grounds alone. Today we are asking Mary to recall specific experiences she had whether they be good or bad as she grew up during the Great Depression in the 1930's.

Mrs. Laner, why don't we begin by allowing you to give some very specific background information such as where you were born, when you were born, names of family members, where you lived, and the occupation your father had at the time of your birth.

L: I was born on May 9, 1921, in Columbus, Ohio. I was born at home not in a hospital. All four of us were born at home. This I think is a little unusual for our day, but mother didn't like hospitals and was frightened to death. So we were all delivered by a family doctor at home. I had two older brothers. My older brother's name was Willard Daniel; we called him Bill. He was a genius. He was six years older than I. My brother Paul, a year younger than Bill and five years older than me, was a non-academic type of person. My sister Julia was born six years after I was born, between five and six. Her name was Juliann. My brother Bill died two years ago on Thanksgiving, so there are

three of us left. My father died in 1943, and my mother is still living; she is seventy-nine and will be eighty in December. She lives in Florida. My sister and my brother live in Columbus. The family is fairly close together, maybe more so than we were when I was small. We do relate. I have a card here from my sister who is at the present time in London just on a visit.

My father was in the milk business when I was born. He was one of three owners of a small milk company in Columbus. He was until I was around two and a half at which time he sold his business and bought a restaurant. I grew up in the restaurant business. A psychologist told me later that my father was a very sick man, but he was huge, built like an angus bull, very strong, and very intelligent, but very opinionated. He was a sadist at home; he believed his money was his. We were afraid of him. I stayed away from him. He was a domineering and militant man. He had my mother cowed. Mother lived the life of a drudge under him. She was an unusual, very sensitive, and perceptive person. She stayed with him because she came from a home where she was orphaned very young and she didn't want to farm out her children to various relatives and make them live the way she had. It was really, in a way, a life of hatred at home.

F: You said your father was very possessive of his money and things like this. Was that due to the Depression itself, or was this even prior to the Depression?

L: It was even prior to the Depression. He gave my mother a minimal amount to keep the house running. Actually, it wasn't enough to make it go. With the rest of it, he had parties and girlfriends and bought lavish presents for them, this kind of thing .

F: Was this all with your mother realizing exactly what was going on?

L: Yes, mother knew what was going on, but there was nothing she could do about it. I believe it was a love-hate relationship anyhow. She hated those things, but fundamentally, she loved the man. I don't think she could have left him on those terms. It was crucifying us. He would come home from his business at 5:00, and we would have to be extremely quiet because he took a nap. He rarely had meals with us, and when he did, they were frightening occasions. I always had indigestion. He did bring home some supplies from the restaurant. He would bring home food from the restaurant to help out. I remember we were out of eggs and mother wouldn't let me go to the grocery store to buy eggs because she only had money for a half a dozen. She was so mortified because the grocer knew how big our family was and that half a dozen eggs was a ridiculous amount. She wouldn't let us buy it, and this was before the crash of 1929.

I really wasn't bothered by this lack of money, only anything

that would hurt my mother. I was very, very protective of her. When my sister was born, I hated her not because she was my sister . . . It was nice; she was blue-eyed and red-haired; everybody made a pet of her. She bit me when she was a tiny thing , and that was the beginning of a terrible relationship. It is only now beginning to become something bearable between the two of us. I kept trying and trying and trying and nothing ever came of it. She turned around spiteful. I wasn't very happy with that. My mother would tell me just to hold her, but then she would bite me. I couldn't really develop a fondness for her. My brothers were of an age where a six year old girl tagging after them was a pest, but a sweet, little, cuddly baby was fun.

F: You were right in between.

L: Yes. I was in between. I was the middle child, the island child. Things weren't truly happy in my childhood. I learned to be interested in all sorts of things and that interest, of course, has kept my life alive and happy in spite of everything. We were always moving. Mother put me in school when I was very young, at the age of four. That was fine for kindergarten.

F: Was that first grade?

L: No. That was kindergarten.

F: Kindergarten?

L: Yes. I was just barely four. I remember a few things. I remember dancing around the room and lying on the floor. I remember the song "Amaryllis" and a few things. I can remember some of those things from kindergarten, but not a whole lot. We lived at that time above the restaurant, upstairs over the restaurant. That winter I had pneumonia four times. It settled in my ears, and I remember a man coming into my father and mother's bedroom and lancing my ears that seemed to have some kind of abscess in them from the pneumonia.

F: The man you referred to was a doctor?

L: Yes, a doctor. He had a white coat that buttoned down the side. I was very impressed.

At that time there was a poem that my mother used to read to me every morning. It is the keynote of life, and she used to be very irritated because that was the one that I always asked for. It was about an old woman and a peddler. The old woman went to town to buy eggs, and on her way home she became so very tired. She lay down by the roadside and fell asleep. The peddler going by thought that he would play a trick on this old lady, so he cut her skirt off. She woke up and looked down and threw up her hands and said.

"Lock of mercy, can this be I?
It cannot be I,
but if it be
I've a little dog at home
and he'll know me.
If this be I
he will wag his little tail
and if this be not I
he will loudly bark and wail."

When she got home she looked so strange with her skirt cut off that he barked and barked and barked. This little old lady threw up her hands and said, "Lock of mercy, this cannot be I." There have been hundreds of times in my life where I could throw up my hands and say, "Lock of mercey, this cannot be I." I find myself in situations that are so foreign from anything that I could have possibly anticipated.

From there daddy was always in the restaurant business, and we had restaurants in various places. But he also, I think, was a Gypsy at heart. We moved from place to place to place. We went from that school to Mount Vernon School in Columbus, Ohio and from there to West Broad School in Columbus, Ohio. From there I was transferred to John Beryl School. I was only in the second grade at John Beryl School. We went to the Fifth Avenue School.

F: Now, was he still in the restaurant business the entire time?

L: Oh, yes.

F: Why exactly did he move, just get up and move?

L: I think he was just a Gypsy at heart. Mother had a nervous breakdown after the move from the place where the Depression actually happened in 1929. We lived in Columbus in an area called the Hilltop on South Eureka Avenue, and I was going to John Beryl School. That was in 1929. My father insisted that she was having some kind of an affair with a gentleman across the street. Mr. Cobble was one that my poor, browbeaten mother just highly respected. He was an eminent citizen and a good family man and father and all that sort of thing. My father had it in his mind. Well, he wasn't home enough to know. He just was so jealous, unreasonably so. That is why he said we moved from there. We bought a restaurant by what is now Port Columbus called The Airport Inn. We lived in the many, many rooms of the inn, part of this huge, rambling place. We were there at the time the great Ohio State Penitentiary burned. We also were there at the time when they opened Port Columbus as the first of the national length of airport chains. They had all sorts of dignitaries come out to Port Columbus. Amelia Earhart was there. The man with the patch over his eye who went down to Alaska with Will Rogers was there. Lindbergh was there. Eddie Rickenbacker was there. Eddie Rickenbacker

is from Columbus. The mayor of New York was there. I don't really remember, but I think that it was Jimmy Walker. I'm not sure.

F: I think Jimmy Walker was there during the Depression years. I can remember seeing the show on television.

L: They all had come by train, and a special spur of that train came off there. We were within walking distance up there. So I was over there that day.

F: What was Lindbergh like, do you remember?

L: Just tall and gaunt.

F: I have read so much about Lindbergh. It is just unbelievable. He is like a hero in his time. People came from all around. Is that true?

L: Oh, yes, he was. He was a hero in his time.

Columbus was relatively provincial at that time because it was sleepy, slow, even though it was large. It was a political town. It was the capital of the state and not much else. These people came. My most vivid impressions were walking around the airstrip itself. It was nothing but meadow, and I came across a nest of killdeer right on the airstrip. It was nothing but a huge field. It was one I used to play in.

F: Now, what year was this?

L: This would be 1929.

F: Was there much air traffic at that time?

L: Oh, no. I do remember mother crying, and I asked her what was wrong. The men from the airport came in and ate at our restaurant. This one man was missing, and she asked where he was. They said that his chute hadn't opened. Mother cried and cried and cried, and she already was depressed. Shortly after that she had a nervous breakdown. She was enclosed in one of the wings in the inn upstairs, and we weren't allowed to see her. That was a very traumatic period for me. I was very alone because I feared my father and my brothers hated me and I didn't like my sister. I really was.

F: You said before that you were very protective of your mother. Was that due to, let's say, her reading the poem to you and things like that at home?

L: I beg your pardon?

F: Remember the poem that you discussed earlier?

L: Yes.

F: Was this because of the relationship that she developed at night like a bedtime story or something like that?

L: No. The bedtime stories were about four. After my sister came, there wasn't that type of a relationship.

F: It fell off?

L: Oh, yes. It had to. My mother was a drudge. She had to do too much, and we didn't have conveniences as we have now. She wasn't a strong woman. She wasn't robust as I am. I inherited my father's physique, not her's. She, to this day, is slender and tall, but definitely not a strong person. In her youth, as a matter of fact, she survived some of the most dreaded diseases in history. That she is alive today can only attest to the fact that she is what she calls good stock because they didn't have medication at the time to cure her. She had scarlet fever as a child, and she is now eighty. She had tuberculosis. I think she had the measles and whooping cough at the same time. All of her hair came out. She was dreadfully ill. She has had so many really difficult things. As I say, the fact that she is alive today is only because she is so robust, basically, in the genes. If she passes them along to people, we may all grow to be ninety. I hope I have some of hers instead of my father's. Dad's didn't go so well.

At the Airport Inn I used to wander in the fields. I learned to love all of the things that grow, and I learned a lot about them just by observing them. I didn't know their names or anything like that, but I was in the third grade at the time. I was eight. We moved away from there on my ninth birthday, and we went to a farm near Centerburg, Ohio.

F: So that would have been right around 1930?

L: Yes.

F: Did you feel the effects of the Depression already setting in as far as the restaurant business was concerned? Was it due to the fact that you had the restaurant in the airport?

L: The initial restaurant that my father had was at the Pennsylvania Railroad yards on St. Claire Avenue in Columbus on the viaduct, and he still had that one.

F: Who were the people who usually came to you? Who frequented the restaurant itself? Were they always people of high stature?

L: Which restaurant?

F: Well, let's say in Columbus.

- L: The one that my father had was a railroad restaurant. It was open twenty-four hours a day. As a matter of fact, when we sold it, we couldn't find the key. It had never been closed. It was on the railroad viaduct in necessarily a pretty tacky part of town. Across the other side of the viaduct was a place we called "Little Italy." It was a huge Italian settlement in Columbus. Over where we were, our landlord was a Mafia member, a gentleman who ran the numbers racket. When my brother Bill died, his daughters came up to me. They are still connected with the Mafia running dope and prostitution and the numbers and all of this kind of thing. They have been in jail hundreds of times. That family loved us very dearly. I remember the gentleman who rented the building to us. His name was Bolesarro. It is really an infamous name in Columbus. It was in the news about three or four years ago where they had eight policemen under their pay helping them run the dope and all that sort of thing. My father had an awful lot of friends like that and then bootlegging and all of that sort of thing. I remember making beer and bottling that.
- F: In the basement of the restaurant?
- L: No, at home. I remember my father's poker party sitting around. As a matter of fact, my sister would toddle from person to person saying, "Some more soap," because of the suds on the beer. She was winged with a beer bottle.
- F: I imagine you could have met a lot of different people in the restaurant business?
- L: Yes. Most of our customers were railroaders. During the Depression years, the railroad was in really bad trouble, and they laid off railroaders, and they were starving. They were really in terrible trouble. I remember they would bring in jewelry and this kind of thing to give it to my father to keep. He was running a kind of little hock shop. At the age of seven, I got one of those diamond rings. I have a diamond broach now with the diamonds taken from a platinum stickpin that mother gave me. She passed out all of her diamonds to all of the kids. Then she missed them so I got her a pearl from the Orient and had a ring made of it for her. She missed her diamonds after she had given them out to everybody.
- F: Was this hock shop more or less for payment of food or anything?
- L: No. These men were hard-up. They gave my father a hard-luck story, and he would give them something. They would in turn leave a little something with him so that in case they couldn't repay him, he wouldn't be out of money. An awful lot of what we had went that way because he was big-hearted with other people, but not with his family, no. He was such a "good Joe" in later years then when his mind went. We had him probated according to the railroaders. We just railroaded him. Three doctors and

three judges, tried and true, found him to be mentally incompetent.

F: This is what year?

L: This was later on in 1938 or 1939.

F: Then he died in 1943?

L: Yes, in the hospital.

F: During the 1930's there must have been entirely different morals in the family itself. Like I can remember in "Gone With the Wind" Clark Gable said, "Damn," and I think that they were going to try to bar this from the screen.

L: Well, my father always bragged that he spoke three languages fluently: profane, obscene, and indecent. He did. There is absolutely nothing that anyone could ever shock me with ever because I have heard it all. But he also was very proud that my mother was a lady. My mother, of course, was not that sort of person. I'm quite sure that he always respected and was proud of the fact that his wife was a lady although he went with some people who weren't. This is it. He kept his life in two separate pieces. One he lived, and then one he came home and felt the lord and master of . . .

F: Was there very much religion in the home itself?

L: My mother insisted that we at least go to church until we were old enough to know what it was and to make a choice of whether or not we were going to go. I always went.

F: How far away were the churches from your home?

L: Wherever we moved, and we moved so frequently, there was always someplace I could walk to. I went to many, many churches. Basically, our family was Methodist, and the church that we went to as very tiny children was Methodist. I have gone to Presbyterian, Lutheran, Church of Christ, and Church of God, just about anything you can mention. Wherever we moved, I found out where the church was that I could go to and feel happy in and I went.

F: Do you think there were more going towards religion in the 1930's, during the Depression, because of the hard times, that people had to find an answer in somebody? A lot of people felt that somebody would be God. Do you think that it was a drop-off of religion?

L: I don't think that I was aware really of what grown-ups felt at that time. I was so isolated, it seemed, from everything. I was isolated from my own family. I didn't feel that I belonged to another. I really wasn't close as such. It was only through

my own observations, and, of course, it took me a little age to make those observations to see some of the things that you are talking about.

F: I can imagine.

L: I remember going to one that was so strange that I told mother about it. She told me that we would go see, and mother got all dressed up and came to church with me. It was something else. They screamed and shouted and rolled on the floor and babbled things. She called them the holy rollers.

F: Yes, that is a term that a lot of people use even today.

L: That one [church] was the one that was closest to home. See, I was trying them all out, and when I came to this one and went home to describe what I had seen . . . I always came home my whole life--I still do--and describe to mother what I had seen and what I had done. This was very important for my mother, and it is a very important part of our relationship. On the other hand, I have always been my mother's shoulder. When she has got gripes, I am the one who receives them. This is a part of our relationship. I wouldn't say that I am closest to my mother or that she loves me most. I am sure she doesn't, but that isn't the way it was. I am her shoulder, and that is the role that I played in the family, just mother's shoulder, not anybody else's.

F: Let's go back to the Depression itself. You were restricted to chores and meals. What was a typical day like as far as the meals that you received and the chores that you had to do?

L: You will have to tell me what year.

F: Let's say, around age ten or twelve. That would be around 1930 or 1932.

L: At age ten we were still living on the farm where we moved from the Airport Inn. Dad sold the Airport Inn and sold his restaurant in Columbus on the viaduct, the railroad restaurant. We went out to the farm. For a very short time, he started to farm the farm. We had 120 acres halfway between Centerburg, Ohio and Lot. That is still remote as can be. We had no electricity. We did not have roads in, but mud. It was around two and a half miles to school where we walked. For a typical day, you will have to tell me whether it is summer or winter, because boy, they certainly varied.

F: How about summer itself?

L: Alright, summer itself. We had a farm hand. When we got up in the morning, he had already been up for hours. He would have had a cup of coffee from our wood stove. He had seen to the stock.

He had milked the cows. We had four horses: Three were his, a match team, a beautiful dapple grey, and we had a little carriage horse of our own. He had seen to the stock, and he has also seen to the chickens. At that time we had a pig or two or my pet lamb, Ossie. He came in for breakfast about the time that we got up. We used to have a contest to see who could observe the most about his breakfast because as a gaunt, old, man, he ate more than any human being I had ever seen in my life. He had fried potatoes, about four, ham and eggs, numerous cups of coffee. We never got the coffee straightened out. We counted one morning twenty-eight of my mother's plate-sized pancakes, and we lost count. He kept to himself. He had a little wing of the farmhouse to himself. He ate with the family. It was just kind of fabulous for us to watch this old man. He was a family retainer. He had been with an aunt of mine who married and died, and there was no place for him to live. So we accepted the responsibility of seeing to it that old Bill was taken care of. When we sold the farm . . .

F: What year was that?

L: We were there for two years. We moved there on my ninth birthday so that would have been 1930, and we moved away two years later. So it must have been late in 1931 probably.

F: Now, at that time, what were the effects of the Depression on the farm itself? You probably ate very well.

L: We did. By that time, my father had to take his restaurant back and was commuting back and forth to Columbus because the man couldn't continue paying for it. So dad had to continue running it. He could make it go. The other man couldn't. The effects of the Depression were every place, but we didn't see it because we were so isolated, except for at school where I saw some.

F: Not on the farm?

L: Yes. The farm was completely isolated from the rest of the world. I went to school with some children by the name of Hall. I remember Alita and Orlando. They were in my grade, and Orlando would wear overalls with a bib on them.

F: Farming jeans themselves.

L: Yes, that is what they were. He wore those and no shoes until it got very cold. If Orlando got up against a patch of barbed wire fence and got a hole in his jeans, you could see Orlando through those jeans. He had absolutely nothing on but those jeans. I remember seeing their lunches. They had homemade bread with just pieces of green pepper in it for sandwiches, and that was their lunch.

F: How long was the school day at the time, do you remember?

- L: No. We had to walk around two and a half miles there, and we always made it. It was a one-room school, and it had twenty-eight pupils and eight grades. The first year my brother Paul was in the seventh and eighth grade there. I was in the fourth and fifth in that particular school. We had one teacher.
- F: One teacher for all eight grades then?
- L: Yes, for all eight grades. We were just in one room that had a potbelly stove in the middle and a cloak room in the front and a coal house out to the side that held coal for the potbelly stove. We were called upon to go to the bench up in front, and the teacher heard the lessons, say, of the fifth grade. Then we went back to our seats, and she would call the sixth grade. Then they came up.
- F: She gave you work to do as you went back to your seats?
- L: Oh, yes, yes. We were working. She heard our recitations and everything, and we went back to our seats. It must have been a fabulous job. The first year our teacher was a widow with two children. I think she was a divorcee. She was an older woman, and she lived as they did a hundred years before with the various members who had children in school.
- F: She boarded from house to house?
- L: Yes. She boarded with them. She was extremely prejudiced, of course, in favor of her own children in the class, and we hated her. She was a prunish, old-maidish kind of person, and we just didn't like her. The next year we got a young lady, Lucille Wigton. She lived nearby with her family. She had just graduated from normal school. That is only about one or two years of preparation for teaching. She was adorable; we loved to work for her; she was a wonderful person. I remember one cold, cold winter day when it was just as bright and snappish out as it could be. She had us all wrap up warmly in our clothes, and we went over to the creek which had frozen over and skated all afternoon. We had a great time.
- F: What were some of the disciplines they used in the schools at that time, just general, not by any specific teachers? Can you remember any discipline techniques?
- L: I remember when my mother had the breakdown; that, as I said, was a very traumatic experience. Something mentally was going wrong with me at that time. I remember stealing somebody's pencil. I didn't need a pencil. I don't know why I did it. It was one of those things. I was just so upset. They sent me to the principal's office. It was such a traumatic experience that I don't even know what he said to me. This was in the third grade.
- F: You were just shocked that you were there in front of him?

L: Oh, I was there. I was so very frightened.

F: That goes back to that poem that you stated before.

L: Of course, of course. Everything does. I don't know what happened then. I truly don't remember any discipline being required. The children knew what they were in school for, and they behaved accordingly.

F: But the parents at that time during the Depression years were behind the teachers all the way?

L: One hundred percent, and if we had to be disciplined at school, we knew we had to be disciplined at home. Then we would be disciplined more severely at home than we were in school.

F: So there was no protest movement by any parents that said that you could do only so much with their kids and then they step in?

L: That was unheard of, just unheard of.

F: Why do you think that no one really pressed the teachers at that time as some people do today as far as discipline techniques? Was it because of the education or was it just the fact that they thought education was a gift?

L: Well, for one thing, I thought that teachers were respected more because not that many people were that educated. Very rarely were people college graduates. Another thing was that the teachers also had more disciplines from other areas. For instance, they couldn't be seen smoking in public. They couldn't be seen drinking in public. Most women teachers couldn't be seen with a man in public. There were many restrictions.

F: Do you remember any other restrictions on teachers? You were talking about cigarette smoking and things like this, anything in public?

L: This, of course, varied from community to community. But this was very rural, and therefore, a little more [strict] than other places; the requirements of someone's behavior might be slightly more prestiged than in other more sophisticated areas. The economy at the time was so difficult as I had told you about the Hall children, that Miss Wigton decided that she would institute a school lunch program.

F: This was during the 1930's?

L: Yes. Miss Wigton did it herself because she saw, like I did, that the Hall's weren't getting enough to eat. All of our mothers canned, and we had vast stores of canned material. She asked us to bring in just a can of anything that mother had too much of. We all brought in our cans, and her father butchered

and she would bring in a knucklebone. She put it in a huge pot on the potbelly stove, and she dumped in the cans.

F: Everybody could have soup?

L: Yes, indeed. She dumped in the cans of things, and she made her own ingredients go. By noon we had hot soup for everybody. This way, of course, the Hall's could have all that they needed and not feel beholden because pride, of course, was a very big part of that period.

F: Yes, I can imagine. She must have realized the fact that nourishment and education go hand in hand.

L: She did. Of course, she did. But it was good soup, and it was a great warming idea. I will tell you, when you've warmed by a potbelly stove in the middle, you cook on one side and you freeze on the other depending on where your seat was. We really needed it for health. Nobody got sick. I never missed a day of school, and I had to walk two and a half miles. Many times I had to break snow to my chin. I was a tall girl too. That trip to school was really rough going. It was mud ruts that were frozen that were hard on your feet. It wasn't even walking or anything like that. It was breaking snow all of the way because nobody came in and out of the road that we were on; they couldn't without a sleigh or a sledge. Miss Wigton made at least my fifth grade in school very happy. I can't tell you how good or bad a schoolteacher she was because I can't really recollect a great deal there. Now that problem I told you about stealing the pencil occurred in the third grade, and I since found that I received a mental block on math because we were studying the timestables at the time as a result from this.

F: Really?

L: Yes. I really didn't progress in math from that point on. I was a disappointment to my teachers in the math area. My genius brother who mentally and academically I resembled a great deal, I didn't have his genius but he and I were similar in our learning structures. He was greatest in math. He was a prodigy in math. But I had this trauma, and I have no idea. I assimilated enough that I could handle a cash register easily enough and change and all of this sort of thing quite good, along with my household accounts and dealing with money and this sort of thing. But I never did catch up with the math that I lost. I almost have a blank spot there in my educated processes. I know later on when I was in business arithmetic, having to do with my commercial courses, I barely squeezed through in business arithmetic mainly because I just had such an aversion to numbers. I just hated anything to do with numbers. I still have a little problem dealing with numbers per se. I have got some real tricky things that I do with my grades when I make grades at school. I do practically every bit of it in my head. I can't really see why anybody would

bother with an adding machine. I still have this trauma on the math thing. I developed my own math. I had to in a practical sense.

F: A practical way really?

L: Yes.

F: What about as far as pranks being played at school during the 1930's? Can you remember any of those?

L: Pranks?

F: I know most of the kids were probably sitting straight up and things like this, but I'm sure there were times when kids . . .

L: I'll tell you, it was a very different kind of age, maybe one that you don't realize. We were taught especially in this particular school because we were all such different ages. We had from first graders to eighth graders and just twenty-six to twenty-eight pupils, and we were taught to care for the small ones.

F: Do you have an example?

L: When we had recess and at lunchtime when we played "one-a-cat," we played a full game.

F: What is "one-a-cat?"

L: "One-a-cat" is a baseball game where everybody gets on the field and you choose half sides and sides and sides, and the older boys choose half and half, and they went down and everybody was on a team, first graders and up. Everybody is on a team. Everybody has a position to play on that team. When it comes to playing then we have a batter and a pitcher. When the batter hits the bat and starts to run, everybody advances a position.

F: Do you mean advances a base like in baseball itself?

L: No. He advances a position. The pitcher becomes the catcher. Then the next catcher comes to bat.

F: This was just a way of practicing for baseball?

L: This was our game. We played, and everybody advanced his position so that the first graders got to be the pitcher. They got to be the catcher; they got to be the batter; they got to be the first baseman, the second baseman, the third baseman; they got every position.

F: I see. It is just rotation of the players themselves.

- L: Just rotation of the players themselves. It was so wonderful. The little kids could hardly hold the bat. It was a regulation bat. Then we helped them.
- F: Was this softball, do you remember, or was it hardball?
- L: It was softball.
- F: Softball, I guess, became of great age during the 1930's and 1940's
- L: The eighth graders didn't mind helping the first graders in the game. This isn't the way that they do it now. They wouldn't be seen dead playing with first graders, but here it was a relationship with all ages of kids. It was with tenderness and love.
- F: So do you think that the one-room school in this respect is far better than the schools we have today that are segregated by grade?
- L: If you took the child of today and put him in a one-room school, he would be miserable because he wouldn't have sufficient members of his peer group to make him happy. I don't think that we can regress. I don't think that we can go back to that unless we develop a whole new society. Now maybe some of those earth children up in the hills with their little communities could do this, but I don't think that the people of today could. They couldn't adjust to it. Another game that we played was "Andy Over the Schoolhouse." God knows why. Again we chose sides, and everybody was on a team. Every team had its share of every grade. We had the ball and we threw it over the schoolhouse, just a little one-room structure. The team on the other side of the schoolhouse caught it and tried to get it over to the other side without being stopped.
- F: Would you knock them down?
- L: Oh, yes indeed. It wasn't so much knock them down, it was kind of just resist. I don't remember anyone ever being hurt, no, not ever. It was just stop them. It was a tackle kind of thing. They were games of that type that we played, and they were healthy things and games that we could do, which was very little. There were two outhouses behind the school and there was a pump in front. It was at a place called Five Corners. It was on a little triangular island like where two roads intersected, and there were three more that came into it from other places. So this little schoolhouse was on just this little plot of land. As it widened behind, that was our play yard in the back with the outhouses.
- F: There must have been some fascinating times with those games.
- L: Yes, there were.

F: This was all during a recess period?

L: A recess of lunch period. We had an extended lunch period enough to play a game of whatever it was we were playing. The teacher often played with us.

F: That is good. Now let's go on to the worst teacher that you ever had. Do you remember anyone like that, and why you felt that way towards that person?

L: Well, it was the teacher before Miss Wigton. I don't remember her name. She was so unreasonably stern. I know that she was unhappy. I know that she had been divorced and and he been uprooted from her own cultural background and shoved into this rural atmosphere. It was the only job she could get. It was the only way she could support herself and her children. I mean, I know that today. She must have been very bitter because, of course, her personal unhappiness.

F: There was not a human relationship between the kids and the teacher.

L: No. She made a miserable teacher.

F: Looking back on life during the 1930's especially, probably your favorite teacher was the one who was most human?

L: Oh, of course. Miss Wigton was trying to give us something because she knew that for most of the students . . . But not for me because I had a richness in my own mother who was a paragon in her time. She hadn't even a high school education, but she had such a progressive outlook on things. Whenever anything happened that was noteworthy, she would tell me to listen carefully and watch carefully because I would probably want to tell my grandchildren this. I have milestones in my life that my mother said that to me. I really did look carefully and watch carefully, and I don't have any grandchildren. There are moments of history that happened that stopped time for me for just a moment. I paid such careful attention to history in the making, and I was there. I was in it.

F: Were any of these current events discussed in the classroom? Did they talk about the Depression period? Did they talk about the stock market crash?

L: Not that I ever remember. Not ever.

F: It was more or less stick-to-the-book type of thing and leave the current events alone outside of the classroom?

L: Yes, it was. I don't remember. I think in high school in my senior year in 1939 the principal insisted upon teaching the civics class. I think he felt that way, but he was unable. He was a very wonderful person, but he was so reserved, let's say, that

he couldn't open up with us. He felt his political consciousness so severely that he insisted on teaching civics. This was a senior requirement in high school. I don't see that he did a better job than anybody else. I merely knew that it was very important to him. It wasn't to me. The teaching methods of getting these things across . . .

F: Were strictly lecture?

L: Well, I remember an English teacher who was gifted in eleventh and twelfth grades. He might have enacted "Macbeth," you might say, and he would have us write imaginative things rather than just write what you did on your summer vacation bit.

F: The first day at school.

L: He wasn't like that. He was gifted. As a matter of fact, I think he is rather influential right now in the Columbus school system. This was when he just got out of college, and he was great in English for those two years.

F: That was the doing type of learning that you would actually be involved in rather than just sit back and be a passover.

L: That's right. I was thinking of the things that you do in geography, having elections and the political things and everything. I don't remember having a political consciousness until, oh heavens, I was thirty years old. I really don't.

F: That would have been 1950, right?

L: Yes. I remember when I turned twenty-one that a neighbor came over and asked my mother if he could take me to vote.

F: What? When you were twenty-one that would have been 1942. Was this your first actual vote that you cast then?

L: Well, yes. But the thing was that I didn't know what I was voting for. I voted for what he said. He had something that he was pushing through, you know?

F: You didn't vote in 1940 then did you? Do you remember if you voted in 1940? That would have made you about nineteen years old.

L: No. I couldn't have voted in 1940. I couldn't vote until I was twenty-one.

F: As far as the political consciousness, you didn't have it until you became of age to vote.

L: I really didn't care. I didn't have any reason to.

F: Well, you weren't prepped in it. That's probably why.

- L: That is it, I wasn't. I don't remember anyone who was. This is why I think that people in my age group were so terribly against the eighteen year old vote. It is because we ourselves knew that we were in no way prepared to carry on the business of a country at the age of eighteen.
- F: Right. Today you would have to consider.
- L: Well, today I think the kids are, but I think the maturity isn't sufficient. I think that they are swayed so by outside influences. But I don't really believe that their own choices could be of their own mind. I think that it is how they are swayed politically rather than how they believe politically. I don't think that they are ready for a belief. Frankly, the eighteen year old vote frightens me a little bit. There are a lot of things that frighten me, but that is just one of them.
- F: Well, then as far as FDR, do you remember anything at all about him?
- L: I remember a great deal about FDR because I remember how everyone that I knew either republican or democrat revered the man. Things were in such a terrible condition that they learned their faith on his ability to do something about it. It was almost unbelievable how the people of the country believed that FDR was going to do something great for them and that was going to bring them out of this. They really believed this. The love, just the big waves of love whenever his name was mentioned . . . He was probably the most revered, and I can't say respected; it has to be love because things couldn't be worse, and they really thought that this was the man who was going to be their saviour.
- F: Do you think that his "Fireside Chats" had a lot to do with that? How about his being handicapped?
- L: I think his "Fireside Chats" were brought on because of the way people thought about him rather than the other way around. I really do. I think that he gave people this opportunity to see him, to hear him, to be with him because he wanted to keep this charisma going as great as it was. It worked for a long time.
- F: Did you hear any mention about communism because of the welfare state that he was moving towards, this way of life?
- L: No. People needed the help so badly that I don't think I ever remember that word communist. The word communist was almost equivalent to dope fiend. I mean these were just horrible things that hit the pit of your stomach, you know? They were so revolting that you just didn't want to think about that. You put your head in the sand.

- F: Do you remember this being discussed in school about communism?
- L: No.
- F: Probably not.
- L: I don't remember communism, but I remember hunger and problems. You know, on the farm when daddy had to take the restaurant back, we grew truck, that is, we grew the vegetables.
- F: Truck farmers.
- L: Right. We had 120 acres, and we farmed most of it. But around the house we had eight to ten acres that we put into truck garden to keep the restaurant going. We used the produce for the restaurant, but the years of 1930 and 1931 were bumper crop years. Nobody knows why. I guess in times of Great Depression this does happen. There is a God and he provides, and these were bumper crop years. Well, our truck garden overproduced so that we had more truck than we could can, that we could use in any way. I remember when dad had everything that we could use taken care of, he would take gunnysacks full and bushels full of produce in his car when he commuted to town, as much as he could. He would just dump them on street corners, bushels of tomatoes and gunnysacks full of melons and things like that. He would just dump them on street corners in the poor sections where people were hungry.
- F: That goes back to the idea of your dad being a nice guy to anyone else.
- L: Well , yes. As I say, I had been told that he had to be terribly ill. He had to have had a great personality development weakness that I'm sorry I can't forgive even so, but a certain amount of sympathy can be given there. He had his problems. I do remember that everything he could carry in the car when he left to go to Columbus to the restaurant, it was as loaded as it could be with all kinds of produce every single day he came out. There was just such great need, and ours was just going to waste. We were so remote. We had no way of taking it anyplace.
- F: Do you remember going with your dad at all? Were you left at home most of the time?
- L: Well, mother and I maybe would go with him like on Saturdays or something like that if I needed shoes or something. That was one of the things my father used to do. When I got new shoes, he insisted upon looking over my shoes. They had to be constructed well; he had to see them on my feet; they had to fit properly. He was very, very funny. As a result as heavy as I am and eveything, I have reasonably high arches. My feet are in grand condition; they never hurt. He was real fussy. The thing that I hated and really was so hateful to me, after he would look it

all over, he would spit on them, a big gob of spit.

F: Why?

L: He said that they weren't new any more and that I could then wear them.

F: Very rational thinking.

L: Oh, I hated it, my beautiful new shoes. I never had a pair of new shoes. They had always been spit on.

F: Let's get into holidays. This I would be most interested in especially like with Halloween today and the fact that they might bar it. Do you remember Halloween and Easter and Christmas and different things that were taking place during these times?

L: Well, they did do interesting things at Halloween. We never really figured out exactly how. It was in the rural area where it was a great time for pranks. If someone hadn't pulled up all of his turnips, they would pull all of his turnips and dump them on the front porch. They put outhouses in all kinds of peculiar places. They barricaded roads with corn shucks. Well, you know, they always shucked corn then. They barricaded the roads with corn shucks, pumpkins, and outhouses, and those were major highways. They would put people's buggies up on top of church steeples. I don't know how they did it. They must have used some kind of block and pulley that they used for the hay mows. Everybody had a block and pulley in the hay mow. They did do things like that. Now when we lived in town, when I was thirteen or fourteen, I lived in a neighborhood where there were quite a few children, and we went in great flocks. We did everything together. We played together all the time, the whole neighborhood. We would dress up in outlandish getups, but we never bought anything. We always made whatever we had. We went in these getups and we trick-or-treated all around. We had an ex-senator next door to us who had a man servant, you know. He would dress in chauffeur's livery when he drove him and this kind of business. Well, we were standing outside the gate trying to decide whether or not we dare invade his citadel because he was a no no kind of person. He was just too much for us to talk to. We finally decided that we would go and see about trick-or-treat, and we knocked on the door. His man opened the door, and he took us into a room. He had prepared a feast, a punch bowl, pop, popcorn, potato chips, candy, just everything. I mean it was an unbelievable room. Taffy apples, anything you can think of that anyone could have was full of all of that food for just us kids in the neighborhood. The butler told us that he would have died if we wouldn't have gone. But we didn't even see him because he was sitting in his study. It was the butler who took us in there and took us out. He told me that because he knew that I lived next door. He knew I was the leader of this gang, this crew. We had argued a long time about whether or not we

were going to go in.

F: I can imagine. You always get some people like that.

L: So we decided that we would.

F: What was passed out, candy?

L: And apples. Maybe a few pennies. That was something else. We put that in a big common kitty and went down to get penny candy for it. It usually was just a few cents in change. But actually there was a trick-or-treat night and a pennies night.

F: Two nights?

L: There were two nights. On the trick-or-treat, you got apples and popcorn, and on pennies night, you would get pennies. But we didn't get anything like individual pennies. We got individual apples, but we didn't get individual pennies. The group would get what they could give us.

F: Even during the Depression when the people were poor, they were still going around trick-or-treating, and the other people almost felt it was necessary to give?

L: I don't ever remember doing anything but a little bit of soap. I think the worst thing that I ever did was when I was a young lady. I shouldn't have. My conscious is very cloudy in this respect. I had a lipstick that I didn't like and I wrote "Wilkie" on a car that had a Roosevelt sticker on it.

F: That was political consciousness.

L: Well, I didn't really know anything about either one except that they were for Roosevelt so I put Wilkie on. I mean that this was a trick, you know?

F: What about Christmas?

L: I think I learned to believe as I believed during the Depression that you don't buy Christmas and that Christmas is that spirit of giving inside yourself rather than a big Madison Avenue hassle. We learned to make what we used for Christmas. We learned to string cranberries for reeves for the tree and popcorn and trim it. Any other trimmings were like heirlooms that we used around the tree. We had very little in the way of toys. What we got for Christmas were clothings that we had to have anyway

F: Necessities.

L: Every year I begged for books, and I never got books. Instead I got a slip which was something that I had to have, and they were practical things in our home at least. Then I learned to

make things of my own and for things, and to this day . . . I'll have to show you some of the things I make. I crochet little, beaded wreaths, and one year I made them for every teacher in school, for every lady teacher in the school. They take hours, but I made them. I started in October to make something. I make candies; I make cookies, nut breads, fruit cakes, all kinds of things like this for my more modern friends who don't know the delights of old-fashioned Christmas cooking. My nieces and nephews had mothers that could cook. For Christmas they always got a package of old-fashioned Christmas goodies or crocheted mittens or things that I could make. Christmas was giving of myself rather than of things I could buy. It may have been disappointing, but as they got older, these are the things that they remember about Christmas.

F: I believe so. I really do. That is the type of Christmas it should be anyhow.

L: Now, we really celebrate Christmas because all during the year if we need something, we get it when we need it. If we want something, we get it when we want it when it is available. Christmas to us is a spirit in the heart that goes all year. We don't make a big to-do of Christmas at all.

F: The one day of the year.

L: No, not one day. We are really very, very old-fashioned about that. I don't decorate because the last tree I bought, I had it in a cold closet in here waiting to decorate it, because traditionally we never decorated until the night before Christmas. That was when we put up the tree on Christmas Eve. Santa Claus brought it when I was a child, so we woke up on Christmas morning and it was there. It hadn't been there before. I had it in the closet, and my cat chewed on it every time I opened the closet door. This is poisonous to cats, so I just threw it out and never trimmed it. Since they go every place, just every place, I don't have Christmas decorations up. They eat tinsel. In fondness for my cats, we just don't do those things, but Christmas is in our hearts. That is where it belongs anyway. It doesn't need these things.

At home when we were children, mother always made us goodies at Christmas and Easter. She put them in four, antique, soup plates on Christmas and Easter, and they were always filled with Christmas goodies or Easter goodies. They were our share of whatever was Christmas in the house. We had popcorn balls which we had to help make. Mother made fondant about three or four weeks before Christmas and set it by to age. Shortly before Christmas, we each were given a plate with a package of fondant in it. We had to scrub our hands and nails very carefully, and mama had to inspect them very carefully.

F: What is fondant?

L: It is a kind of candy. Those little, white mint patties are fondant. We had a bowl of fondant, and each one of us would have a different flavor. I would have like peppermint, and Julia would have orange, and Paul would have cloves, and Bill would have anise and we would have a different color to go with each one. We would have to warm it in our hands until it got soft. We would work in the flavoring and the coloring until it was all mixed well and everything. Mother would take some of them and make like little chocolate drops. She would dip them into chocolate, and we had chocolate fondant there. Then some of them we made into flat patties and put a nut in the middle. Some of them we put into little rolls and little dates.

F: Just a variety of different things.

L: Yes, different things like that we would do with fondant. Well, that was part of our homemade Christmas. We always had a box of chocolates for the family. In this dish we had assorted nuts to crack, and we had an apple, an orange, a popcorn ball, and our share of chocolates. That was our Christmas gift also. That was a part, and was always on the sideboard.

At Easter we had a little nest of paper if mama could have it. If not, it was enough. We had our Easter eggs and our jelly beans and maybe a little chick in each of them. Then we would color eggs. That was our Easter. When my brothers were old and married, they came home and were really disappointed to find that their dishes weren't on the sideboard.

F: I can imagine. Let's go on to a few historical events. See if you can remember any of these. Anything about the bread lines or soup lines that you care to relate?

L: Only what my father told me about them as they were because I didn't see them first time at firsthand. We were very fortunate in that we did have the business that dad was able to keep alive during this period. We never had anything that you might call plenty, but we never hungered as many of the people I know did. I was in the service with this girl. She was telling about the one, full winter that she and her brothers and sisters and father and mother and her two grandparents lived in this cold house with no heat, and they had a hundred pound sack of navy beans. That was all that they had without any supplements for food that winter.

F: Hard times.

L: That is hard times. Even with a hundred pounds, they had to go hungry sometime because that doesn't go for a family very long.

F: Right. They just didn't look forward to beans every day, and

that was it.

L: It was just being able to hold your life together and no more. We and the kids I went to school with just didn't have. We were able to make our own fun to have our own times. I know when I moved into town I was twelve. We were in this neighborhood of many, many children. There were four across the street, two next door, and assorted extras here and there. We were always together as a unit, as a group. We did things together; we had fun. After the war, I was in the bank in Columbus. I went in to cash in some war bonds.

F: This is World War II you are talking about?

L: After World War II, yes. I was in there and when I went down to cash in the bond to the young man behind the counter, I gave my identity and identification of all kinds; he asked me if I was the Mary Morley who used to live on Grandville Street. I told him that I was, but that I didn't remember him. He said that he moved in after I had left. I asked him how he new about me, and he told me that on summer evenings when they would sit on the steps the kids used to wish that Mary Morley was there because she would think of something to do. We were always full of activities and games. If it was nighttime, we played "cops and robbers" through the alleys. It was safe; it was really safe. Then we used trails of newspapers or marked off a trail with a piece of chalk through the alleys and who knows where through the yards and everything. The whole neighborhood would play. We would sit on the steps and play "twenty questions" and we would play games like that. We roller-skated in the streets together; we played tennis in the streets together. Our street was a little side street that was perfectly safe for us to do that. We played baseball in the streets together.

F: Is there anything else important that you would like to add?

L: I think perhaps the most important is that we were children longer. Up through the age of sixteen we were playing these games with the kids; we all were. I didn't become a young lady with too much dignity to do this until after that year. I can't see my children at twelve playing some of the games that we played.

F: I would like to thank you very much Mrs. Laner because you have certainly given us a wealth of information that was profitable about how it was to live during that unforgettable period which we call the Great Depression. Thank you again.

END OF INTERVIEW