Alice Polikowsky
Narrator

Margaret Tabbut
Interviewer

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MT: This interview is with Alice Polikowsky, a homemaker living at 515 South Fifth Street in Moorhead. Mrs. Polikowsky, formerly Alice Midgarden, has lived in Clay County since her birth in 1904. This interview...

AP: 1909.

MT: 1909, I'm sorry.

AP: [Chuckles]

MT: This interview was held at Moorhead State University's recording studio on February 26th. The interviewer is Margaret Tabbut, representing the Heritage Education Commission. Alice, as a child, where did you live?

AP: Well, I was born on the farm where my parents first started farming. They rented from a man by the...a bachelor by the name of Knut Tweeton[sp?]. So...hmmm...until I was three years old. And then we moved to my grandfather's homestead, which was about two miles northwest, down by the Concordia [Evangelical Lutheran] Church.

MT: And that's near the Buffalo River?

AP: Yes, it's on the Buffalo River.

MT: So north of Moorhead here.

AP: And his name...his name was [unclear – sounds like Olav but is possibly Olaf?] A. Midgarden. And he homesteaded there in 1871.

MT: From where?

AP: He came up from Houston, Minnesota as a bachelor. He rode horseback up here.

MT: Is that right? And that was in eighteen...when?

AP: 1871.

MT: 1871. You've been in this county and area for a long time then, you and your folks.

AP: Well, my parents always lived here. But of course when I was teaching I was in southern Minnesota. And hmmm...otherwise I have been in this area most of my life.

MT: What was your mother's life like on this farm?

AP: Well, one thing that I always remember. [Sighs] Hmmm, she always had one extra person from the day she was married and lived on the Tweeton[sp?] farm, she had this bachelor to cook for as well as my father, and launder his clothes and so on. And when we moved to my grandfather's homestead, hmmm, an uncle, my father's brother Richard Midgarden lived there, so he lived with us until 1956. So she always had that extra person.

MT: Always. Ah, what kind of a home or house did you live in at that time?

AP: Well, it was the house that was built for my grandparents. And of course it's over a hundred years old now, but it was quite roomy for a farm home. It had three bedrooms and living room, kitchen, dining room, bedroom downstairs. And it had a couple of cellars, one under the dining room for certain things and one under the kitchen for storage.

MT: It wasn't a log cabin then, as we think of early homes in this area.

AP: No.

MT: Is it the same house that is on the homestead now?

AP: Right.

MT: It's been well preserved. Hmmm, describe a typical day in your home as you remember it as a child.

AP: Well, my parents always had meals on time. It was always six in morning, twelve at noon, and six at night, except during harvest time or threshing time. Then, of course, the hours got earlier. Or perhaps during potato picking, the evening got a little later, but they were usually very prompt. And of course it was, hmmm, certain days for clothes washing, and bread baking, and it was a busy, busy time. It was always something relating to food, or clothes, or getting children ready for school, and there wasn't much leisure time.

MT: Did you have morning and afternoon coffee then, too?

AP: No, hmmm, our people didn't drink coffee.

MT: Oh.

AP: My mother made one cup of coffee every breakfast, and that was for my uncle. Otherwise...and then Father didn't want coffee. He said no, except during harvest and threshing, of course. Then she had to prepare morning coffee and afternoon coffee. But as a family, we never had coffee.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. What do you think would surprise her if she should come back to visit now?

AP: Well, hmmm...I don't know...if she would be surprised. She lived until 1972. So during her lifetime she had seen a *lot* of changes, and a *lot* of history, and had experienced a lot of these things in her own home.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: Until she quit homemaking in 1958, when she moved in with me.

MT: She saw a lot of change then, as you said.

AP: Oh, yes.

MT: How did she adapt to the change?

AP: Just fine. She was a very progressive individual.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. What holidays were especially important to you and how did you observe them?

AP: Well, Christmas and New Year's and Easter. Ah, Christmas was especially exciting, because she and her Bekkerus relatives would get together. And you'd have somebody at your house for Christmas Day, then somebody else invites you for the next Christmas Day, so it was three days or four days of celebrating during Christmas. And then the same way at New Year's. So they'd make the rounds to everybody's home, and of course we all ate too much.

MT: [Chuckles]

AP: And I am the oldest of the cousins, and of course then we youngsters would get together, you know.

MT: What about Fourth of July?

AP: Ah, we would celebrate that. Hmmm...as a rule, the Ladies Aid of Concordia Church would sometimes have doings down in the woods, and for the congregation. And of course there'd be a political speaker out. I remember Christian Dosland used to come out and speak. And then after World War I, we had a big celebration when they came home.

MT: What...?

AP: And hmmm...but I think mostly it was grouped together. Of course, if we were home alone on Fourth of July we always had firecrackers, and sparklers, and things like that. And there was always homemade ice cream to celebrate.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Who organized those community activities?

AP: It was usually the Ladies Aid in the church.

MT: And your mother was active in that?

AP: Yes, very active in the Ladies Aid.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. What about birthday celebrations?

AP: Well, hmmm, they didn't make too much of those. Maybe we'd have a cake or something like that, but we very seldom had a party. I had a party when I was six years old. My aunts, sisters of my mother, came down to help her. And hmmm, they were younger than she. And so they invited the whole school!

MT: Oh, my. [Chuckles]

AP: To come down. And I remember we had pink ice cream and we had pink divinity that the girls had baked.

MT: [Chuckles] Big celebration. Are there any foods that were traditional foods for any of these celebrations?

AP: Well, during Christmas, of course, we always had to have...hmmm...Norwegian or Scandinavian foods. There was always lefse, and flatbread, and lutefisk. And then in addition there would be rommegrot or cream mush. And head cheese, mother always made head cheese for Christmas, that was a standard. And rolled sausage, which is called rolla pulsa, and pickled pig feet.

MT: Your mother made those?

AP: Yes. Uh huh.

MT: Have some of these traditions changed over the years as you have...?

AP: Well, about the only thing that I would make...or that we made in the last few years would be lefse, and the flatbread, and then we'd have lutefisk. But, hmmm, very seldom did we ever make any of these things or even buy them. Once in a while, I guess, we'd buy head cheese, but...

MT: [Chuckles] Those things have changed a little bit then. It's...

AP: Oh, yeah, yes.

MT: Over the years. How many children were there in your family?

AP: We were three. I was the oldest, and then there was Olaf, and then James.

MT: And what were your responsibilities as children? Did you have any...?

AP: Well, when...because I was the oldest, and when I grew old enough to handle horses, I was my father's hired man when my uncle couldn't help. Because he was church sexton, and he was...hmmm...the person who kept the Buffalo River telephone lines in order, And hmmm...then he also owned a threshing separator and Gust Lee[sp?] owned the engine. And so they were out doing threshing.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: So at those times when he was busy and couldn't help my father, then I had to. So I was...hmmm...helping cultivate, and do all kinds of things with horses, until my brother got big enough so he could help. Hmmm...as far as housework, I used to like to clean, and then Mother would let me cook, because she loved to sew.

MT: Oh. So you did have some regular responsibilities.

AP: Oh, yes.

MT: What about the boys? Did they get involved in homemaking jobs at all?

AP: Well, hmmm...of course I had to take care of my youngest brother when he was born. I was babysitter, and that's about all I know about it, is that babysitting. [Chuckles] Because I left home when I was thirteen to come to Moorhead High School. So I never attended classes with them or anything...or school. Hmmm. When I left home, then of course my brothers got in on helping my mother clean, and cook, and so on. They had to take my place.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. You stayed in town then when you went to high school?

AP: Yes. We didn't have buses at that time, so I had to come in and stay with a strange family. And that really was a little difficult, because...hmmm...I couldn't go home every weekend. We

didn't have roads, and we didn't have...ah, we had a car but, you know, they didn't use it like they do now. And I remember in one spring we had rain. Oh, it just rained and rained. And I hadn't been home for six weeks. So my father came with his horses and buggy and got me. And it was a *long* trip those ten miles [chuckles] because the roads were full of gumbo, and it was real hard pulling. Anyway, I got home, and that satisfied me.

MT: For a couple days anyway. [Chuckles] How were money management decisions made in your home relative to homemaking?

AP: Well...[sighs] Hmmm. The money for the house was earned through selling butter and eggs. My mother used to make butter. And I can remember as a small child we'd go into Christian Wensel's[sp?] store on what is now Main Avenue and Fourth Street, and she'd bring butter jars in, two-pound or five-pound jars, and then eggs, and then we traded for groceries. And then she raised chickens and turkeys, and that also went into the housekeeping part of it. I remember...hmmm...that she was raising, hmmm, springers. And Joe Wensel, who had a meat market, would order so many chickens for Monday morning, so then the whole family got involved in getting these chickens ready for Monday morning.

MT: You had to dress them?

AP: Dress them, and they had...he told us exactly how he wanted them taken care of after they...Hmmm...my job was to give them a good washing, and pick off the pin feathers, and then he wanted them soaked in cold water. And we had to be at the meat market before eight o'clock in the morning. And we did this, you know, during the summer when these birds were ready.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. How many would you have at a time? Do you remember?

AP: Well, he would order so many dozen. Sometimes it was four dozen. You know, that's a lot of birds to get ready.

MT: That's a lot of chicken! [Chuckles]

AP: But then, you see, there were four men, and my mother, and me that were working. But it brought in some money into the...hmmm...homemaking finances.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Did they keep a record? Or was it just an ongoing...?

AP: No. Ah, my mother used to keep books. So they pretty well knew what they were taking in and what they were spending.

MT: Do you have any idea what a grocery bill might have been for a month at that time?

AP: For a month? No, I wouldn't...groceries were very, very reasonable, you know.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And of course they didn't buy too many things, except maybe in the wintertime. But we usually had our own products.

MT: You would garden. Your own animal, meat products...

AP: You know with canning, and preserving, and things like that.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Did you children have allowances?

AP: No. But they gave us money for certain things. We always got spending money for Fourth of July, and if we came to town they would give us spending money. And I remember when I was in college a lot of my friends would go and get summer jobs. But my folks said to us—all three of us—they said, "You come home and work on the farm with us, and then we'll be able to help you on through school."

MT: So all three of you went to college.

AP: Oh, yes.

MT: How was the use...how has the use of credit changed over the years?

AP: Well, my father's philosophy was: do not buy anything unless you have the money. And he said it was just like digging a fence post; there was never enough dirt to put back around that fencepost. And so, he said, when you got in debt, there was never enough money to cover the debt. So that was his philosophy. And I can't remember my folks ever having too much, you know, charged. I just can't remember that. Maybe during the tornado in 1931 they had to, to get lumber to repair, build the barn, and so on.

MT: You apparently had some destruction then during that tornado.

AP: Oh, yes. Oh, just terrible destruction. Even the house was damaged. Our top of our barn was gone, and our garage, and turkey house...and we had a lot of destruction in 1931.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Where were you at the time of the tornado?

AP: I was in southern Minnesota, my first year teaching. And someone read it in the paper that evening, the Rochester paper, and my father's name was in it. And hmmm...I got a note from my mother the next morning, and all she said was that they'd gone through a terrible tornado, but everybody was well.

MT: Did they take refuge in the basement? Or what were they...?

AP: No. Hmmm...my youngest brother had been up to Riverside School, District Number Eight, to write...state boards. And he and a friend of his were walking home, and they tried to get into

the church...which was lucky they didn't, because the church was demolished. They would have been killed.

MT: Mmmm.

AP: And he came running home and got into the house. My mother was going to take care of her turkeys, and she was between the house and the barn, and the barn was the closest, so she had to run there. And my father, and my uncle, and Olaf were in the barn. And hmmm...it got very *dark*, and a lot of dust was flying. And the animals were in the barn because it was late in the afternoon; they were getting ready to milk cows. And when it was all over, Olaf said, "Is everybody alright?" And Mother said, "Well, I'm here." She was in one of the alleyways in the barn. And Olaf said, "Well, Richard and I are here." But my dad didn't answer. He'd been at the other end of the barn holding the door or something. And when they went out, the top of the barn was on the east side, you know, crushed. And my mother was just *positive* my dad was under there. But he wasn't. He'd been blown down toward the river.

MT: Oh, for...!

AP: And so he came walking up then. And he'd lost his hat and he had a scratch on his head, and that's about all...he was dirty, of course, from all the dust. And I asked him, hmmm, if he had been up in the air. And he said, no, he was just pushed along the ground, but he just couldn't stop. There were three funnels, you see, that's why we had so much damage.

MT: Mmmm.

AP: And then we could see out in our field...because the grain was up (it was in May) where these funnels had come together and then had gone to Hanson's farm all in one big storm.

MT: That was an experience.

AP: And I came home then, and we worked all summer cutting up these great big cottonwood trees that my grandfather had planted way back in 1871. Some of them were eighty feet tall. And picking up glass, and nails, and just cleaning all summer long. And we couldn't get any vehicle in there, or any horses, but we kids had a Shetland pony. And so she was hitched up to a little trailer, and so she worked all summer, too, hauling this stuff out.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. I imagine your mother had her hand in that, too?

AP: Oh, yes.

MT: How much time did your mother have for volunteer activities, and what were they?

AP: Well, most of hers were related to the church. She was very active in the Ladies Aid. And then she would teach a Bible class in the summertime, and that was usually right after school was out. And that was a busy time, because she raised chickens and had incubators, but she was there

on duty every morning. And…hmmm...then she was in homemaker group, but outside of that, I don't think she belonged to any other organizations. But those kept her busy with her homemaking.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. What kinds of hobbies or activities did she have if she had time for any?

AP: Well, she loved to sew. So she made all of her own clothes and mine. And, hmmm, during the Depression, she even made some things for my brothers because they had feed sacks, you know, that were colorful. And the material was the kind that you could use, so she'd make pajamas, and shorts, and stuff like that. And she loved crafts.

MT: Did you inherit...inherit some of those likes?

AP: I still have some aprons made out of those feed sacks. And hmmm, I have learned to enjoy crafts.

MT: What kind of crafts do you do?

AP: Well, I have been doing hardanger [embroidery], lately, I've learned how to do that. Of course, my mother did that, too, before she was married. She had some beautiful pieces.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: But she didn't save them, she *used* them, so they're all worn out. And of course my love for teaching, because my mother was a teacher.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Did she like violets, too?

AP: No. But she had a lot of plants that she inherited from her mother-in-law.

MT: Oh.

AP: But, hmmm, she liked gardening. She enjoyed gardening.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. You've made some reference to work outside the home that your mother did. Such as the chickens, turkeys...

AP: Well, she would take care of her turkeys and her chickens, and she'd garden, and that was about all she had time for.

MT: In addition to her other work. Hmmm. As a child, what did you do for fun or entertainment in your home?

AP: Well, I was a real tomboy, because I was always out with my father. And then I only had brothers, and most of my companions in the neighborhood were boys. And Father enjoyed ice

skating, so I learned to ice skate at a very young age. And we would ski, and we would slide down hill, ride horseback; my father was a very ardent horse lover. He *always* had a riding horse in addition to his other horses, so we'd ride horseback. Our Shetland pony came home in my grandfather Bekkerus' Overland [automobile] in the backseat!

MT: [Chuckle] Oh, no.

AP: One Sunday afternoon they were there and they were conversing. And Olaf was about five years old, and he came in and he said, "They're going to go and get a pony for us!" And I didn't believe him. But hmmm, my grandfather and my father left, and they went down to Hendrum, brought this one year old Shetland pony home. She was all black, peeking out of Grandpa's car! [Chuckles]

MT: [Chuckles]

AP: So and then later on we got an English saddle horse.

MT: So that was your fun and entertainment.

AP: That's right.

MT: Your homemade entertainment, really. How were your Sundays different from other days?

AP: Well, we usually had a special Sunday dinner. Not...extremely special, but there was always something special. And of course we always went to church, when there was church. And hmmm...then when C.B. Runsvold was our pastor, he would always say to my mother, Sunday morning when she came to church, "If I don't get an invitation, I'll be over." So many Sundays they ate with Pastor Runsvold. But he was a very fine man, and very ordinary, and Mother never worried about having him there.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And then many times after we got a car in 1918, we'd go for little rides, and then we'd play ball. It was always something.

MT: Something different. But something different. Was it chicken every Sunday?

AP: No. My...

MT: There's a book by that name, is there not? [Chuckles]

AP: The men in our family weren't exactly fond of chicken. They would rather have pork and beef.

MT: Oh. [Chuckles]

AP: But we'd have chicken once in a while, or turkey.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Speaking of meals, how did the meals of the early 1930s differ from the meals that you eat now?

AP: Well, of course, most of the products were homegrown. You very seldom came to market to buy fresh vegetables, because you had your own garden. And once in a great while they'd bring home cans of pineapple, something like that, but you didn't buy a lot of things like you do now.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: Now we go and get frozen products. About the first frozen products that we had were our berries, strawberries and raspberries that we stored at the locker at Fairmont Creamery. So it would be different.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And of course you'd have your own milk products. And Mother always made butter.

MT: What are some of the foods that are available now that you couldn't buy in the 1920s?

AP: Well, during the winter we very seldom bought oranges. The only reason we had the vitamin C that was needed was that we had potatoes twice a day and every day of the week.

MT: [Chuckles]

AP: And, hmmm, like melons, you know, they are in season much longer now, and...hmmm...a lot of fish. And there are many things that you can get now that you couldn't get then, because they weren't brought in. I suppose it was due to refrigeration cars or something.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Technology has changed a lot, hasn't it?

AP: Mmmm. Yes.

MT: What about the meals eaten out?

AP: Eating out? I don't think we ever went to a restaurant. There weren't restaurants like there are now. I think you'd have to go to a hotel. Hmmm...one meal that I remember, especially, when I was a freshman in high school...I suppose this was in the early 1920s. I had an aunt in Moorhead who was a nurse, and then she became a beautician, and she thought my cousin, who was the same age as I, we should have an experience. So one Sunday noon she took us over to the [Fargo] Waldorf Hotel to eat in the dining room, because she wanted us to see what finger bowls were, and how to use napkins. And when the maître d (I guess that's what you call him) waited on us, and seated us…and we were so embarrassed, because we had to watch to see what

she would do. And we had all this silver…we didn't know what to do with it, so we had to watch her. And it was one meal I didn't really enjoy! [Chuckles]

MT: [Chuckles]

AP: Because I was...it was kind of frustrating. But it was a good meal, I remember that.

MT: Well, there weren't all these drive-in places to eat.

AP: No.

MT: And [unclear] foods and so on. It's quite a change. What do you remember about grocery shopping when you first starting shopping for food, or when you went shopping with your mother, what kind of a store...? Hmmm...

AP: Well, hmmm, way back when I was just a youngster, I remember this Christian Wensel's store. And they would have things in barrels, and big jars, and...hmmm...there wasn't all this packaged material as you have now. And of course there weren't any frozen things. And they'd grind the coffee for you.

MT: And they'd wait on you, right?

AP: Oh, yes.

MT: You never picked out your own...

AP: You...you had a list and then you would tell them what you wanted and then they would go and get it for you and you didn't have a cart like they do now. I remember when that first started at Evenson's store, it was sort of an experience for my mother and father to go around. They didn't know where to find all these things. But you finally got used to it.

MT: What did they think about that change?

AP: I don't remember if they made any comment...at all about it. But of course they got used to it.

MT: Mmmm. Did you ever have any peddlers or home delivery?

AP: Hmmm. We had...one man, an Armenian who used to travel around with horse and a little wagon, and he sold woolen and silk materials. And then I remember once he stayed at our house. Then when the rayon came on the market, he sold that to some of the women as silk, and that *really* hurt his business, because they were pretty upset when they found out it wasn't silk! And hmmm...then we'd have the [unclear] man and the [J.R.] Watkins man stopping with their products. And the Watkins man lived in Sabin. Seems to me his name was Green[sp?]. And we

always looked forward to that, because the first thing he did was give us a package of gum. And we thought that was *wonderful*.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And he, too, would stay. And he kept on for *years*. But the Watkins man didn't come as often, and I can't remember much about him, but they always thought their products were better than those they could buy in a store.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: Whether they were or not, I don't know.

MT: We still have the Watkins man in town. Or...don't we?

AP: I think that we do have a Watkins person.

MT: I think the Watkin products...

AP: But I have never had him stop at my house.

MT: No. How much of your own food did you produce? You mentioned this before but...

AP: Well, I think most of it. Our own meat and our own vegetables and our own berries, fowl, potatoes.

MT: There must have been some way of preserving this food and keeping it safe. What were some of the early methods of preservation?

AP: Well, my mother did a lot of canning. And hmmm...I suppose the open kettle was one way, and then it was the boiler method, where you'd put these jars in and boil them for two, three, four hours. And hmmm...then she got a pressure cooker, which reduced the time a great deal.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And that was wonderful. Then...hmmm, they did a lot of things with their meat. They'd make hams, and it was thought that if you put these cured hams in the wheat bin that they wouldn't mold. So that's where they'd put those to store them.

MT: In the wheat bin?

AP: In the wheat bin. Mmmm-hmmm. And hmmm, then of course they'd make their own sausage. We had a sausage grinder and a sausage press. And they, you know, cleaned the intestines and made their own sausages. Sauerkraut, Mother learned from her German neighbor, Mrs. Fred [unclear], how to make sauerkraut. First they'd put it in a big crock. Then after a while

they put it in a can, just the shredded cabbage in a mason jar, add a little salt, and then water, and that was really good sauerkraut. And preserved jams and jellies, and butters, and...until Fairmont had this locker plant. Then, of course, we could freeze berries and…hmmm...I never heard of them freezing vegetables.

MT: Did you have an ice house by chance?

AP: Yes. Father dug a big cellar in the ground out in the grove, and then he'd put sawdust in there. And in the wintertime then they would cut ice blocks from the Buffalo River. And of course that was wonderful, and we could make our own homemade ice cream. Speaking of ice cream, Fairmont Creamery would sell a gallon of ice cream, various flavors, and when my uncle would come to town in the summertime, one of his treats was that he'd stop and get a gallon container of ice cream. And then everybody would come running and we'd eat ice cream. We'd...there was no way of saving it, so we had to eat it. And then you had to bring this container back. That was really quite a celebration.

MT: And you mentioned the locker plant. You bought a regular storage space?

AP: I think we rented...

MT: Rented, I mean. Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: That you could have...ah...then that meant you had to package your beef, and pork, and your...and then you had the chicken...and your chickens, and then you had to put a date on it, and what it was. And then you got a key. And then it meant when you went to town, that was the last trip. You had to stop there and go into this cold place and hunt out the food that you wanted. And of course we had an ice box where we used this ice. And then after we got electricity in the late 1930s, then of course Mother had an electric range and electric refrigerator, you know, so that we could store things.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Hmmm, how has the time required for food preparation changed?

AP: *Drastically*. My mother used to bake *tons* of bread in the year, because she had four men who loved home baked bread.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: So she spent a lot of time making bread. And...and when you think of the stoves that she used from the time she was married until she quit housekeeping…First they would have, hmmm, wood and coal range, and you had to be a good judge, because there was no way of knowing how hot that oven was. Then she also had a kerosene stove, and that had a little detachable oven on it, and she got another kerosene stove that had attached oven. And of course then she got her electric range. We did have a stove that finally had a heat regulator on the oven, so you could tell how hot it was. But when I think of my grandmothers and my great grandmother and my mother making these Norwegian dishes like lefse and flatbread...Oh, they'd shine up these old black

stoves, you know, and then they'd bake that right on top of the oven. And how they knew how to...you know, how to feed corn cobs or wood into that, so that you could bake it, it just...amazes me.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: That the product could come out the way that did.

MT: They had a sense of touch that we probably haven't developed.

AP: Well...no! They had to develop it, you know. And they used to make beautiful pies and cakes in those ovens. And bread.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. I can remember my mother putting her hand in the oven and knowing whether or not the temperature was right.

AP: Yes. So they had to develop a judgement that the modern homemaker doesn't have to worry about.

MT: That's right. What was your source of water?

AP: Well, of course when my grandparents lived there, they could use the river water for washing clothes. And I think that they were able to drink it when they first came, because I heard my father telling when he was a small boy how clear the Buffalo River was. It had a little sandy bottom sort of, and the water was very clean, and there were lots of fish in it. And it didn't get muddy and full of clay until they started this dredging in about 1914 or 1915. And then of course it spoiled the water.

There were twenty-five places dug on our farm from the time my grandfather homesteaded in 1871 until we got water in around 1920. They could *not* find water. So we used to go to the next neighbor, who was about forty rods away, and use their water supply for cooking and drinking. And I know when we'd get company on a Sunday afternoon, then we kids would have to run over there and get some water so Mother could make some lemonade. And hmmm...but when we did get water in a well—it was a deep well—we got soft water. So we could use that for washing and food and drinking.

MT: How did you finally...? Who got your well? I mean, how did you get it?

AP: Well, we had two brothers, Larson brothers, who were well diggers. And they were trying to dig this well close to the house. And they would work day and night. Because I remember before my mother went to bed at night, she set the table, and made food, and told them where this food was, because they came in at midnight to have midnight lunch and to heat the coffee.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: Well, finally, this one Larson brother took...hmmm...a willow branch. He was going to witch water. And he...hmmm...claimed that he could find water out in the middle of the road that ran by our barn. [Chuckles]

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And it was right east of the house. So he moved all his equipment out there. And that's where they found water. Now whether it had anything to do with his witching or not, I don't know. [Chuckles] But that's where they found water.

MT: In the middle of the road?

AP: Mmmm-hmmm.

MT: You had to change the road then?

AP: Well, it was...it was just an area between the groves.

MT: Oh. Hmmm.

AP: So it didn't disrupt too much.

MT: And that water...that well is still being used?

AP: No. We had a flood in 1975 when Moorhead and this area got twelve inches of rain that weekend.

MT: Yes.

AP: So we had a foot of water all over our farm. And no one lives there, and hasn't lived there since 1961 or 1962. And it would take a lot of money to get that well back, because it would mean all new equipment, and new screens, and new pipe, and test the water after all of that.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Alright. Let's talk about clothing and household linens and the challenge they were to your mother, the care and upkeep.

AP: Well, I suppose when...[sighs] hmmm...my mother first started doing laundry work, she would heat the water in a copper boiler on the kitchen range. And I don't know if she had a washing machine...At first, I suppose, she used a scrub board to do the laundry. And it meant hanging it outside winter and summer, and then bringing those frozen clothes in the house and hang them up anyplace you could to dry. And, hmmm, starching was something that they did. Men's collars and cuffs had to be starched, and women's dresses had to be starched, and I suppose their petticoats had to be starched.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: Hmmm. Then...hmmm...I remember a hand-run machine. There was a wooden handle on the side, and then people would work that. Dad, and my uncle, and my mother would move this back and forth. And then there was a contraption inside that had fingers, and that would revolve the clothes. I remember that. Then she got a machine that was run by a small gas engine outside. But I can't remember what happened in the wintertime, and whether they brought this in on the back porch, which they always framed in for the winter. But I can remember that. Then she got a machine that had a small gas engine underneath, and she'd have that in the kitchen. But we had to have an exhaust pipe out so we didn't get asphyxiated. Finally, we got electricity. And then she got electric. And then of course we got our basement. They remodeled the house in 1929. So then that was wonderful.

MT: Ah, when did electricity come in? Do you remember?

AP: Well, when they remodeled the house, they put wire and plumbing in, but they didn't get the electricity for about four or five years...later, because we had to...hmmm...the line had to come across somebody else's land. And that family wasn't quite ready for it. But then they signed about five years later or something like that, because we had electricity and water when I was married in 1937.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And that made homemaking a lot easier, especially taking care of food, and cooking, and laundry.

MT: It certainly made ironing easier.

AP: Oh! Ironing was *awful*.

MT: What kinds of irons have you used in your lifetime?

AP: Well, my mother tried to teach me how to use a sad iron, but, oh...I was a hopeless failure when it came to using a sad iron.

MT: Just for...to make sure that we are clear on this, can you describe a sad iron?

AP: Well, it's...hmmm...a piece of metal shaped like an iron. And then you have a frame that you fit over it. But you have to heat these sad irons on some stove. And my mother had a great big black skillet that she'd put over these irons so it would heat faster and keep the heat. Finally, she got a gas iron. That was better. And then of course she got her electric iron. But I never learned to iron because of this terrible experience that I had. I just thought it was awful!

MT: [Chuckles] Is that right? Can you tell me about it?

AP: Well...I couldn't get this ironing frame to hang...you know, to hang onto these irons. And...oh, I thought it was so hot, you know, especially in the summertime. Then they would...you know, you'd have to be careful that they weren't dirty... And, oh, I just thought it was awful.

MT: It was a tough job. And everything had to be ironed.

AP: Well, and some of these women did a *beautiful* job. My mother did a beautiful job of ironing with those...that contraption. When I think of all the linens and things that she used to iron! And of course there was a lot more ironing then than there is now.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: They didn't have polyesters, and knits, and so on.

MT: How much ironing do you do now?

AP: Not too much. I do some. But of course, being alone, I don't have a great deal.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. But there are a lot of things that don't need to be ironed that they did iron in those days.

AP: No, that's true.

MT: Did she do a lot of mending and repair of clothing?

AP: Oh, yes. And as I say, she always had this extra person, you know, that she had to mend socks, and overalls, and...

MT: So a great deal of her time was used in mending and keeping clothes in shape.

AP: Yes, they were...they used things until they were worn out.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. What changes have you seen in the kinds of clothing worn for church, school, shopping, and housework over the years?

AP: What was that?

MT: What kinds of changes have you seen in the types of clothing worn for these various...?

AP: Well, of course, hmmm, my mother lived long enough to see the young women running around in jeans and pants, you know, that you didn't do when you were young in my day. Although I was so hard on dresses (because I was outside all the time) that they bought overalls for me. And I had to wear these overalls when I was four or five years old, and I haven't liked them since. [Chuckles]

MT: [Chuckles] You wore those at home. Did you ever wear them to school?

AP: Oh, no. You didn't wear things like that to school.

MT: Or church or Sunday school.

AP: No. And I remember when I was teaching we had...hmmm...jackets and ski pants, they called them. And we could wear them to school. But we had to take them off. We could not wear ski pants when we were teaching.

MT: Or in the school room.

AP: No. Women had...they had dress codes and you had to live up to those.

MT: What about hats?

AP: Oh, a hat was a must. Every Easter, usually, you had to have a new hat.

MT: Did you ever go to church without a hat?

AP: Not for a long, long time. I like hats. And...hmmm...it's just in the recent years that I have gotten comfortable in going without a hat.

MT: Well, let's talk a little bit about housekeeping and housing. That's a part of homemaking, and the changes you have seen. How has the amount of time spent in housekeeping changed?

AP: Well, hmmm, I always remember house cleaning. Then the house was really torn up, because all the rugs and all the drapes had to go out on the line. And everything had to be cleaned, and there'd be painting, and varnishing. And our job was to beat rugs. They had a wire beater, and we children would have to stand out there and beat those rugs. Oh...we thought that was a terrible job! And take the mattresses out and air them, and dust them, and...and it seemed that, hmmm, housecleaning was a fall and spring job. Now it's just continuous. They didn't have vacuums, they had carpet sweepers; but that just sort of took the top layer, it didn't draw any dust out at all.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And Ladies Aid used to meet in the homes. And oh, if you were going to be hostess for Ladies Aid, your house had to be in perfect order! So then they went through this formula again. Everything was taken out, and everything was painted and varnished. And, oh, you couldn't have Ladies Aid except if your house was in perfect order. And of course in the wintertime, the men would come, too. Because they would drive with horses and sleds, so you'd have all these men upstairs in the rooms visiting while the women were conducting their business downstairs.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: Then you'd have all these people. And they'd serve regular suppers, you know.

MT: So it was a real big community event.

AP: And then the children would come home from school, and so they'd go there, too.

MT: [Chuckles]

AP: Get their lunch.

MT: Well, what chores were considered weekly chores? Or did you...?

AP: Well, of course, the general care of the floors. And hmmm...then monthly maybe—or maybe it wasn't monthly—windows, you know, you had to wash the inside of the windows. And hmmm, turning mattresses, and dusting furniture, windowsills.

MT: Those were all kind of weekly routine jobs, I guess.

AP: I think so.

MT: Has your attitude toward housecleaning changed?

AP: Housecleaning changed?

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: Well, personally…hmmm...when I house clean, it isn't like it was when I was a child. Seems that you do a little cleaning all the time; and with a vacuum that you can use any day or every week, it's different. Maybe you send your drapes out or your curtains out once a year. Maybe you don't do it more than once every two years. You can hang them out and dust them. It isn't like it was on the farm.

MT: So those have changed. Certain events have impacted homemaking over the years. And what have been some of the problems that your mother or you have encountered during your lifetime as homemakers?

AP: You mean problems in what areas?

MT: Oh, I'm thinking of Depression, World War II.

AP: Well. [Sighs] In the Depression, of course, hmmm, we never had any problems as far as food. We always had food to eat, because we did raise our own. Sometimes when it was real dry we didn't always get a great amount, but we were able to get it. World War I, I can remember,

they had a problem trying to get flour and sugar. You know, they used to buy a hundred pounds of flour and hundred pounds of sugar, or maybe they'd buy more flour than that for the season.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: You couldn't get flour or sugar, so then they were getting all kinds of other flours, trying to make bread. And they finally got oatmeal flour. And my mother used to make fairly good bread out of that that they could eat. And of course now they have all these recipes for oatmeal bread, and it's really quite a delicious bread. And then they got sorghum, which you'd take over for sugar, but that didn't work so well, either.

Then World War II, of course, we had rationing. Hmmm...vegetables, and shoes, and gasoline, and sugar, and flour...it seems like everything was rationed. I remember my husband and I were living in Elgin, Minnesota. And one Sunday noon, about one thirty, the superintendent and his wife came to our house. And the first thing I thought of, what am I going to feed them? Because our ration points, you know, had almost been used up. So I had a can of salmon, and I had a box of corn flakes, and I had a can of green beans.

MT: [Chuckles]

AP: So I made cornflakes muffins, and we had salmon, and we had butter, and these green beans. [Chuckles] And that's what we ate. Oh, and I guess we had coffee. We had a can of coffee. So that's what we had for lunch. Well, as we were...as they were going home in the evening, we found out they were spending their first wedding anniversary with us.

MT: Is that right? [Chuckles]

AP: And there wasn't anything to do, you know, because there wasn't...there was all this rationing. And they just couldn't travel. You didn't get gasoline; you couldn't get tires and so on. And I said, "Well, that was quite a wedding feast you had." And he was nice enough to say, "Those are my *favorite foods* that you had today."

MT: [Chuckles] It's hard to imagine that now in our day of plenty, isn't it? Hmmm...you were...I guess you were...you've just told me how you met some of these challenges. Did you ever hear about coffee hoarding?

AP: Well, because we weren't coffee drinkers, we didn't do much coffee hoarding. My...a can of coffee at my mother's would last a long time, because we didn't have coffee morning and afternoon, but I don't know anything about coffee hoarding. Maybe some people did, I don't know.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. And I...

AP: Didn't they used to use barley, too? It seems to me my grandmother used to burn barley.

MT: Is that right?

AP: And then make coffee out of it.

MT: Or at least...

AP: Or something that tasted similar to coffee.

MT: Dilute so that it would...

AP: And then use Postum. [Transcriber's note: Postum was a coffee substitute made from roasted wheat bran, wheat, and molasses.]

MT: Postum was popular, wasn't that...?

AP: And tea. Mmmm-hmmm.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. What impact have technological developments had on your role as a homemaker?

AP: Well, my life, in the short time that I was a homemaker and my husband was living, was much easier than my mother's, because I had electric appliances to do laundry, and to do ironing, and to do cooking, and preserving foods, and so on. So we had more leisure time. And hmmm...we didn't do all this starching of clothes. And we didn't have to feed a wood stove wood and coal, because you had either bottled gas or you had electricity.

MT: Now you had a telephone a great deal of the time.

AP: Yes, my father...hmmm...I have a certificate, my father bought a share for the...in the Buffalo River Telephone Company back in 1908, so they've always had a telephone, and that made a lot of difference. Because they used it a great deal to find out the price of this or the price of that, or what this was worth or what that was worth, and then sociability. They could talk to their families.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And then of course for some people it...ah...you would be about twelve on a line. And you'd hear the telephone ring. And hmmm...then people would rubber. But we never dared to at home because it wore out the batteries, and then my uncle would get so upset. Then finally when we got...hmmm...

MT: Now when you say rubber...explain what you mean by rubber.

AP: Well, it meant that you'd take the receiver down and you'd listen in on somebody else's conversation.

MT: So it was a pastime then maybe, too, for some people?

AP: I suppose. And hmmm...but then the lines changed, and we were only four on a line. I suppose that's when they joined up with Northwest Bell. And of course now you can have private lines out in the country as well as in town.

MT: How did you know which phone ring to answer?

AP: Well, they were...they were little rings. Hmmm, I used to know all of them. There was one...there was one family that would have two short rings. Three short rings, four short rings, and five short rings, then the next series was one long and two short, and two long and two short. [Chuckles] And two long and three short.

MT: So you had to stop to listen to see what the rings were!

AP: Oh, yes, you had to know...you had to know all the rings. And then the next series was two long and one short, and so on. And it was really something.

MT: So and you had your own system of ringing from neighbor to neighbor?

AP: Well, you had a handle on the telephone, and when you were going to call Central, you rang one long. Then she would answer, and you'd give the number if you wanted to get on somebody else's line.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: But of course on your own line, then you'd ring these things, you know.

MT: We haven't mentioned anything about heating systems, the heating in the homes.

AP: Well, the wood and coal range, of course, would heat the kitchen. Because that...and during the winter, that had to be used all the time. And at the back there was a reservoir to heat water, you know.

MT: That was your hot water.

AP: And there was always a tea kettle on, and then some families had coffeepots on all the time. And in our dining room we had a coal...hard coaled heater with this icing glass, so you could see this coal in there, you know, and, hmmm...until the basement was dug. Then they got a furnace. But of course that didn't work until you got electricity, because you had the stoker. So it was just a coal stove and this hard coal heater. The upstairs rooms were plenty cold. We used to dress and undress by the coal stove and then we'd run upstairs and crawl into bed.

MT: Into a cold bed.

AP: Mmmm-hmmm. And then we hated to get out in the morning.

MT: Did you ever heat your bed with a hot water bottle?

AP: Oh, yes. And sometimes with bricks and things like that.

MT: Soapstone?

AP: Mmmm-hmmm.

MT: And transportation. How has that affected homemaking?

AP: Well, of course, it's much easier to dash into town to get supplies now. And...hmmm...

MT: How often did you shop for groceries?

AP: Well, they had to bring eggs in once a week, and this butter had to be bring in once a week, so we usually...when the roads were so that one could go in, it was usually once a week. Of course, in the wintertime, the butter didn't spoil because you'd have it outside where it'd be frozen, I suppose. But eggs, that was a little different. And of course they didn't raise as many chickens and eggs as they did later on after you had an automobile and you could get these things to town.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. When you were talking about butter, I wanted to ask you back...I'll ask you it now. What kind of a butter churn did you have?

AP: Hmmm, the first one that I remember was just like a barrel, great big barrel, and then it was so heavy. And Mother would pour the cream in there, and then fasten the cover, and then somebody would sit there and turn this until it...

MT: It was on a frame then so it could turn, rotate?

AP: It stood on...it stood on a stand, sort of, and...hmmm...until it became butter.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And of course the men liked buttermilk. They thought that was very good. And my mother evidently made...seasoned the butter the way people liked it, because her butter was very popular at the store. Then she got one that stood on the table, a smaller model, and that wasn't nearly as heavy. But I remember once when the cover came off that big barrel one and we got *cream* all over the kitchen floor!

MT: Accidents happened then, too.

AP: Something else...something else about housekeeping was you always had a wood floor in the kitchen. And it meant getting down on hands and knees and *scrubbing* it. And many women had maple floors in their kitchen and they were scrubbed *white*.

MT: I've heard about those white floors.

AP: And hmmm...but then of course we got linoleum...and congoleum rugs, so that made it easier. But oh, that was a *mess* to get that cream up.

MT: [Chuckles] I'm sure it was. What about the impact of radio and TV on homemaking?

AP: My uncle got a radio quite early, and it was a battery set. And he was about the only one in the neighborhood who had one, so we had company every night coming in to listen to this radio. Then...hmmm...

MT: Did you use earphones or did you have a loudspeaker?

AP: He...the first one was with earphones, and then the second one he had a speaker. And of course it was down in the dining room, so...But we...nobody touched it except my uncle. We weren't allowed to touch it. So then it was evening entertainment.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And then of course, hmmm, after a while, my parents got radio. They were, you know, just like a piece of furniture.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: And then it wasn't long before they got television, you know, when that came into being.

MT: Hmmm, do you feel that television and radio have made an impact on a person's attitude towards homemaking?

AP: Oh, I think so, because...hmmm...we see a lot of things advertised, and hear a lot of commentaries which deal with homemaking, and personal living, and you...hmmm...you get ideas.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Over the years, Alice, what were some of your frustrations as a homemaker? Now you were a professional person...

AP: Well, hmmm...maybe...hmmm...while I was at Concordia College, in the home economics department...I had my parents with me from 1958. Father lived with me until 1966, and Mother until 1972. Hmmm, sometimes it was a little difficult for them to...understand why I had to go to evening meetings, or why I didn't come home right at four o'clock. And then if I brought home a lot of work, then I couldn't visit with them as much, you know, or do things. But hmmm, I had a

cousin who came over and stayed with my mother for about a year and a half. So that helped some. But I sometimes felt I didn't spend enough time with my parents.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. What were some of the challenges that you have faced as a working woman, as a professional person, and also a homemaker? You've been...most of your life as a homemaker you were teaching or working.

AP: Well, to see that I had groceries, see that there was menus planned, see that the clothes were washed, and hmmm...that the house was clean. You put in long hours trying to get everything done, and trying to be...hmmm...loyal to your job, too.

MT: It's a real challenge then to seek a balance between homemaking and your profession?

AP: I think it is. I think it is.

MT: What was your impression of such women as Eleanor Roosevelt?

AP: Well, of course, I thought she was really quite a person, you know, to be able to do some of the things that she did. And...hmmm...But now, we find a lot of women who are going out in public life and doing a lot of things that people like my mother and my grandmothers would never have thought of doing, because that was the man's world. Now the women are out there, too.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. Their perception of women's roles and men's roles have changed considerably then?

AP: Yes.

MT: Over the years. What changes would you like to see in your life as a homemaker, if you had it to do over again, what would you change?

AP: Change in my life, you mean?

MT: Yes, or as a homemaker.

AP: Well, as far as my personal experience, you know, I...I don't think there would be any changes at all that I can think of, because it was relatively quite easy. It was just my husband and me. About the only time I really worked hard was the first summer we came back from California, and then we had to stay with his parents until a house was available for us. And my father-in-law had a great big garden and lots of berries. And so I worked all summer taking care of those products. I filled four hundred cans of food.

MT: [Chuckles] Did you eat it all that year?

AP: Well, when we moved then in October, we were given half of it. So they had food and we had food. And the southern part of Minnesota is a lot hotter and more humid than it is here, and I really thought I suffered.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm. [Chuckles] What would you wish for any young girl today or young lady as they become homemakers?

AP: I don't know. As far as the homemaking, I think it's an easier job, you know, physically.

MT: Mmmm-hmmm.

AP: She has to be a good manager. And maybe because of all these appliances, and all this free time, that's why we find some of these women as career women. And then of course they need two incomes to get all these appliances and so on. And of course the clothes, and food, and everything is so much more expensive now than when you compare with what I went through as a youngster and a teenager. If you took a dollar to the store, you really got a dollar's worth of merchandise, whatever it was; cloth, or food, or whatever.

MT: So the cost of living has certainly increased. Well, Alice, this has been a most interesting interview. Thank you for appearing with us.

[End of interview]

Transcription by Marilyn Olson-Treml
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