

Elsie Lee
Narrator

Helen Thompson
Interviewer

April 11, 1985
Heritage Education Commission Oral History Project
Moorhead State University Recording Studio
Moorhead, Minnesota

HT: This is an interview with Elsie Lee, a homemaker living at 1311 Fourteenth Avenue South. Mrs. Lee has lived in this area since 1947. This interview was held at the Moorhead State University Recording Studio on April 11, 1985. The interviewer is Helen Thompson, representing the Heritage Education Commission.

Elsie, as a child, where did you live?

EL: I lived in Big Lake, Minnesota. A little town near Minneapolis.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: South of here.

HT: Ah, rather briefly, what was your mother's life like?

EL: [Sighs] Ah...I grew up on a farm, so my mother's life was a very busy one.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: Not only doing the homemaking, but also taking care of a big flock of chickens, and cleaning the chicken coop.

HT: [Chuckles]

EL: Hmmm...beside the other work. And sometimes milking the cows, and sometimes doing things like cutting seed potatoes in the spring.

HT: Oh, yes. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: At busy times.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And there was a big family of seven children...

HT: Oh, my.

EL: So she had a lot of homemaking to do.

HT: Oh, I should say so. Hmmm, can you think of anything that she yearned for, particularly?

EL: [Chuckles] I think my mother yearned for peace and quiet! [Laughs]

HT: [Laughs] That so?

EL: She was always saying, hmmm, you know, "Go outside or someplace and give me some peace and quiet."

HT: Yeah, that I could believe. Can you think of something that would surprise her if she should come back to visit you now?

EL: I think maybe what would surprise her most would be to see...ah, for instance, how much food we keep on hand. If she opened my...hmmm...I don't call it a pantry anymore, but my pantry supply cabinet kind of, and saw how much there was available to use in cooking. Or if she could open my refrigerator and see how much food we had.

HT: Yes.

EL: Because she always said, "It's nothing to cook, if you have plenty to start with."

HT: Right.

EL: Her problem was getting something to...

HT: To start with.

EL: ...to cook.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Can you describe a typical day in your home, as you remember it, as a child?

EL: Oh...as a...as a...do you...you mean a day for me now?

HT: Yes, a day for you. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: Ah, of course, most of the days I went to school. But if I took a Saturday when I was in high school, it was my job to clean the house upstairs and down.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And ah...because somehow that was my mother's day for going out and cleaning the chicken coop so...hmmm...she left that, the housecleaning, for me. And then in the afternoon...I was supposed to do all this in the morning...in the afternoon I baked a cake for the week.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And by evening I usually had to wash my hair and get ready for Sunday. And I remember Saturday night, too, was the night of the family...everyone taking a bath in the kitchen.

HT: Right. [Chuckles]

EL: While my mother cleaned the chicken, which smelled...when she was cleaning the chicken. [Laughing] And so I associate the smell of chicken...

HT: [Chuckles] Oh...yes!

EL: ...and chicken feathers with taking a bath in the tub in the kitchen.

HT: Taking a bath. Oh, my.

EL: [Chuckles] So that's a typical Saturday.

HT: Yeah. I had forgotten about some of those things. Could you share what one day of your life was like as a homemaker when you were first married?

EL: Hmmm. I don't know that my life was anything out of the...what the ordinary homemaker did. Hmmm...since I worked during the week, then my Saturdays really changed, because that would be the day I had to...ah...to do the grocery...work on grocery shopping. And it was the day I had to get out and do the errands.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: I did have help at home most of the time, so the work was kept up. The house was cleaned, and hmmm, I didn't have those things to do. But there are always so many things that a hired help person can't do that I had left. Especially those errands that you had to do on Saturday.

HT: Now when your children were small, you didn't work outside the home for a few years, did you?

EL: Ah, for seven years when they were very small.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm. Could you share a day?

EL: When I stayed home with them?

HT: When the kids were small, when you stayed home with the kids.

EL: Ah...I didn't particularly enjoy those days. Somehow I am not...hmmm...good at taking care of *little* children. [Sighs] And I remember...it's so hard to keep them entertained and give them enough attention. I had the kind that wanted a lot of attention.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: I remember taking them around the block. I had two little girls, less than a year apart, and they could both sit in the stroller. And I'd go around and round the block, because if they were riding in the stroller, they'd be quiet.

HT: [Chuckles]

EL: And hmmm...ah...it was such a *relief* to go to work where I could, at work, even have a coffee break, and no arm grabbed my coffee cup.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: Usually at home if I had coffee, I had a child on my lap maybe, and the child would grab the coffee cup before I could get it to my mouth. [Laughs]

HT: [Chuckles] Oh, what holidays were especially important to you?

EL: Ah, we celebrated Christmas and Easter, I guess the way most people do, maybe a little more emphasis on Christmas with the old Swedish customs.

HT: Yes.

EL: But there weren't any...I don't think that there was any difference in holidays in...here in Moorhead than anywhere else.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm. Were birthdays an important celebration?

EL: We tried to have birthday parties for the children. Because I could remember that as a child my birthday would sometimes go past, and I would think, oh, I had a birthday, and nobody noticed! [Chuckles]

HT: Nobody...oh...! [Chuckles]

EL: So I tried to notice the birthdays. Of course, the children wouldn't let us forget at our house.

HT: No. No.

EL: So we did celebrate their birthdays, and everyone's birthday, family.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Hmmm, on to a different subject. Who kept the money records in your home?

EL: When I was married, I was keeping a budget of my own, and I kept a record of every penny that I spent with a circle around in red around anything wasted. So if I bought a pair of shoes that didn't fit, I circled that in red, and so that I wouldn't forget next time to do better on that purchase.

HT: [Chuckles] Oh, that...that's...

EL: So we kept that up, the two of us.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And hmmm...it later reached the point where my husband fills in the budget sheet now.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: We used to buy...have a book we bought. And those little budget books were no longer on sale on Woolworth's, so we made our own sheet. [Chuckles]

HT: Ah ha. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And we still have it. So we have the budget sheets, which show what we actually paid for everything, from the time we were married in 1944 up until today.

HT: Oh, that's interesting!

EL: Which I think would be a valuable economic history, because it shows what we paid for everything for a family of five from 1944 up until now.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: Shows the going through the Depression and all of it.

HT: Oh, that's...that's interesting.

EL: Ah...we were...we celebrated our fortieth anniversary recently.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: So I brought out the budget book for the year when we were married. And it was fun to see what the prices were in 1944.

HT: What a change! Yeah. What a change.

EL: What I'd paid for things.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Hmm, how were money management decisions made, relative to homemaking, let's say?

EL: Oh, hmmm, my husband does most of the grocery buying yet. So I make the list and he buys it.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: Our money...actually, ah, we're possibly different in that our...we both worked and our money went into a common fund.

HT: Uh huh. Uh huh.

EL: And so it didn't make any difference who paid for what, because we put it all together.

HT: Right.

EL: Hmm, we have separate checking accounts. But hmmm, there is no rule about who puts what into which one. [Chuckles]

HT: Uh huh.

EL: So sometimes if we pay a bill like taxes, we look and see who has the most...

HT: Most in their checking account! [Laughs]

EL: [Chuckles] And then...and use that checking account, because I can write a check on his and he can write a check on mine. So...

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Oh, that's...that's interesting. So you'd more or less made big decisions on spending together, I am assuming, surely.

EL: Together. Mmmm-hmmm.

HT: Did you have a lot of time for volunteer activities?

EL: [Chuckles] Not at all.

HT: No? No.

EL: Actually, with working during the week...

HT: No.

EL: And sometimes working in the evenings even on Sunday afternoon or evening, hmmm, when the library was open during that time.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: So there wasn't much free time. And what free time there was, I *valued*. I remember especially saying no to church activities, and someone being very angry that I wasn't willing to work at a church supper, for instance, on a Sunday.

HT: Mmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: I tried to keep Sunday for the family and for being at home. But it was difficult.

HT: Okay. So you...

EL: Church work was volunteer work.

HT: Yeah.

EL: I did teach Sunday School for twenty-five years, so I did some there.

HT: Oh...well, I should say. So you really didn't belong to any clubs then? Or...no other groups?

EL: Ah...not...hmmm...well, I guess I did. I belonged to AAUW, and later I belonged to Delta Kappa Gamma, but that was when the children were older.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And way back when the children were small, I was, what...hmmm...supervisor...or an advisor, is...I guess is the right word, for a sorority here at the...

HT: College.

EL: ...university. And they met every Tuesday night, so...

HT: Uh huh.

EL: I'm...I'm...I think back, and I think, how did I do that? I think for about six or seven years, I got out of the house on Tuesday night to work with this sorority.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And of course they had many other activities I went to, too, so I did get some free time away from home, even during the week.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. And do you have any hobbies, particularly?

EL: Ah...my main hobby is reading, which I can do at home. And then...

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. That fits in with your librarian work! [Chuckles]

EL: [Chuckles] Yes. The other hobby would be bridge.

HT: Oh, great.

EL: That provided most of our social life outside of church activities.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. And you obviously worked outside of the home. Hmmm, and you said you did have help in your home?

EL: Yes. Hmmm. When I went to work, the children were two and three. The girls were two and three years old, and our boy was in school. But hmmm...we needed somebody to baby-sit. And I hired a neighbor who did not just the babysitting, but she...hmmm...she did the laundry on Monday, and ironed on Tuesday, and baked cookies on Wednesday, and cleaned our house Thursday and Friday, so that most of the main housework was done by her.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Very good. Did the children have particular or special responsibilities as far as the home was concerned?

EL: Oh, we tried. [Chuckles]

HT: [Chuckles]

EL: Ah...it was a big effort to get very much help from them.

HT: Yeah. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: Hmmm...They were, of course, active in so many activities when they were in high school. But I remember people saying, "Well, you have two big girls to help you."

HT: Oh, yes.

EL: Ah, when they were in high school. And I thought, when they leave, I'm not going to have anything to do! [Chuckles] Because there was so much that I did because they were there. But...not because they didn't help some. But it was hard to get them to even clean their own rooms and keep their own rooms in order.

HT: Well, I think they always have so many outside activities as far as school is concerned, so it is difficult. I...I know that.

EL: And then the television. It is a real problem to get them away from there. Television is difficult, I think.

HT: Yes. Ah, you mentioned bridge as being something that...your main entertainment. Hmm, were Sundays different from other days?

EL: They were different from other days in that we always went to church. And hmmm...then we usually...I was in the habit of having a big Sunday dinner.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And at home we always had lots of company, and were a big group for Sunday dinner. But when we came to Moorhead, we didn't have any relatives around. We discovered that most of our friends had their own families and grandparents around. So that at first Sunday was kind of a lonesome day. But I always prepared a big dinner at noon. And then in the afternoon, the children...ah, the neighbor children showed up, because we always made popcorn. And it didn't take long for the neighbor children to know that they could come over for popcorn at our house. So that always happened Sunday afternoon.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And then we tried to read the paper, and get a little bit of rest, because it was the only day we had for rest and relaxation.

HT: Right. Right. Now as far as food management is concerned...Hmmm...well, this goes back to the early 1930s. [Chuckles] But have meal patterns changed since the early 1930s and what we eat now, as far as you're concerned?

EL: Well, just recently. But hmmm...there are so many health foods that have come out, **that** I have found my old recipes, which didn't stress that, are a little bit out of date when it comes to using whole wheat flour and all of that.

HT: Right.

EL: But otherwise, in those years...hmmm, between 1930 and 1975, I didn't notice a great deal of change. We always had a refrigerator.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: I guess the microwave, ah, made a difference in the preparation of food. We had an extra freezer in the basement, and grew a garden, and stored our garden food in the refrigerator downstairs. But we...we still do these things.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And we always had...ever since we started, we had, of course, electricity. And so...I don't think the food preparation has changed a great deal.

HT: Uh huh. Can you think of foods that are available now that weren't available when you...in the early 1930s, let's say?

EL: In the early 1930s, I was at home yet.

HT: Or in the 1930s?

EL: Hmmm, I guess, if I think back that far, I can remember, in the early 1930s, my first taste of sweet potatoes.

HT: Oh, yeah.

EL: I didn't know what they were!

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And we didn't eat much broccoli, or cauliflower, or Brussel sprouts. I don't think I even knew about those.

HT: No.

EL: Our food in the early 1930s for vegetables was corn, and green beans, and peas.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: So that's changed.

HT: Yeah, and then of course the...hmmm...where we shop, and the kinds...has changed.

EL: Yes.

HT: The kind of store, for instance.

EL: Certainly, supermarkets are much different today than they were.

HT: Yeah.

EL: When we came to Moorhead, we shopped in the old Red Owl. [Chuckles]

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: Which was...didn't have enough of a parking place, I remember was the big problem.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: So...little narrow strip along the side of the store there. And then when it moved, and we got more parking space, that was much better, of course. But the parking was a real problem.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. You mentioned foods that are available now that weren't then, and certainly the packaging of foods has changed a great deal. And how about the frequency of shopping?

EL: Ah, we never had time to run to the store every now and then. So we did our shopping once a week.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And often after work...my husband would get home from work first, get the children ready, and then come over and pick me up after work. And we'd go...one night of the week, go get our groceries.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And if we...if I forgot something, that was too bad. We really didn't have time to go back and get anything.

HT: [Chuckles] Yeah.

EL: So I learned to keep a good list!

HT: Yes. Good planning. And of course we all know how the prices have changed...

EL: And we did have a milkman. That was the one...

HT: Oh, yes.

EL: A milkman did come to our door in those days.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: So hmmm, that took care of the one thing that we might run out of.

HT: Right.

EL: Otherwise, we could buy enough of the rest for...to last us.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. And you mentioned that you had a garden?

EL: Yes.

HT: And you still do?

EL: We still have a garden.

HT: Oh, that's great. Ah, and you mentioned that you did have refrigeration and so on all the time. Not, of course, when you were out on the farm as a child.

EL: No.

HT: But from the 1930s and so on you did. Ah, and you had a freezer.

EL: We had...hmmm...ah, no, we have never had...except a freezer that's part of our...we have a combined freezer and refrigerator.

HT: Refrigerator, mmmm-hmmm.

EL: But not a big separate freezer, as most people have.

HT: Oh, yeah. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: I...I just am not the kind that...I didn't have time, I suppose. But I'd, for instance, do a lot of pie baking. But if I'd bake two pies, we'd eat them.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: I never thought of making five or six pies and freezing some.

HT: Yeah.

EL: I wasn't that kind of a homemaker, I guess.

HT: Or you just didn't have room to store them, either, in any case.

EL: No, but I'd... we didn't buy a freezer. And...and that was because we never have been the kind that buy a lot of food ahead to store in the freezer.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm. Okay. Hmmm...has the time changed at all as far as preparing your food? Does it take you a shorter time now than it used to?

EL: Well, I got to be an expert, but I...I think that's been within the last ten years that I got to be an expert in coming home at 5:15 and having supper on the table at 5:30.

HT: Oh, wow! [Laughs]

EL: But I could do that because of the microwave.

HT: Yes.

EL: And so I prepared a big meal on Sunday, for instance, and we would have kind of a repeat on Tuesday.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: Ah, heated...reheated in the microwave.

HT: Uh huh. Yeah. That's made a big difference for all of us. Ah, I think we'll...go on to clothing. Ah, what...? Were most things purchased ready-made or were they home-made?

EL: Ah, of course, I didn't have much time for sewing.

HT: Yeah.

EL: But we did have a sewing machine, and we did a little sewing. The girls took one class, at least, in home ec., and learned to do some sewing. And they are better at it than I am. But when they were little, we could buy a summer outfit of shorts for a dollar at [J.C.] Penney's store in Fargo. I thought, these are really nice, and I think I'll make some. I went to buy material and such, and I found the zipper cost seventy-nine cents.

HT: [Laughs] Yeah.

EL: And the elastic...just the zipper and the elastic would have cost me more than the dollar.

HT: Isn't that something?

EL: So it turned out to be ridiculous to do my own sewing back then.

HT: To try and make... Mmmm-hmmm. And it...it is a time consuming thing. Ah...how about laundry?

EL: We always...hmmm...from the time I started homemaking in Moorhead, we had a washer and dryer. And of course with two...I had two in diapers for quite a while.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And I did the laundry anytime. In the middle of the night if it needed to be done.

HT: Right. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: So, hmmm, we were all on one floor in our little house, so I could just put everything that needed washing right into the washing machine and press the button.

HT: How nice.

EL: And I would dry...I would often have laundry going in the middle of the night if I needed something washed.

HT: Yeah. It sounds...Uh huh. Hmmm...do you...? How was the ironing of clothing and linens changed? Or how has it changed?

EL: Oh, hmmm, our worker had to do a lot of ironing at first.

HT: Yeah. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: With the shirts that needed ironing, especially.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And the little dresses for the girls were a job, I think. Hmmm...but as soon as materials came in that didn't need ironing, we had no ironed sheets, and no ironed towels, until it got to the point where the only thing left to iron at our house were to go over Ralph's shirts and his handkerchiefs.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: And since the ironing ended up being his things...

HT: [Laughs]

EL: It got left to him. And to this day, he does the ironing.

HT: Yes.

EL: Because I don't care if it's never done, because it's nothing of mine in it, usually! [Laughs]

HT: [Laughing] Yeah. Isn't that...? Yeah. That's great. Well, it certainly is a big change. I can remember standing and ironing for hours. Hmmm, what changes have you seen in the kinds of clothing that are acceptable for church, for instance, and school, shopping, housework, and so on?

EL: Well, of course, as a child, we thought we really had to dress up for church.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: I'm glad it was that way, because if it weren't for church, I wouldn't have had any dress up clothes.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: Hmmm, and ah...clothing during high school...But...in the early 1930s, I remember getting a new outfit as a freshman in high school, and getting a new winter coat, and a winter hat. We wore hats back then.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: Hmmm...I did some work on the side for the superintendent that year, and that superintendent left at the end of the year. So my senior year I met him on the stairway—he came back to visit the school—and I met him on the stairway between the high school and the elementary school. And he looked at me and he said, “Well, Elsie, you look the same.”

HT: Oh...[Chuckles]

EL: And I had on the same coat. I thought afterward, I had the same coat and the same hat as I wore when I was a freshman.

HT: For goodness' sake.

EL: I wore that...I did have a new coat by that time, but it was my dress up coat, and I wasn't allowed to wear it to school yet.

HT: Right. Right.

EL: So hmmm...and I'm sure that the outfit I got when I was a freshman was my main outfit maybe for the four years because, of course, that was Depression.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah, certainly not the amount of clothes that people have now. Back then we...we just didn't have that much. Hmmm. I think the type of clothing acceptable for church, and school, and so on has changed a great deal.

EL: Oh. Mmmm, yes it certainly has. We've gone through a time when almost everything was acceptable.

HT: Right.

EL: More recently...and I'm...I am noticing how we're back to, ah, not quite that level. I mean, now, things are getting back to looking better than they did for a time.

HT: Yeah. Yeah, I think so. Well, you had lots of help in housekeeping. Do you think the amount of time spent in housekeeping has changed?

EL: Hmmm. [Sighs] I don't know. I think we...I'm sure it has. It had to change.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: My mother surely spent many, many more hours than I did, or even my worker did.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: But we still spend a lot of time on housework. If we really timed ourselves, we'd find we do spend a lot of time.

HT: Yeah. I'm sure. Ah, was there a job that you hated more than anything else to do as far as housecleaning was concerned? [Laughs]

EL: [Chuckles] Ah...I liked the cooking, and didn't like the cleaning because, hmmm, cooking was somewhat creative.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: But I never felt cleaning was creative.

HT: No.

EL: And I also felt cleaning had to be done over again, it didn't last.

HT: Right.

EL: And as far as a job I hated, it was to clean the basement windows. We didn't have covers over the window wells, and they filled up with leaves and all of that.

HT: Right.

EL: And to clean the basement was...was difficult.

HT: Yeah. That would be. [Coughs] Excuse me. Ah...do you do an annual housecleaning or is it kind of a revolving thing that goes?

EL: I...I guess I still do a cleaning of everything. I start about in March, and...but I only do it once a year. Where we used to, I remember, have a spring housecleaning and a fall housecleaning in my home.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: Now I...once a year is enough, but I do clean more as we go along. If I see a place that needs it, I...I don't leave it.

HT: Yeah.

EL: But I'm...I do go over everything about once a year.

HT: Uh huh. [Coughs] I think before we go on to...events that may have had an impact on homemaking, why don't you tell us about your house? When you built your house, and where it was, and so on?

EL: Hmmm, I do think this pertains to the history of Moorhead somewhat. Hmmm, when we came here in 1947, the housing was so scarce, the other faculty...we came to...well, I was on the faculty of Moorhead State, my husband worked at Fargo. And we had a very hard time finding any place to live, and were fortunate enough to have a friend find us an apartment over in Fargo. But it was most difficult living there, because we had to cross two railroad tracks on the way, I had to, to get over here to Moorhead State to work. And so almost every day I was late because of the trains. So hmmm...we ended up moving over here, but all we could find to live in then was a sleeping room upstairs, and it was not heated.

HT: Oh, my.

EL: So hmmm, that winter, we ate at the dormitory. And it...I think it was either Comstock [Hall] or Wheeler [Hall] where they had a faculty dining room, and we ate with the single men and single women who...who ate there. Because of course we had no place to cook. And ah...when we were in our room, I remember wearing a long woolen bathrobe. And we rented...we knew when we rented that it wasn't heated, so we just prepared for that. And if we got too cold, we went to bed! [Laughs]

HT: [Laughs] Yeah.

EL: That was one year. When school was out in June, we still had no place to live anywhere. Ah, other faculty were living in the...in barracks. But somehow there was no opening, and so we'd never been promised a barracks that we could live in, so for the summer, we didn't, either of us, have summer work, so we traveled. We just spent our three months traveling, because we didn't have a place to live.

And then we...we bought a home that was...it was a factory-made home that was to be delivered. The whole house came on a truck. And we bought a lot on what's now Eleventh Avenue South, which was in the middle of an alfalfa field. And this house was to be delivered, I think, perhaps October 1st in 1949. Hmm...we had a baby by that time, and we needed a place to live. But that house was not delivered on time. But we had *lots* of difficulty getting a loan to help pay for the house. We had to make a trip to Minneapolis, and I remember the...we met with some representative of the government. And ah...I felt that he was our *enemy*. [Chuckles]

HT: Oh, my.

EL: Really. Hmm...we had to get a piece of paper saying that we had a street past our place with four inches of gravel on it. So when we went home, that was our project, to get the city to put in the street on Eleventh Avenue, which they did for us. Ah, that didn't turn out to be too big a problem. Then we had to have...our lot was fifty feet wide. We had to have a sidewalk on those fifty feet before they would lend us...give us our loan. So we had the fifty feet of sidewalk built. It didn't go anywhere. It just ended in the alfalfa field. [Laughs] But we...we followed the regulations, and we did get our loan approved eventually, so that our house was the first house in the block between Thirteenth and Fourteenth. And hmm...it looked out on the bare prairie, except that a couple of blocks to the south was the radio station, Moorhead's radio tower.

HT: [Whispers] [Unclear].

EL: And I can remember how during a blizzard that first year, the man was stranded out in the radio tower. And over the radio they said nobody could come to replace him overnight, so he'd been there overnight, and he didn't...he was running out of food and coffee. So, hmm, we packed up some food, and my husband went in the blizzard across the couple of blocks. We could just barely see the radio tower over there.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And brought the man some food. But we...we were really at a...out in a very open space that first...that first year.

HT: Mmmm. My.

EL: And then the houses started coming in all around us, and we listened to construction day and night for three, four years, it seemed like. [Chuckles]

HT: Yes. Yes. Now you're living...and this is the same house you're living in now?

EL: No. We moved three blocks south of...of where we were then.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: So we're on Fourteenth.

HT: Oh, yes. Yeah, I see that. Mmmm-hmmm. Hmmm...now let's see. Coping...I think that was one thing. Coping with problems encountered...Hmmm...do you remember food rationing during World War II, and coping with that?

EL: Oh, I remember food rationing during World War II, because I was a teacher at that time in a high school, and the teachers had to take care of the food rationing. So we worked after school many evenings, I have...

HT: Oh, my.

EL: It seemed that once a week we were open, and people came and applied for their rationing booklets, which we distributed.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. And gas, of course. I suppose you...Was it just food? Or did you have something to do with the gas rationing?

EL: Uh huh. We did gas...gave out gas rationing materials, too.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And even fuel. I remember at that time we had applications that came in, even...I...I remember especially somebody's request where it was a single man who wanted kerosene for his lamp. He had written on the application he needed enough kerosene for his lamp, and it wasn't...he didn't have electricity.

HT: Uh huh. Yeah. Hmmm. Do you especially remember problems because of, let's say, gas rationing for yourself? Or maybe you didn't have a car at that time?

EL: Hmmm...we had gas rationing problems, because I was working in a high school. It wasn't in Moorhead, however.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: But hmmm, to get...it seemed that the gas was always there for the athletes to travel to...

HT: Right.

EL: But to try to get gas...I was director of the speech activities, and to try to get enough gas to go to the speech...to the debate tournaments and the speech festivals was very difficult. In fact, you almost had to break the law to get enough gas to go.

HT: Were you at all affected by any...by floods, or droughts, or...?

EL: The floods never came close here in Moorhead to where we lived, because we were far enough south.

HT: No. Right.

EL: But we were affected with mud, hmmm, some years out there before we had the sidewalks to walk on. When we first lived there, there was so much mud. And the clay! I remember our children going over in the park to play, and one of them actually getting both hands and feet stuck in the clay.

HT: Oh, my.

EL: So that it was hard...actually, it was where they had this radio tower, and they had moved it. So there was open mud and clay there.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: And we had to go over and rescue her because she couldn't get loose.

HT: Sure, she...well, and it was...it was just like glue!

EL: Uh huh.

HT: Yeah, it was.

EL: So we had a lot of that before grass got planted in the...in the new section of town like that.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: Before our lawns got going, mud was a real problem.

HT: I think we more or less covered the impact of some of the technological developments in homemaking. We mentioned electrical appliances, and telephone, running water, heating systems, and transportation. There were no...hmmm...

EL: Our first...talking about heating systems, our first house had heating pipes in the cement floor, which was new then.

HT: Oh...Uh huh.

EL: So it was kind of...and they had tile on top of the cement floor, and with the heating pipes underneath. Our children could go barefoot even when it was twenty below outside because the floor was always warm.

HT: Always warm. How nice.

EL: In fact, there was one spot near the front door that was almost hot.

HT: [Chuckles]

EL: So we could go there to warm our feet.

HT: Isn't that interesting? It would be kind of nice to have that kind of a system! [Laughs]

EL: I don't...I don't know if there is anyplace left in town that has that kind of heating. I know that the...it changed, and heating started to be in the ceiling more.

HT: Uh huh.

EL: But we liked our...that kind of heating.

HT: Yeah. Well, the heat goes up, so it makes sense to have it down below. Ah, what were your impressions, oh, of such women like Eleanor Roosevelt, and Amelia Earhart, and so forth?

EL: Well, of course, hmmm, I think they were...[chuckles] they were wonderful.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And I'm...I am glad Eleanor Roosevelt started actually getting into being an activist.
[Chuckles]

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And we need more of those. And ah...women today, I know there are lots of women who still don't even bother to vote, because they can't see that it makes any difference.

HT: Right.

EL: But surely, we need to follow the examples of those two women more than we do.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm. And do you...? [Coughs] Do you think that radio, television, movies, and so on have had an impact on our role as homemakers?

EL: Oh, I am sure that everything that happens in the home, every change has a big impact. I think television certainly has a big impact on our bringing up our children.

HT: Oh, yes.

EL: Because we used to blame parents so much if children didn't turn out just the way we wanted them to, and now I think there's very little time that a parent has to influence. The outside influences come in through...through the television...

HT: Right.

EL: Until you don't have any...any time when you...that you can spend with the children alone very much.

HT: Yeah. Ah, if you had to do it over again, what changes would you like to see in your life as a homemaker?

EL: Oh, I don't know. I think...I think I really had quite a pleasant life as a homemaker. I don't know if I would change very much. I always felt...hmmm...that I had too much of the responsibility. Now, my husband does a lot to help. But when the children were small, of course, he was working, too. And he often even coached plays over at school, so he was gone in the evening, too. But hmmm...he had not been, ah, brought up to do half of the housework, for instance.

HT: Right.

EL: And hmmm...Hmmm, I don't think anyone was in those days. My husband was more help than most. But if I could have...[Chuckles] If I could do it over, I would surely like to have had more help from...from other people. Because what my worker didn't do, I did.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: And I think the children could have been more help, but I didn't...I don't know how to do it. I don't know how to...[Chuckles] Ah, I enjoyed working, and I enjoyed the housework. But there was just too much.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah.

EL: And I don't know how to teach somebody else to enjoy housework. I have failed at that. [Laughs]

HT: How do you? [Laughs]

EL: [Laughing] They don't catch it from me!

HT: Oh...no! [Laughs]

EL: [Laughs]

HT: What would you wish for your granddaughters as they become homemakers?

EL: I hope they don't have to spend too much time at it. I mean, I hope they have time for a career, as I did, so they can do anything they want to, and are not limited to a...to staying home and doing their housework, unless they want to be.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: If they...if they prefer that, I hope they get that. But hmmm, I think fields are opening up. Right now it seems that women have too much in both a career, and raising a family, and being a homemaker. It's too big a job.

HT: Mmmm-hmmm.

EL: But hmmm, I think we're going to get that so that nothing is a woman's job alone. I think we're improving a great deal.

HT: Oh, there have been many, many improvements. I see it in my family. [Laughs]

EL: Mmmm-hmmm.

HT: Okay, I think that's it, Elsie, unless there's something else you'd like to...to add...?

EL: No, I think we've...

HT: ...somewhere along the line?

EL: I think we've covered most...I only hope it's of some value someplace. [Chuckles]

HT: Oh, I'm sure it will be. I'm sure it will be. Thank you.

[End of interview]