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Kimball, Nebraska Interviews

Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier

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Interview Date: February 16, 1981

Interviewer: V.B. - Violet Blodgett

Interviewees:

V.P. - Vinda Russell Phillips

G.S. - Gwendolyn Willman Shroeder

J.L. - Jean Irwin Long

V.K. - Velma Evertson Kelso

L.P. - Luella Lockwood Peterson

L.G.P. - Louise Glubber Macenduffer Phillips

V.B.: - Kimball, Nebraska, for the purpose of interviewing Vinda Russell Phillips respecting her – experiences in rural schools. This taping is a part of a project called the Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier. It is sponsored by the Mountain Plains Library Association and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This tape will be placed in a depository in a college library, probably Kearney State College for use by future students of American culture. Today's date is February 16th, 1981. And now, if you would introduce yourself please.

V.P.: I am Vinda Russell Phillips and I live at 506 Local Street in Kimball. And – I have 5 children and the oldest one is a farmer, and then Doug is a technician for the Dressidraf[?] company, and Darlene is a housewife, Cy is a financial manager for a company in California, and Tom lives in North Platte and he works at the lumber yard. And I was born at – Rafton, Nebraska, in Kimball County – July 14th, 1904.

V.B.: And what county was that?

V.P.: Fillmore County.

V.B.: Fillmore…Oh.

V.P.: Yes, did I say Fillmore County? And –

V.B.: Now – did you ever attend rural school?

V.P.: Yes. I attended rural school in Fillmore County, I went to District 66. And later I went to high school in Rafton, Nebraska, and I –

V.B.: Did you have any college education?

V.P.: No, I did not go to college, we had Normal Training in high school.

V.B.: And – now then – getting into your school experience – well – the school that you attended as a rural – the rural school you attended – what type of a building was it?

V.P.: It was just a plain, wooden, one-room school house. With a hall and some bookcases and – we had the double-desks, and the – drinking fountains were – we just had a water pale in the building where I

went. And – we each had our own cups. But later I think we did get one of the stone jars where we had a little faucet to get our water. Our drinks – and the heating was just a plain stove, and we didn't have hot lunches. [2:15]

V.B.: You brought your own in a pail?

V.P.: Our own in a pail at that time. And the lighting was just the windows, no electricity.

V.B.: then – was there any hardship in getting to school? How far did you live from school?

V.P.: I lived a mile and a half from country school, and we nearly always walked, except when the weather was real bad, then my father took us.

V.B.: And, of course, that was what kind of a conveyance?

V.P.: Well, just a buggie, sometimes a wagon.

V.B.: [chuckles] By horses, anyway? [3:30]

V.P.: By horses, uh- huh.

V.B.: And, now, your first day of teaching school, can you recall that?

V.P.: Well, yes, very vaguely, it was a long time ago. It was in 1921, and I did have a lot of students. I think there were probably 35 or more, and getting to know their names and – getting their books lined up for their ages and grades and so-forth was quite an ordeal as I remember it.

V.B.: And, let's see, were they all American children? Or did you have some foreign born?

V.P.: Well, I had some German children, and there was one little German boy who couldn't speak English when he came to school, and we did manage, I did know a few German words, and it seemed like he did progress real rapidly when he once got started, but I don't know how I really did [chuckles]

V.B.: - Now, this was in Fillmore County?

V.P.: Yes.

V.B.: You taught there how long?

V.P.: I taught 1 year in Fillmore County.

V.B.: And then – [4:31]

V.P.: And then I came out here, my brother was living out here, so I applied for District 25 in Kimball County, and I was accepted and came out here that fall, and taught. And here I only had 8 pupils, and after having 35 back there, it just seemed to me like there were surely some of them missing. And I kept counting them up about every day to make sure they were all there. That - There was – it was a nice group of children and – let's see, we did have an organ in the school, and I could play a little bit, so we did have a lot of singing, and – the children seemed to enjoy that. And the building was used for Sunday school, and – Church. And I remember that there was minister, Reverend Thomas, came out from Bushtell I think every Sunday and there was church in the afternoon and services in Bushtell in the morning, and came here in the afternoon. And – that school, now, we spoke of lunches a while ago – we

did have hot lunches there, the mothers would send something hot to be cooked, and I would usually put it on the plain old stove at recess time, and it would get cooked by noon.

[5:53] And one real cold day, I remember that I was standing by the stove, stirring the soup, and – all of a sudden, little Robert Sumner, says "Oh, teacher, your dress is on fire." So, I looked down and I had on a wool jumper, and it was all scorched way up high on one side, but it didn't – it didn't start blazing. But I had always been strict about the kids talking without permission or holding up their hands, but that was one time it worked out all right. [chuckles] Robert let me know about it, I don't know - I wonder if he remembers that. And all the children in that school were just very good, I didn't seem to have any problems with them, and they were all good little students, and – and the studies we had, they liked to cypher down, we did have cyphering contests among ourselves, we didn't go out to the other schools – and spell-downs.

[6:53] And, there, I can't remember, yes I did have some beginners, and I think I taught them the phonics and that type of – learning to read. And the grammar, we did have subjects and predicates and used the [can't understand] grammar book, I think – to teach grammar. And – I don't believe I had any 8th graders the first year I came out here, at that school, and I don't believe I had 7th graders, either, I don't seem to remember that. But I came back the second year and taught there and – we didn't have any 8th graders the 2nd year, so I must've just had them up through the 6th the first year. Less, so – I'm sure we had – we studied the poems of Longfellow and Whittier and Loer, and had them memorize quite a few of those.

V.B.: Do you remember who the county super intendant was?

V.P.: Yes, it was Miss Rachel Mackelroy at that time, and I taught there – and – let's see –

V.B.: Let's see, then [chuckles] You be – got – after your second year you married or did you continue teaching? Aft – After the second year in District 25? [8:11]

V.P.: No, that's the year I went down to Wellfleet, and I taught in Wellfleet for that next year. There I did teach the 7th and 8th grade. And that's when I learned a lot about the 7th and 8th grade exams, because they did have to take them, and I really drilled them, and they all did fine, and they all passed the first time they took their exams, they were real proud of it, and so was I. So – and down there, of course we had a little bit of a better building, but not too much larger than a one room school room – there was a high school there, too, though, so there was 12 grades in that school, but I taught the 8th grade. 7th and 8th.

V.B.: And then, how many more years did you teach?

V.P.: Well, then, we were married the next summer after I went to – well, taught in Wellfleet, and then I came out here and I taught District 28 in Kimball County – the last year I taught. And – that was a one room school building, again, and I think I probably had about 10 pupils there. And I don't – if I did have one 8th grader, that was Kenneth Grud, he was my 8th grader there and he passed his exams. So, I guess – I think we were probably using about the same kind of books, I don't think times have changed too much, and –

V.B.: Was District 28 a one room school, too, or did it have a basement? [9:57]

V.P.: It had a basement, yes. It had a basement.

V.B.: But no running water, or electric lights –

V.P.: No, no running water or lights - that I remember.

V.B.: What type of heat, do you remember?

V.P.: Well, I think it was just one of those –

V.B.: Pipe-less furnace?

V.P.: Pipe-less furnaces that – that stood in one corner of the room, I think, one of that - that type.

V.B.: Can you think of any other interesting experiences during your rural school days?

V.P.: Well, not really any. I do remember when I first came out here to that first school, when the airplanes would fly over with the mail going between, I guess, Omaha and Cheyenne with the mail. And they flew so low that we could see them right out the window almost level with – the school room. And the thing that bothered me was that we didn't have any mail – our mail, we had to go to town to get it. [chuckles] And then I'd come out here from Eastern Nebraska, I was used to getting my mail every day, twice a day, usually, and then to come out here and wait a week or so to get my mail, I thought that that was kind of strange. Kind of hard to get used to, but I did, and managed to live through it all, and I really enjoyed the times that I taught out here – in Kimball County, the people, the children, and the parents were all very nice and –

V.B.: And you met your husband in Kimball County? [Chuckles] [11:28]

V.P.: Yes. [Chuckles] Yes, that's right. So –

V.B.: and you enjoyed a good, long life together.

V.P.: Yes, we did. Mm-Hmm.

V.B.: And – thank you so much, Mrs. Phillips.

V.P.: Thank you.

V.B.: [moving around, working on recording machine] oh, stopped, too [?]

[in background]: Can you see it?

V.B.: Yeah, it's going, uh-huh. [long pause] so, now – I am Violet Blodgett in the city of Kimball for the purpose of interviewing Gwendolyn Wilman Shroeder, respecting her experiences in rural schools. This taping is a part of a project called the Mountain Plains Library – by the Moun- called the Country School Legacy, excuse me, Humanities on the Frontier. It is sponsored by the Mountain Plains Library Association and funded by the National Endowment for Humanities. This tape will be placed in a depository of a college library, probably Kearney State College for use by future students of American culture. Today's date is February 17th, 1981. And now, what is your name?

G.S.: Gwendolyn Shroeder.

V.B.: And you reside where?

G.S.: 306 South Oak, Kimball, Nebraska.

V.B.: And – now want some of the information on your family. How many children did you have?

G.S.: Three. [long pause] Three daughters. [12:57]

V.B.: And how many sons?

G.S.: None.

V.B.: Oh, you mean in your own family?

G.S.: Yeah.

V.B.: Ah, in the Willman family?

G.S.: Yeah.

V.B.: Now, and your - And your immediate family?

G.S.: Oh, mine? I had three boys and three girls.

V.B.: And what are their occupations? Your children's occupations?

G.S.: Oh, well –

V.B.: Let's see – Esther?

G.S.: Well, Esther is teaching in the library, and – Les is super intendant of a gas plant at Sterling, and Ruth is a housewife, I think you'd call it [chuckles] although she's busy as a bee all the time. And, Leonard of course passed away. And Leland works for Kodak at Windsor. [Can't understand] And Barbara lives over the mountains on – Mount Rose, and I guess she's a housewife.

V.B.: And, of course, you are retired. [13:59]

G.S.: Yeah.

V.B.: Where were you born?

G.S.: Nebraska City.

V.B.: And when?

G.S.: November 5, 1893.

V.B.: And, now, your education – this would've been quite a few years ago – attended city schools in Nebraska City?

G.S.: Ah, yes, all through – There's not kindergarten when I went, so I went from the 1st grade through the 12th.

V.B.: And, of course, in these days – in those days, you had normal training in school, right?

G.S.: The last year.

V.B.: Mm-Hmm. So, after graduating from high school in 1912, what did you do?

G.S.: Hmm – taught school.

V.B.: And the first year you taught was in Otoe County, right? Can you remember anything about your first day of school as a teacher?

G.S.: No.

V.B.: Nothing exciting to remember.

G.S.: Well, nothing happened – nothing exciting happened. [14:58]

V.B.: And – what type of a building did you have?

G.S.: Oh, a little white-frame.

V.B.: And did it have electric lights?

G.S.: No.

V.B.: Just the windows were the only light, right?

G.S.: Just the windows.

V.B.: What – how did you get your water? Did you have to carry it to school or was there a well on the grounds?

G.S.: I think the pupils took turns bringing a bucket.

V.B.: Oh, uh-huh. And of course there was no hot lunch program in that day?

G.S.: Oh, no.

V.B.: Everybody brought their lunch in a - ?

G.S.: Everybody brought their lunch.

V.B.: In a large pail, probably, huh?

G.S.: Yep.

V.B.: And – what did you use for fuel? What type of stove did you have?

G.S.: Coal stove.

V.B.: And of course –

G.S.: You were janitor, too.

V.B.: [chuckles] This was very important, I found, in lot of the teachers' contracts reading the – the – specified that the teacher had to do the janitor work. [15:52]

G.S.: Oh yes.

V.B.: Do you remember what kind of a salary you got?

G.S.: I think it was 40 dollars a month.

V.B.: And after teaching two years in Otoe County, then you went across the river to Iowa, was there any special – thing you remember about teaching in Iowa?

G.S.: No - it was just nice – scenery going and back. Going back – back and forth.

V.B.: It was close enough so that you could go home occasionally, right?

G.S.: Yeah, every night. Unless it was stormy.

V.B.: Oh – oh wow. It was just very close, then, to Nebraska. And – so there was nothing really different about that school and the one you had taught before?

G.S.: No.

V.B.: Then, in 1915 and 16, you came to Kimball County – what was the reason for coming to Kimball County?

G.S.: Mm, just wanted to come out West.

V.B.: It was well advertised as an interest to you?

G.S.: Oh, yes, it was quite advertised at home.

V.B.: And, so, it sounded like a good opportunity, right?

G.S.: Mm-Hmm.

V.B.: Well, at this school – did you board in the district? Or –

G.S.: Yes.

V.B.: Did you walk to school in, or did you-?

G.S.: Oh, yes. It was just across the street. Just across the road.

V.B.: Just across the road? Oh, uh-huh, and you walked. And – do you remember how many pupils you had?

G.S.: No, I don't. [very long pause] Oh, I [can't understand] maybe 6 or 8, I don't remember.

V.B.: But it wasn't too large a school? [17:38]

G.S.: No, it was a small school.

V.B.: Had your schools in the east been bigger, as far as –

G.S.: Yes.

V.B.: Oh, mm-hmm.

G.S.: Much bigger.

V.B.: And, of course, in those days – did you have any 8th graders? So, they would've come to town to take examinations?

G.S.: No, I didn't.

V.B.: Mm-Hmm. Did you have singing in your school?

G.S.: No.

V.B.: Did you have any kind of community activities – any programs, or anything that were held in the schoolhouse?

G.S.: I don't think so, I don't remember of any.

V.B.: No box socials, no – and – do you remember who the county super intendant was?

G.S.: No, not for sure. I don't remember for sure.

V.B.: Then you went down to Weld County, Colorado, to teach. And – and Weld County – you also took out a homestead, right?

G.S.: Mm-Hmm.

V.B.: And so you taught school in the day time and lived on your homestead at night? [18:47]

G.S.: That's right.

V.B.: And – then you proved up on this homestead by doing this.

G.S.: That's right.

V.B.: Mm-Hmm. Was your homestead very far from the school?

G.S.: Oh, I'd say a couple miles.

V.B.: And then – this would been in - like 1917 or something, right? – Did you walk to school, or did you-?

G.S.: Mm-Hmm, yeah, I walked.

V.B.: And the pupils, most of them walked to school, right?

G.S.: I think so.

V.B.: We didn't depend on automobiles so much - or school buses.

G.S.: Oh, no. Had no school buses, then.

V.B.: That's right. And all of these schools were just one room schools?

G.S.: That's right.

V.B.: And coal – burning?

G.S.: Uh-Huh. And you had to be janitor. [19:45]

V.B.: And you had to be janitor [chuckles] That was an important thing, uh-huh. And, of course, then, after 3 years – of teaching in Weld County, now – you didn't teach after you were married, right? Or did you?

G.S.: Let's see – yeah – I finished a year –

V.B.: Oh.

G.S.: I finished one year.

V.B.: Oh, you got married while you were teaching and – and –

G.S.: Yeah, I finished that year.

V.B.: Mm-Hmm. And – of course, Weld County was a long ways from your county seat, did you have much help from your county – super intendant?

G.S.: Oh, no, a hundred miles.

V.B.: And in those days 100 miles was a big trip.

G.S.: That's right.

V.B.: And now, as far as you know, are any of these buildings where you taught still standing?

G.S.: No.

V.B.: They're all gone, right?

G.S.: Uh-Huh.

V.B.: Weld County has become a – a bust –

G.S.: Oh, yes.

V.B.: Of course Kimball county is fast becoming – one district, more or less, I mean they all go to Kimball, Dixon, Bushnell.

G.S.: Yeah. Our place out there is in New Reimer district. [20:57]

V.B.: Oh, New Reimer.

G.S.: And you would go to New Reimer.

V.B.: Oh, mm-hmm.

G.S.: I don't know how far that is.

V.B.: But they have a big, new school there –

G.S.: Yes.

V.B.: -called Perry. And they bus them for – oh, I would – from all over the coun- miles and miles, I know. Uh-Huh.

G.S.: Yes. [long pause] I feel sorry for the youngsters, especially if they're small ones that have to ride that way.

V.B.: Oh, I do, too.

G.S.: It'd be hard on them.

V.B.: It seemed in the old days we believed in having a school close by.

G.S.: That's right.

V.B.: And now we've gotten to this where we ride hours on a bus, twice a day.

G.S.: That's a long ways. Let's see – Let's – I can't think, I can't remember how far that is to Stoten[?] and then you go, what is it, 8, 9 miles West of there?

V.B.: Mm-Hmm.

G.S.: To get to the schools.

V.B.: And, of course, a bus doesn't go the shortest route. They have to go round –

G.S.: Oh, no, they have to go round and pick up all the youngsters, it would be – would be a long ways.

V.B.: Mm-Hmm – Can you think of anything of special interest you wanted to say on any of your teaching experiences? [22:03]

G.S.: I don't think so. Just common, everyday teach.

V.B.: [chuckles] And – you never used cow chips for fuel?

G.S.: No.

V.B.: I know some teachers have, you know?

G.S.: Yes, I know, but I had coal every year except the last one. Couple of years, and that was oil.

V.B.: Oil, Uh-Huh.

G.S.: Fuel oil, fuel oil.

V.B.: Mm-Hmm. Well, thank you so much for telling this - these interesting things about your teaching. And – we will conclude the tape now.

G.S.: Okay.

V.B.: Thank you.

[ends that section of tape, then restarts it with a new interview at 22:55]

V.B.: We are back again with Mrs. Shroeder. We want to add on some blizzard information in her school teaching years. So now you tell the story.

G.S.: Oh, one year – one year it was beautiful, and it snowed – oh, it must've been 4 or 5 inches deep, and then it crested on top. And you could walk on top, and I think the cattle walked on top, and I

thought, well, maybe it will melt today, that was in November. And – we went to school, and the wind came up, and I thought it was going to blow the school house to pieces. And it blew the snow, and drifted it, and we didn't get home until way late – It must've been close to midnight, when my husband came after me. And – I took two pupils home with me because I didn't want to leave them in the school house, and – I just took them with me, we took them home. And that was one experience we had with a blizzard. [23:05]

V.B.: Now, you had another one? Where you stayed all night at the school house?

G.S.: Yeah, then later – no, that was – later, yeah it was later - another year we were at the school house and it began to snow, and we had to stay all night at the school house. Well, we did pretty good – we all napped [chuckles]

V.B.: Weren't scared?

G.S.: No. I didn't have very many people, I think there was only 4 that day.

V.B.: Oh, uh-huh. And this was Lonestar School, in Weld County.

G.S.: Uh-huh, this was Lonestar School in – in Weld County.

V.B.: In Weld County. Mm-Hmm.

G.S.: Mm-Hmm. And we stayed all night. And they came after us the next day.

V.B.: [Chuckles] [24:45]

G.S.: And we didn't have school then for several days. [chuckles] It was too drifted.

V.B.: Mm-Hmm.

G.S.: Couldn't get back and forth.

V.B.: Well, of course, now-a-days we don't –

G.S.: Well, we didn't have a highway down there, then, you see. It was just a – just country.

V.B.: Yeah. Well, we don't send the buses out if it gets too bad now-a-days.

G.S.: No.

V.B.: Anything else?

G.S.: No, I believe that's all.

V.B.: Ah, okay, thank you. [25:10 ends this interview]

[new interview starts at 25:19]

V.B.: I am Violet Blodgett in the city of Kimball for the purpose of interviewing Jean Irwin Long. Today's date is February 17th, 1981. Now, Jean, could you tell us something about yourself?

J.L.: I am a retired librarian. I taught in the rural schools in Kimball for 6 years. And in the Kimball school system for 15 years. I have a Bachelor of Science degree from Kearney State College and graduate work

in Librarianship from Denver University. I graduated from Kimball County High School in 1931, and Kimball County High School had a normal training program. During the Junior and Senior year, classes that were taken were methods of teaching – methods of teaching all subjects.

[26:20] Examinations in 14 or 17 subjects, set-up by the State Department of Education had to be passed, and then the certificate was earned. This was enforced for 3 years and was renewable. So I started teaching in September, after graduating from high school in May at the age of 16. The school building - all of the school buildings in which I taught had two rooms: a small room for coats and lunch buckets, and the other for classes. None had electricity, all had pipe-less furnaces, not automatic. Often the teacher's contract specified that she was to do the janitor work. There were no provisions for our official lighting, although a far-sighted teacher would see that a kerosene lamp, or at least candles, were available in case of a storm – or an overnight stay was necessary.

[27:34] When meetings were held in the school building, gas lamps were brought by the people conducting the meeting. Water was brought by the youngsters. In two districts, a family made an agreement with the board to supply the water, and it was bought - brought in a cream can and poured into a stone jar which had a spricket. This had to be emptied each evening, of course. Since all of these schools had pipe-less furnaces, a tea kettle was placed on the grates so warm water was available for washing hands. Each child brought his lunch in a bucket, or a specially designed lunchbox, where contents varied. Some even had enough for a snack for afternoon recess. But some lunches were very sparse. People were poor. Wheat, 18 cents a bushel, pigs were killed and buried, that was a government program. I stayed one year with a family who worried all week about the price they would get for their cream that they would sell on Saturday. This price determined what we would eat during the week. At two schools, we had probably one of the first hot lunch programs.

[29:10] During the cold months, each family, that could, would provide for a week, each day, a kettle of soup. And these would be placed on the furnace grate, and so hot food was served at lunch. Those furnaces were a problem. And one of the schools, the grates of the furnace, which you had to shake each morning to get the ashes down, always fell down into the ash pit. I was the janitor, I crawled into the ash pit, hoisted the grates back up into their slots, and built the fire. There certainly wasn't enough water to clean up very much after that. All of the buildings in which I taught are gone, and the grounds are being farmed. As for getting to school, I walked, and most of the children walked. I don't recall a child that would walk to school regularly. Gas was pres-Precious, and used when necessary, which was not getting the kids to school.

[30:38] As I said, most of them walked, as did the teacher, or rode horseback, as this teacher did not. Our one family had four girls who came in a horse-drawn wagon. I recall one boy who rode a horse five miles to school, and two little boys who came 4 ½ miles on horseback. Absenteeism was high. The use of the community – the use by the community of the school building – well, the largest of the buildings in which I taught, which was district 16, 13 miles south and 1 mile west of Kimball, was used as sort of a community center, or the voting place. Farm Bureau Organization had regular meetings. There were dances and socials with a live band, one fiddler and a piano player who could cord. The school programs drew the biggest crowds. Teachers worked hard in preparing the programs so that no favoritism was shown, jobs were scarce. Revival meetings were sometimes held in the school buildings, too. And some –

[First side of tape ends at 32:09]

[Next side starts at 10.2 seconds]

J.L.: The school programs drew the biggest crowds. Teachers worked hard in preparing these programs so that no favoritism was shown. Jobs were scarce, you understand. Revival meetings were even sometimes held in the school buildings. [unintelligible mumbling] As to the subject matter, a course of study was provided by the State Department of Education, and it was followed carefully. Because each 7th and 8th grader had to pass an exam in each subject before he or she could go to high school. And these exams were prepared by the State Department, and were based on a course of study. I remember that each 7th and 8th grader had a booklet which was full of sample questions which had been used in previous examinations. And this was published by the war publishing company in Minden. The answers to these questions were surely memorized.

[1:20] Scheduling classes, and sticking to it, the schedule, was a problem. If one had all 8th grade – 8 grades, the classes couldn't be over 8 minutes. Even though the 5th and 6th, and 7th and 8th grades were combined in some subjects. The material in the course of study had to be covered, because those state exams loomed in the distance for everyone. Friday afternoon after recess was often a fun time, cyphering down spelling bees and so-forth. The early 30s was a time when phonics, before reading, was taught. Grammar was very formal with diagramming. Mental arithmetic was important. Every school where I taught had a piano. So there was lots of singing, cite reading, musing – music appreciation, and in one school we even had a – a harmonica band.

[2:31] The boards depended on the county super intendent to supervise, which they did as much as possible. But those type of exams carried the clop[?] I marvel that I coped with the cold, the inconveniences, at least they were to me cause I was a town girl. But I was young, the job was so important and hard to get. And I really needed it so I could save enough each year to attend summer school, get a better certificate, and teach in town was the aim. But it was a rewarding time. The parents were really concerned about their children and they cooperated. I have lots of friends now that were parents of the children, and friends of the now-adult children. [weird noise, maybe tape issues] I live in Kimball, Nebraska, and I have two children. I was born in Wood River, Nebraska, in 1913.

V.B.: Oh, thank you Jean, I thought your report was very good. [3:44] [various noises with the tape]

[mumbles] I thinks it's going – Yeah. [other person agrees] I am Violet Blodgett in the city of Kimball, for the purpose of interviewing Velma Evertson Kelso, respecting her experiences in rural schools. Today's date is February 17th, 1981. And now, what is your name?

V.K.: Velma Evertson Kelso.

V.B.: And you reside where?

V.K.: In Kimball – 310 North Oak.

V.B.: And – how many children have you had?

V.K.: We've had – we had two.

V.B.: And their occupations?

V.K.: Well our oldest boy, Ronald, Red as he's known, is a full-time pilot at sky-lab in Cheyenne. And our daughter, Amy Lee, is deceased, she died when she was about 21 years old.

V.B.: and where were you born?

V.K.: At Cambridge, Nebraska.

V.B.: And when?

V.K.: November 27, 1899.

V.B.: And – your education – you attended a rural school? [4:53]

V.K.: Oh, yes.

V.B.: And –

V.K.: Royal - rural school in Red Willow County. And the Northstar school there in Red Willow County. And then when we came up to the homestead North of Ushell[?] we – we attended District 18. That's where we had our 7th – had our 7th and 8th graders taken there.

V.B.: Do you remember the type of building you went to when you were in Red Willow County?

V.K.: Oh, yes, it was just – just – conventional building like they made and the one-room school houses, windows on both sides, entrance one end and blackboard at the other.

V.B.: [chuckles] And, I suppose you had electricity?

V.K.: No.

V.B.: [Laughs]

V.K.: Wasn't heard of, then.

V.B.: And – oh, what kind of desks did you have?

V.K.: We had the – we had – let's see, I [can't understand] when I was there. I believe we had the double desks there. Seemed to me like –

V.B.: Did you have a drinking fountain? Or a pail – [5:58]

V.K.: No, and by the way, we – they had a cistern. And – my sister and I both were victims of Typhoid fever when we were going to that school, and it was found that there was a dead rabbit in that cistern, and that was the reason for – for our typhoid fever. And that – I don't know whether they depended on the rainwater for that cistern or what. Or whether they filled it – a district, it was too small, but I do know that was – that was their diagnosis, that the well, that we took – that we drank out of – had a dead rabbit in it –

V.B.: [chuckles] Oh my goodness.

V.K.: We both nearly died of it – of typhoid – but we were the only two that – that took it.

V.B.: Do you remember what the heating was like in that school?

V.K.: One stove – just a stove.

V.B.: Burned coal and wood?

V.K.: Not wood, just coal.

[Can't understand the next two lines between the women]

V.B.: What was – did you take your lunch in a pail, or - ? [6:56]

V.K.: Oh, yeah. We walked about a half a mile.

V.B.: Can you recall the first day of – oh, we were just in grade school. Now, let's see, when you graduated from high sch- or, 8th grade, North of Ushnell[?], then you went to high school where?

V.K.: Kimball.

V.B.: Kimball High School. And did you take the –

V.K.: And I might tell you that I – when I started school, I started school – at Red Willow. And – and I was only 4 years old. And the first teacher I had – and I imagine she knew just what she was talking about – she called me a little nuisance. So [chuckles] my folks took me out of school and then I didn't go back to school until I was 5. [chuckles] And I can well-believe that I was a little nuisance.

V.B.: Then, which high school did you go to – here at Kimball?

V.K.: Here at Kimball. And the old – I graduated from the old – first building. The first building that they did here.

V.B.: and you took the Normal Training Course? [8:00]

V.K.: Oh, yes, we took our normal training course here, and Ms. Mackelrod[?] was our county super intendent. And we took all of our subjects, and then when we finished high school, we had to take a teacher's examination. And that covered every subject that we would teach in a school, but – mental arithmetic, arithmetic, physics, history, geography, everything. And that gave us a 3rd grade certificate. And then we were allowed to teach – I cannot remember – several years on that, and then we had to go and get several hours in college to renew – to renew that certificate. And I cannot remember how many hours, but it didn't seem like it was very many. Maybe 3 or 6 hours. And they didn't make it course compu- compulsory. And then, later on, of course, we had to have 2 years – 2 years of college to get our certificates renewed.

V.B.: Which colleges did you attend? [9:03]

V.K.: Oh, I went to Jr. College up here at – I graduated from Jr. College in Scottsbluff. And then I transferred to University of Wyoming and finished it, got my degree from the University.

V.B.: Do you remember your first school? You taught in rural schools after high school.

V.K.: Very first…

V.B.: Could you tell us something about your first one?

V.K.: Well, very well, I was in – I graduated in 1918, so that Fall I obtained a school in – Garfield, Nebra- or, Fo- Flowerfield D[Can't understand] County. And – we had – it was the old log – I had the log cabin, I was, they were still in a log cabin – in a log school. And – I had – I believe I had 16 or 18 students. And some of them, of course, the boys were larger than I was. However, I never ever had any trouble with

my – my big boys, they were all very loyal to me, and I often wondered how the schoolboard ever put up with me that first year because we had no training – we took normal training in high school, but actual teaching, we had none. We had to – to do it on our own, trial and error, that's what we had to do. And I had – every grade was separate, I had every - I had 8 grades, I had 8 grades [mumbling].

[10:39] But it was a marvelous neighborhood, we had – our water was – Mrs. T.U. Vantelt[?], lived right across the road from us. And she supplied our water, and of course it was in a bucket, with a big, long-handled dipper. And I remember very well in my teaching experiences when we got a big earthen jar with a faucet in the bottom of it, how happy we were about that because then they could fill that jar and our water would come out of the faucet that way, but it was all brought in, no water was [mumbles, can't hear]. And that year was the armistice, the old November 11th armistice was celebrated in – and we were called the – called out to Mother van Pelsing[?], she let us know. So, we didn't have any more school that day, we really celebrated, that was one outstanding - .

[11:32] Now, that was my first school, and I do remember this much, we had – we had a family that were not noted for their cleanliness, and we had a big ol' potbellied stove, and that building would be frigid in the morning when I got there, and of course we had our fires to build. And – we didn't bank our fires in those old buildings cause it wasn't safe. And we had to get there and get that room warmed up, and this family – in – that I said was not noted for cleanliness would come and we'd all be about froze. And we'd stand by those old fires and our – our tummies would just get burned up, then we'd turn around our backs. And – then we'd put our feet up, so they could get warm, and whenever their feet got warm, well – we almost had to open the windows. [chuckles] But it – that's been quite a few years ago, but I had a – had a marvelous year that year, and they supported me and encouraged me, and I think that was one reason why I continued my profession. However, I had always wanted to be a teacher from a little girl.

V.B.: Oh, wow. Well, did they use the building for anything besides school? Anything - [12:48]

V.K.: Uh, no, they had – Flowerfield was a mile-and-a-half west, and at that time they had a room for their Sunday school and what church services they had, so – so they had used this old log cabin till they got the new one over at Flowerfield. Eventually, the – the new building was built over at Flowerfield. The – the old site's still there, but I don't think the cabin's there anymore.

V.B.: Did you ever have any box socials or school programs or - ?

V.K.: Well, not so much there, because they did have the church building and all that they had over there. But in – in most of my schools that I did now – from Flowerfield – I was married, then – then we moved to Colorado. My husband got back from World War I, and we were married, and – oh, yes, and I want to say something else, too, there about our – contracts for our school. It was inserted in our contracts that if we were to marry during the school term, the contract was closed right now. No married teachers whatsoever. And, also, I wish I had saved my first certificate, perhaps our first contract, I might have it somewhere. That – what you did over the weekends and everything was included in that contract.

[14:30] Morally – if you slipped one bit morally they had the privilege of canceling your contract right now. Now that was the kind of contracts we teachers got. In those days, there wasn't anything left out.

And – in one way, I think it was alright, in another way, maybe it was just a little bit too aggressive. Anyway, they – they – we had to – well, our profession was honored, I think more when we –

V.B.: Oh, yes, I think so, too.

V.K.: when we had the original, I think that was it. Then, as I said, my husband came back, and he had taken a homestead in Colorado, 26 miles south of Kimball, so – he only had to live on it a little while, so when we went down there, there was – in that part of Colorado, in Weld county down there, there was certainly – very, very few teachers who would go out that far and teach because it was really out in the wilds of the prairies, and they – they were eager to even get a married teacher if they could get one. So when I – when we moved down there - I – they gave me the Indian Cave school, they just begged me to take it. So I did, and I had about 2 ½ miles to drive, but I had some experiences down there that I think would be very interesting. In the fall of the year, [can't understand] when school started, you know when the nights first begin to get chilly, I – I went to school early one morning, I always did go to school early, so I could get a fire or whatever else was available, get myself ready to teach.

[16:17] So, that morning, it was quite chilly the night before, and I dashed down to the ladies' room, which was of course an outdoor building, it wasn't like the Arnell[?], it was dark in there, and – I seated myself, and I hadn't mo- much more than done that when I looked in the corner, up on the seat about 6 inches from me, there was a big rattlesnake coiled right – right next to me. And if – if it –it was just a wonder to me that I didn't sit right on that rattlesnake. But he buzzed, and I buzzed, I got out of there. And of course we had a pitchfork and rocks, and the boys come and we get the snake taken care of. And then there was another sad incident – very, very saddened for a young teacher. Actually, I'll never forget it, it was this boy's first day of school, he had to help his daddy a couple of weeks before school started, so he couldn't start on the first day. But he was a very inventive child and he was always quite an outdoor boy, and he was always fixing his saddles or something a little different and then he would - he'd want the other boys to see it.

[17:32] So this day, the first day of school he came to school, he was 14 years old, and at noon – or, that morning, he tethered his horse down below so that he could eat grass. We had a barn, but it wasn't cold enough to put him in the barn, so he just tethered his horse so he could eat grass. And – it – noon, I noticed the children down – down around the horse, I didn't think much about it because – he was there and he was showing the boys something he had fixed on his saddle. And he – he mounted his horse, and of course with all the kids around this horse, the horse took off to run, he went one length of the rope, and he was frightened, and he turned and came the other length, and when he came to the next length, it threw him. And threw this boy – and there he lay on the ground, unconscious – we were 26 miles from town. I dashed down there, and I couldn't bring him to – I'd done everything with water. Tried water – everything. And – the Klein family lived just across the road, and Milly and Tish and her father. They lived about – I'd say about a quarter of a mile, maybe, from school. So I told the boys to go down there and get Milly as fast as we could with her car. So, we got him to Kimball, and then someone went over to his parents, the Robinson's, and got them. And – and we got – we got him to Kimball, I held him in the backseat, and we took him to Kimball as fast as we could. But, he died that night. Whether it was a broken neck, or something. And that was - something very sad to start out school with.

V.B.: Oh, I'm sure it was. [19:27]

V.K.: But that was what some of us teachers had to – had to do in early days. We didn't have a telephone to call an ambulance to come in. Maybe if he'd had help right away, you see – but there was that 26 mile ride over all dirt roads in the back end of a Ford. So that was – an experience I'll - that I shall always remember from my – from my teaching profession. It was the saddest thing, of course, that I had. And I – I taught in – oh, what district is that, is it 30th? District 30? – but – the –

V.B.: Georges?

V.K.: The Georges, you know, up in – up there, that's the – they had a beautiful school building up there. And, of course, we didn't have electricity or anything, and the water had to be brought, but I would like to – give credit to our school boards – I never had a school board in all my years of country school teaching that what – was the most cooperative people that ever was.

[20:35] It didn't matter what you needed, all you had to do was tell them, and – I never did have a school – the many schools that I taught that – that deprived the children of anything – that they needed. Now, some might've, I don't know. But my school boards were always very, very, very happy to get what we needed for the children in school. [long pause] And, of course – when I did taught in district 18 and 30, we had our literaries every – every month. And, of course, that was a community affair, it wasn't a school affair. Maybe the school kids would have one or two little numbers or something, but that was a project that the community took care of – the box socials and – and all the fun, and that was one time that we all looked forward to was once a month when we had our literary – our literary fun. And when I taught – begin teaching in – in the Kimball schools, I missed that more than anything – that close association with – with – with the school parents and with the community. That's – that's something that is lacking in city schools – it's – it's true that – that you have so many that perhaps you can't visit like you should, but in the country schools every child is an individual, every parent was an individual. And, you just knew and loved those people, which in the city, you're deprived of that because there's just – just too many to accomplish all that.

[22:17] [long pause] And, see that – oh, I've upset on the road to school in my car, I had that experience, too. Got in a rut with my old Model T and flipped it over.

V.B.: [chuckles] Oh, dear. You weren't hurt, though?

V.K.: [chuckles] We had good roads, I tell ya, there was mud deep, and when we had mud, maybe there's – trail nearly a foot deep, and you'd get your car in there and try to get it out, then it'd flip over.

V.B.: But you weren't injured, right?

V.K.: Huh?

V.B.: You weren't injured seriously?

V.K.: Well, I-I stop – I got – I did it in front of a house, and, yes, I still carry the scars. I had to climb out the back window. But he came out and helped me, and then I – called ahead and I had – my sister lived out there, she went in and had school that day, and happened to be on Friday the 13th.

V.B.: [Chuckles]

V.K.: But I was able to go back Monday.

V.B.: Mm-Hmm, well that's good. [chuckles] Can you think of any other interesting experiences you had?

V.K.: Well – yes, we had – we've had experiences with children that had – that were called "little dummies," and – nothing was wrong with them but their eyes and things like that, those – those are just regular things that come up through school. Oh, I might mention, too, about the awful dust storm. In the dirty thirties, the very first storm we had, I was teaching in District 18, and – I – I stayed all night with my – or, I – I lived with my sister and brother-in-law through the week, and – the school house was about a mile and a half – well, just across the wheat field – I'd say it was a mile and a quarter, and now this was the very beginning of the dirt storms.

[24:16] There was a big cloud that morning when I got started, it was along, about in March [?]. It – it was just a big, low cloud along the North and West of the place – that was about 12 miles North of Bushnell. And my brother-in-law said, "Velma, I wouldn't start this morning," he says, "I - don't like the looks of that cloud." Oh, I said, "I think maybe it's just a wind cloud." I said, "Who ever heard of staying at home from school because of a wind cloud?" Well, he said, "Do as you please," but he said, "I don't know whether I'd go or not." But I – started out, I got about halfway there, and this hit – this awful cloud of dust, and I didn't know – I guess I was closer to school than I was to the home place, and I – I struggled along till I got to the school house, and of course this school house had wheat fields all the way around it – so, you can imagine just how that dust was.

[25:18] I got into the school house, I opened the door, and I could not see the chalkboard on the other side – that building was so full of dust and dirt. I never experienced anything like that – that was the beginning of those terrible dust storms. Well, of course, none of the children came, and I just kept – I just kept waiting and waiting and thinking maybe it would go down, but I couldn't – it was just like a blizzard, you – only it was dirt, you couldn't see, and I thought, well, I just – cannot leave this building with it that way. And along about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, my brother-in-law came and – and picked me up, and took me home. I was there alone all day, none of the childrens come, of course. And – I tell ya, after that, I watched the dirt clouds, I didn't go out when there was – and – that – all that school house was so full of dirt because they weren't built to keep out dirt. It – it – it was just a terrible experience. And then, we'd have to keep – when there was dirt storms, we'd release – if we were at school, we'd find old rags and things. In fact, we kept a lot of old rags there that – we'd try and stuff around things so to keep the dirt down – out of the buildings. And those – those were bad days. Course, we had – we had blizzards, too, but the thing of dirt being that bad – kept children at home from school. Kids now-a-days can't really – can't – figure that out.

V.B.: [chuckles] Did you ever teach during any of the snow blizzards? [26:58]

V.K.: Oh, yes – yes, we - we – we'd always dismiss if we saw that it was getting bad. Either the parents would come after the children, we never – that was understood. When – these blizzards started, that if a blizzard started, the – the parents would come and get their children. We didn't have telephones in our school houses, of course, and – if it began to blow up, to look bad, even though it was 12 o'clock, you'd see the parents come to pick up the children. And that – that was one thing that was understood, that they had to come and get the children if it was bad. So – and, let me see now –

V.B.: Did you ever teach where they had – electricity in the school house? Or, did that come after your time in the rural schools? [27:49]

V.K.: No, let me see – no, I – I know, now, there - down there in your dad's district, I believe we had those gas lights, don't you remember – do you remember those gas lights with the – the carbine [?].

V.B.: – the carbine [?].

V.K.: Uh-huh. I think we had – we had some of those, now, and I believe up at – uh, district 30. But other than that, we just had lamps and lanterns, and things like that. We did have enough of them, so if we had a night, anything going on at night we had to [mumbles]

V.B.: Had to light them that way.

V.K.: We had a lot [can't understand]. That – I taught – I rode horseback – when I taught district 18, and I had about 7 miles to ride, and I had my saddle horse, and I – I rode back and forth – to school. I rode horseback.

V.B.: Oh. [28:49]

V.K.: And – yeah, I always rode horseback. One time I – I – started home from school, the wind was blowing, and – and I got down to a gate, I got off and I got on again and the – wind blew my coat, scared my horse, and he bucked me off, and I walked down to my brother Frank's and I said, "I'll never ride to school again," and, he took me home, and when I got home, my husband says, "you're gonna get back on that horse tomorrow morning and go to school." [chuckles] Which I did. He knew if I didn't get back on that horse again, I'd – I wouldn't want to ride. But – that's about the most exciting experience I had – the one time I got thrown off of the horse, but – we had to get back and forth someway.

V.B.: In your teaching, did you ever use – what type of fuel in the stoves? I mean – any cow chips or - ? [29:40]

V.K.: No, no, we never – we never did.

V.B.: You always had coal?

V.K.: We – we had coal. We had coal and – we – I was so happy when I had - a stove that I could dank the fire. Because sometimes I'd gone into a school house when it was 5 below zero, you know, if it's 30 below outside, and we used to have weather like that, we don't have weather that cold, I don't believe – you could remember, Violet, when we used to have all of that –

V.B.: Oh, yeah, the school's – the water froze overnight.

V.K.: And then, overnight, the school building and, if there was any water or anything left, it'd just be froze up harder than – a fruit batch[?], you know. But – when we had a stove that – they got the – they got those – those digger stoves that we could put a big sho- scuttle of coal in at night, just before we left, and shut our drafts up, and then in the morning, open them up and stir them a little bit, and then we'd have a warm fire. My, that was wonderful. And, of course, we had no janitors at all, the teacher was the janitor, she – but I do always had my boys who would carry in my coal. They were always good about that, we usually had a coal house. I don't know how long it had last now-a-days if we had coal houses outside that – we'd have our coal house along maybe with a barn or something like that to protect it. And the boys, they'd take turns and see that there was coal brought in for the morning. And I can't remember what we used for kindling, I suppose they did buy us kindling, too, we'd have to have kindling –

V.B.: Mm-hmm, to start the coal [31:18]

V.K.: To burn fires. So – we just experienced all the things that, I guess, maybe not like the pioneers, because we had pretty good buildings compared to what they had.

V.B.: Mm-hmm.

V.K.: We had pretty good buildings. The old log cabin was the – and the old log house, the old log school house in Flowerfield is the only one, and it was getting in pretty bad sha – shape, there – there was chinks where the air could come through, but - I think about the next year or two after I was up there, they moved to the new school house. But I was happy to think that I could – that I had taught in a log cabin. [chuckles]

V.B.: Log school house?

V.K.: Mm-hmm.

V.B.: And of course you had the regular program, now, subjects in your –

V.K.: Oh, now we – [Side 2 of tape ends at 32:10]

[3rd part of tapes]

V.B.: I think that's on, yeah.

V.K.: Oh – as I – as I started to say about our course of study about the different subjects, we had a course of study sent out by the state, and each – each grade had in that course of study what we had to cover – for that year. And – we had to follow that course of study very – very carefully. And we had county super intendents that would happen in on you, you never knew when they were coming.

V.B.: Oh, surprise visits. [0:35.2]

V.K.: Yes, they were a surprise. I was very fortunate to have such a wonderful county super intendent as Ms. Mackleroy – Rachel Mackleroy. And – but, she would come in and maybe they'd visit you a half a day, and – and they were the ones – they were your resource where you'd get help and – in covering your subject matter. If you had any problems – she'd help you figure them out, and – and – and they were really a coordinator for us. And I don't know what we'd done in the country schools without her – our county super intendents. And – we – we were very – always – it always irked me, as a teacher, that – our 7th and 8th graders had to come to Kimball and take examinations before they could enter into high school. They had to have a certain grade before they could go into high school, which always irked me because the kids in town never had to do that. And our little, old kids in the country – boy, they'd just work night and day and – and to get lined up for their examinations and all. And, I'm happy to say that I never did have one of them flunk. But – nevertheless, I always thought that was a little bit unfair because I think the whole county should've taken those county examinations, not only just the country children. It reflected on the country teachers, that's what it reflected on.

V.B.: [chuckles] [2:03]

V.K.: [chuckles] And I guess that's what irked me.

V.B.: Well, can you think of anything else that's special you would like to tell us?

V.K.: Well, I don't know, it seems like I've talked quite a while – quite a while. I've had – had – we –we had hot lunches in our schools, too, but it wasn't for [can't understand] by the State. The members in our community would bring food and we'd make soup at noon on our old pot-bellied stoves. So – as a rule, our kids had pretty good lunches. And – course, we had – we had lots of fun at lunch time, we all ate together, you know, and – that was one time that we – we had lots – a lot of enjoyment, and of course at our recesses and all, it was expected – I went out and played with them, just the same as if – you went out and you supervised them at recess-time. We didn't have any aids, of course – [chuckles] – we were right there, we had to be there, then sometimes accidents would happen, but were unforeseen, you know.

V.B.: Mm-hmm. [3:15]

V.K.: And – but, teaching was always a great enjoyment for me, and even when I retired, I miss it so much. I miss – course, my later years in town was all first graders, which – which I loved, and – since I was from the old school of phonics, that was the one that they bestowed on me, was the first grade, because – I had taught phonics all those years. And that was – and I loved to teach them, and – so that was why I got first grade. I do – I did love the 7th and 8th graders, but I did love the 1st grade, too. So I've had a full life of teaching, and I wouldn't – I don't regret a day of it. And I do think that it's a wonderful field for anyone that wants challenges, they can sure get them when they teach school.

V.B.: [chuckles] [4:05]

V.K.: And our kids – our kids need those challenges so bad. So, maybe that's about all I can –

V.B.: Well, thank you so much, Mrs. Kelso. Glad you have helped us in this project.

[switches to next speaker at 4:22]

: Let's see, do we need a megaphone or anything?

V.B..: No, it's right here. [mumbling] they're going, now. I am Violet Blodgett in the city of Kimball for the purpose of interviewing Luella Lockwood Peterson, respecting her experiences in rural schools. This taping is a part of a project called the Country School Legacy, humanities on the frontier. It is sponsored by the Mountain Plains Library Association and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This tape will be placed in a depository in a college library, probably Kearney State College for use by future students of American culture. Today's date is February 17th, 1981. And now, would you tell us about yourself?

L.P.: Well, I was born in Portland, Oregon. And – I'll just read from my book. We came to Nebraska in – Well, maybe you want my Birthday.

V.B.: [chuckles] [5:22]

L.P.: In 1906, and we came to Nebraska in 1910, when I was 4. We traveled by train, I recall no more. Papa took a homestead on the South divide, with a team of horses it was a long ride. Papa built us a house out of Green lumber, it kept out the rain and some of the thunder. The water in barrels he had to haul, for a very good neighbor, Mr. Burt Paul. He paid 400 dollars when he filed for the hills and hollers, we broke out 20 acres and sold it for 1400 dollars. In this place I remember, Papa taking the wagon and walking along with me a taggin', we'd come back with it piled high with cow chips, big, little, and dry.

These were used for fuel to bake our bread and keep the rooms warm over our head. We had prunes, dried apples, antelope meat, brown sugar and tavern[?] milk was a special treat. Stop. [click on tape recorder]

V.B.: It's going. [6:27]

L.P.: A year later we moved near the Wyoming line, we had a four room cement house this time. My first sister, Milva, was born in this place. No doctor came, stork delayed[?]. The nearest school was 6 miles away, so to a neighbor's place I went to stay. I cried and cried, I missed my brothers, but I soon got acquainted with the others. It was a 2 day trip when papa hauled wheat, in the winter's snow or the summer's heat. Pine Bluffs was 26 miles away, which wouldn't mean very much today. The school was a problem, without a doubt, so the next fall we just up and sold out. When I was 7, we moved to Kimball, 3 miles North, George and I walked to school, back and forth. Dad paid Frank Leech $1100 to build a house over a hole, While Ched Kron gave him 75 cents an hour for shoveling coal. We liked - this place up on the hill, papa worked hard, his job to fill [?]. He ran the Dray Line[?] in the town and dug basements five foot down. He had 4 hired men upon his team, he had four teams of horses, too. My mother baked and cooked and then had to wash for all those men. [stop recording]

[7:55] In 1918, women were fighting for vote for all. I remember a skit I was in at the fraternal hall. I wore a black satin skirt, a man's shirt and hat. We won the right to vote, so that was that. Frank Jr. came in 1919, the 7th of May. I was old enough, then, the children to stay. I learned to cook and make my first batch of bread, they ate it even if it was as heavy as lead. We were 3 miles from school that fall, so papa bought a buggy and a horse that was tall. All the neighbor kids piled in, too. It's a wonder that buggy didn't break in two. My mother would sew far into the night, she had a kerosene lamp for her light. At – Christmas time I'd help stuff many a toy, a gift for each girl and also each boy.

[8:53] And I might say, I was the oldest of 16 children. We were a very happy family. We always had plenty to eat, sometimes we wished we had a few more nice clothes, but – we attended church - regularly. And we were a very happy family, and whenever another baby came along, we just moved over and made room for it. I remember when I was in high school I came home and told my dad, "Oh, I need a new pair of shoes so bad, you suppose I could have a new pair of shoes?" He says, "Well, let's see." He sat down, took the shoe in his hand and he said, "Luella, you do need a new pair of shoes." But he said, "With this new baby and all, you think you could possibly get by one more week? You bring me the shoe stand, and I'll see if I can't fix this sole on here." I said, "Yes, I think I can get along for another week." My dad was like that, we always could talk things over and never any tears or screaming or yelling, I understood why I couldn't have a pair of shoes. [chuckles] Well, let me see – [tape stopped]

[10:24] Along about now, it became the fad, to call our parents mom and dad. I don't know just when mama and papa went out of style, but names do change after a while. We called our parents mom and dad, too, they answered same as they used to do. The fad caught on, and everybody did, and the young folks called each other kid. The summer I was 16, I worked for Mrs. Celeber. Even today I still do love her. I managed the cooking and cleaning and all, and saved my dollar a day for school at fall. The next two years, normal training I too,. Telva Smith taught us everything in the book. I got along fine with professor Biel, but the boys rotten egged his automobile. I made my own graduation hat and dress, dad sold a hog to buy my shoes, no less. This was the spring of 1924, it was hard to get credit at the store.

[11:25] That fall I started my teaching career, I walked from Celeber's, which was near. I kindled the fire and swept the floor and shoveled the snow away from the door. 80 dollars a month I received for my labors, 20 dollars went for board and room at the neighbors. I learned a lot that very first year, perhaps more than the pupils did, I fear. To go to school in Greeley finally came to pass, I loved every minute of every class. But Ruth Allen cried and cried, she seemed so far away from her boyfriend Walter Dunbar. Then I taught the Oliver School a year, I often rode the train, it would stop near. After that, I went to Kearney Normal a spell, then took the hoteling-school in the Dell.

V.B.: Now, Mrs. Peterson – when you were teaching what type of buildings did you teach in? [12:25]

L.P.: All the buildings I taught were just one room school houses with a little hall in the back where the children hung their wraps, and the two little buildings out back which you had to go out and clean up once in a while. The water, I carried from the neighbors across the road, had one pail of water each day and a dipper. We didn't know anything about paper cups and – paper towels, and that kind of stuff in those days. Everybody carried their own lunch, and once in a while, some of us would get together and bring a big kettle of stew or something which we could put on top of the heater and warm it up and have a – hot dish of soup for lunch. This paper says electricity, we didn't know what that meant.

V.B.: [chuckles] [13:22]

L.P.: We didn't have many things at night. If we had meetings at night, people would bring their lanterns or – rail lamps or something. But ordinarily during the school day we didn't need it. The – coal, of course, was kept outside in a – coal bin, I had to carry that in and take care of my fires. I walked about a mile to school, didn't mind it at all. I remember the very first day that I – came in the school room, I was a little apprehensive, you didn't know just exactly what to do. I walked in there, and up on the board, the president of the school board had written, "Welcome, Teacher." Oh, that helped so much. And then I didn't have one bit of trouble. We just got along fine.

V.B.: And, of course, no – discipline problems in your school time? Cor – I think coming from a family as large as yours, probably you had a good attitude anyway that helped you. [14:20]

L.P.: I loved every one of my pupils, I didn't have a bit of trouble in discipline. I did hear something years later – somebody told me about a man that had told them that, when he was a little boy, about making spitballs. And I laughed, and I said, "Did he tell you what teacher had him do that?" She said, "No." Well, I said, "That teacher was me," and this was such a cute little second grader, but he did like to throw spitballs. So, one night, I said, "Billy, you like to make them so well, I think you better stay in after school tonight and I would like for you to make me 100 spitballs." "Oh, yeah, uh-huh, I will." So he did real fine, he made about 10 or 12 and got along real good. Then he run out of spit. And he just worked and worked, and they were getting so big, and I said, "No, Billy, that won't work, they've gotta be better than that." Then he started to cry, and I think finally I must've let him use a little bit of water, but anyway he had to make 100 spitballs. Well, he remembered that.

V.B.: [chuckles] [15:45]

L.P.: But I didn't have trouble with discipline in those days – we just got along fine.

V.B.: Did – was your – was your school used for any community activities?

L.P.: Mostly just our programs. We usually had a Thanksgiving program, and maybe a Christmas program, and then some of the schools I taught we had pie socials and – where they sell the pies or baskets. And – we didn't have much with other schools, but within our own school on Fridays, we'd have a spell-down and – lots of times for opening exercises, I had mental arithmetic. I would say, "What's 2 + 2 + 8 – 4" and they'd answer. And they really enjoyed that - that was - they thought that was fun. Then about that time, the radio came in, so we would pretend that we were having a radio program. And I would assign different ones at different times on a Friday afternoon, "now you're going to have a program." So they would figure out something to make a little speech of some kind, or reading, or something that way. So we managed to have a pretty good time – I can't remember just what else to tell you. We did have phonics in those days, and they quit them for a few years, and now it's all back again.

V.B.: Of course, did you have an art class? [17:31]

L.P.: Always, one day a week, we had art. And – we would have something for the younger ones and something for the older ones. Of course, we had all 8 grades, so they couldn't all have the same thing. But – we had art, and around Christmas time we'd have a little sewing – and they enjoyed that, very much.

V.B.: did they have to memorize any poems, like - ?

L.P.: Oh, yes. First when we had programs, they did a lot of memorizing, but they memorized the old poems from Longfellow, [can't understand], that's what we used to teach in those days. [chuckles]

V.B.: And – of course you had grammar, I suppose.

L.P.: Oh, yes.

V.B.: Was yours after the Hanchel[?] grammar or during his time?

L.P.: Don't remember – what you mean.

V.B.: You know, we had those old Hanchels[?] where we had to –

L.P.: Oh, yes, yes.

V.B.: do the – what was that? [18:38]

L.P.: We had to diagram sentences, and all that. Oh, yes, that's the way we taught them to do it. Mm-hmm. – I had one little girl one time, she was a 6th grader, but she was way back in her – arithmetic. And I had to put her back sometimes in the 4th grade classes to recite and then again in the 6th grade – and she was quite hurt, sometimes I'd even keep her in at recess, but I told her, "Ruth, I am not keeping you in to punish you. You must learn this or you'll never get through the 8th grade. So I want you to take some of the 4th grade work and we'll work on up until you can get it." Then years later, she thanked me for it. But at the time, her father was on the school board, and they didn't think it was quite fair that I'd do this to her when he was director. But I explained to her, I'm certainly not punishing you, I want you to get it.

V.B.: [chuckles] It's good that you did. Now, can you think of any other interesting school room experiences? [19:39]

L.P.: Oh, I don't believe so, not for sure.

V.B.: Well, we would like to know a little about your own family. How many children do you have?

L.P.: Well, I have 4 children.

V.B.: And what are their occupations?

L.P.: They – all - went to college. Allen graduated from – Denver, DU, and he is an appraiser, lives in Colorado. Berdeen got her degrees at – Greeley, and she is a Head Start consultant, she travels all over the United States to the colleges and different schools to set up the classes for the – teachers – to teach pre-school children. Very interesting work. My boy, Karol, graduated from Lincoln, and he went right out to San Francisco, and went to work in – Bank of America. And he is now a business manager for 40 lawyers. And, we had one boy that stayed on the farm, he's a farmer and rancher, so he took over our farm when we retired and moved into Kimball. So he's been out there now for 20 years.

V.B.: Is there anything else? Well, thank you so much Mrs. Peterson, for making this interview. [this interview ends at 21:17]

V.B.: I am Violet Norbert Blodgett and I reside on a farm South of Kimball, Nebraska, along the Colorado line. I am a widow, I have two children, a boy, Roy, and a daughter Luanne. My daughter is an accountant in Denver and my son, Roy, is married and has two little boys and he does the farming on my farm. I – I attended Kimball County Rural Schools all of my grade school days. I graduated from Kimball County High school in 1935, and then I went to Kearney State Teacher's College for two years. The school which I attended most of my grade school days, in Kimball County, was built for us Norbert children. In those days, the school came to the child more so than going - the child going long distances to a school. [22:30]

And since the school in my home district was 5 miles away, and across the track, and up a great big hill, they decided that – they – my sister and I were old enough to go to school, to build another school in that district. This was a wooden building, and of course we had no electricity. The desks were single, as I remember, we had – a crockery drinking fountain and everyone brought his own tin cup, which was hung on a nail in the hallway. We were heated with a coal heating stove. Each child brought his lunch to school – in a pail, most likely. My sister and I sometimes shared the same bucket. Of course, on those days when we had sea - peanut butter sandwich, or something I didn't like, then we would have to have an individual bucket. [23:38]

I lived a mile and ¾ from school, and when the weather was good, we often walked. But of course my father took us to school when it was stormy. My first teacher was Louise Painter and in this interview project, I interviewed Ella Lockwood Peterson, who was teaching at the other school in district 21 when I was in the first grade. And of course one of the things she mentioned, which I had always remembered, was the fact that Louise would often ride the train from Kimball to Oliver, and then walk the nearly three miles up to our school. Today it's impossible to even get a train ride in Kimball County. And then, at night, she would walk back down to highway 30 and hitch a ride – and in those days it was safe to ride with anyone who was going toward town. Now-a-days, one would hesitate to ride with strangers. [24:50]

[long pause]

Our school was never used as a community center. But – the South 21 school – but the North 21 school, in a – in a few years, they enlarged the building – made a new building, which had a basement and an upstairs, and that was used for the literaries and other things for community interest. And – I can remember these when I was a little older – groups from the whole [something] Valley came to like literary, and maybe we had a dance, with Mr. Joe [something] playing the accordion, or a card party, or a program in which the children might take part, but – not always. I cannot remember any of the – box socials and pie suppers, those were really in days before my school days, I think, for the most of them. And our building was never used for a Sunday school, although district 25, which was on the other side, South side of where I lived, had Sunday school. I was never sorry that I attended a country school, and I always felt in high school that maybe those of us who had had a country school education actually knew more about some of the subjects than the city children, for instance, geography, of course we had a more individual type of attention in school where the larger classes didn't have that. [26:46]

And of course I remember – well the County Superintendent when I was in grade school, Rachel Mackleroy, she had red hair. Then after I graduated – from 8th grade, I went to Kimball to high school, and while I was in high school, Velma Kelso, who I interviewed, taught our school and my brothers were her pupils – were among her pupils. I forgot to say, during my grade school days, my only sister and brothers were my mostly classmates until in 1929, in March, a family moved out from Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, and from then through the 8th grade we had the Valuskas, as well as the Norberts, in the South Oliver school. [27:45]

After high school, I attended Kearney State College for two years, and then I became a rural school teacher. My first school was district 22 in Kimball County, Nebraska. This building was a cement, block building that and no longer stands – it was a small school, one family moved away shortly after school started, and then, before long, another one, and that left just Lieberyer[?] and I to finish the school term. One of the things I remember most about that school was the fact that Mary Prauleer, whose husband Peter had been a teacher of my own mother - I boarded with her and of course was the mother of the only child. She felt that in the cold weather that we should have something warm, so every day, in a thermos bottle, she would fix soup, and to this day I do not appreciate soup after a year of soup every day. But it was very kind of her to think of this. [29:05]

Then I went to district 24, to Prairie Dale school, this was a wooden structure and still stands today. Only recently was the building sold because they no longer hold school there. At Prairie Dale school, I had mostly Youngs' and cousins of mine, the Pillipses, came a while, and Charlotte Pitts joined us later. We did not have any - social gatherings at the school, occasionally, the school was used for church – a revival type church meetings, and we did have a small Christmas program. [30:02]

Then I went to district 25, Prairie View. Now, this school in earlier years, was also a Sunday school on Sunday and church was held there. I interviewed Vinda Russell Phillips, who's now my aunt, who taught in the days when Church and Sunday school were held there. That was the largest school that I taught, I believe, my grades – er – rural schools did not have too many pupils. The children all either were brought by their parents or rode a horse to school. In none of my schools did we have water – piped water, there was a well on the grounds of district 25, a pump type, but it was contaminated. The water smelled so terribly we couldn't even have it in the building. So that we brought water in buckets, a family who came the furthest always drove, so they were the ones that usually brought the water. [31:15]

Of course, during the winter months, the school got very cold at night. I can remember that we often had any water that was leftover would be frozen the next morning when you came to school. Now this school no longer exists. Then I thought I had finished my teaching for a while, I had taught 6 years, but about October of the following year, a school up north of Bushnell needed a teacher – their teacher had quit and gone back home in – oh, I think it was down around McCook or somewhere quite a ways away. And so I went up and finished the term at district 20, North of Bushnell. It – [this side of tape ends at 32:06]

[Side 4 starts at 7 seconds]

V.B.: District 20 was a wooden structure with a basement, a pipe-less furnace, and a well on the grounds. But during the cold winter, the well froze, and we had to carry water for a while. I remember that the – older children enjoyed soap operas on the radio, of course we didn't have television in those days yet, and would volunteer to go after the water at recess so that they could listen to the soap operas at the neighbor's. There was a neighbor that lived quite close, about a couple of blocks away, perhaps. And – so they would always volunteer so that they could go up and listen to part of this soap opera during recess. All the children at that school came by automobile or walked – the close ones walked and the rest had a ride. And, of course in all my teaching days, most of them, with the exception of district 25, I boarded in the district. Now-a-days, teachers wouldn't think anything of driving 8 miles, but in those days we did. However, I thought that I taught in a lackluster type time, really, because – automobiles were very popular so – so the schools were not the centers of attraction anymore, the town was, and we did not have the use – the public use of the building that they had had in pioneer times because things were held in – in Kimball for instance rather than in the school house. And school, was primarily used just for school, in my day as a teacher.

[2:08] I have enjoyed interviewing all of these teachers. It has brought back many memories that I had sort've forgotten. I thought it was unusual that 5 of the 6 of us are widows. And, of course, all but me live in Kimball town now. I called another farmer teacher whom I used to board with, Helen Selervert Grubb, because I felt that I had all women on my interviews, and it would've been nice if we could've found a male. But, neither of us could think of a living male teacher that had taught in rural schools in Kimball area. So I hope that you have enjoyed these interviews with Vinda Russell Phillips, Gwendolyn Willman Shroeder, Jean Irwin Long, Velma Evertson Kelso, and Luella Lockwood Peterson as much as I have. [noises with tape recorder]

[3:32] Back in my mother's school days, rural school days in Kimball County – school was only held like three or four months each year, and the children sort've forgot over the long vacation what they had learned before. So many times they took over the same grade year after year, same book. In her day, school boy – the older boys in school would be dismissed for a prairie fire. These were often set from sparks from the railroad and traveled clear across into Colorado from the Union Pacific. Of course, the land wasn't plowed up and there weren't any roads to speak of, so that by the time I became a school child, these experiences were no longer available. Also, in my interviewing, I could not find anyone who had burned cow chips in their school, which my mother often told about in their school days. So, times have really changed, and we in Kimball County now have no more rural schools operating. We all ride the bus to either Kimball, Bushnell, or Dick's. And my own children went to Dick's public school after my daughter had finished 8 years in a rural school, so I have been associated with rural schools most of my life. First, my own going to school in rural schools, then teaching, and then my children. And, of course,

before that, my mother. So I have a very great interest in rural schools and I think that this is a marvelous project. [monologue ends at 5:27]

[new interview starts at 5:33]

V.B.: I am Violet Blodgett, and with me today is Louise Glubber Macenduffer Phillips, and now she will tell us something about her - immediate family and family history. Now, where do you live?

L.G.P.: Deets[?], Nebraska

V.B.: On a farm, right?

L.G.P.: Yes.

V.B.: And – how many children do you have?

L.G.P.: I have 5 children.

V.B.: And would you like to tell us what their occupations are?

L.G.P.: Most of them live on a farm and do farming or ranching.

V.B.: Oh, really? [chuckles] They stayed with the rural life. And – let's see, where were you born?

L.G.P.: I was born in Chicago, Illinois.

V.B.: And when?

L.G.P.: 1909.

V.B.: Now could you tell us something about your education? Where you attended school? Like, you graduated from high school -

L.G.P.: High school, yes. I graduated from Sterling, Logan County high school in Colorado. Armed with a third grade certificate which I gained through taking the examinations. 20 hours of college work, really. I taught at a school East of Pete's called the [something] school, with a salary of 90 dollars per month. Should I just go on?

V.B.: Yeah, just –

L.G.P.: I paid 30 dollars a month for board, and I had no car. And I'd come to school carrying a lunch. I was 18 years old and my 8th grade student was 15.

V.B.: [chuckles]

L.G.P.: And I had 5 children from one family and one other child that I taught at this time, I just taught one year in this school. [noises] In applying for a school, I got La Vista, the schools that needed teachers from the County Super intendent. And then sometimes I had to walk across fields to interview secretary of the school board who was plowing or working in the field, and leave him my written application after I had made as good a personal appearance as I could. I had no experience whatever, and – [unintelligible]. The school is the social center of the community, the teacher would prepare programs for every holiday, and the program was followed by pie suppers and box suppers and stuff to raise

money for the things that the school needed. In Colorado I taught in one school with a dirt floor, almost no books, and I bought my own busy-work material. Paid for it myself, of course.

V.B.: Let's see, you had an 8th grader in your first school. Did he have to go to the county examinations?

L.G.P.: Yes. All 8th graders had to take a county examination and pass it.

V.B.: This was at the county seat, I presume.

L.G.P.: Yes.

V.B.: Were those examinations hard?

L.G.P.: They were quite difficult, I thought, we spent quite a bit of time preparing for them, you know, drilling the children on certain things, and they were in every subject. [9:30]

V.B.: And of course they had the opportunity to retake them if they didn't pass the first time?

L.G.P.: Not until they'd had another year of school.

V.B.: Oh, they just gave them once a year?

L.G.P.: Just once a year, and if they didn't pass them, then they had to go back and take the 8th grade over.

V.B.: Oh, I think we had a double trial in Nebraska when I was in the 8th grade, you know. If you didn't pass the first time you had a second chance yet that year.

L.G.P.: No, this seemed to be the way because I know that I had some repeaters. I stayed more than one year, and once in a while there were some repeaters, once in a while, not many.

V.B.: Did you ever have any spell-downs or cyphering contests?

L.G.P.: Oh, yes. We had spell-downs and [something], but it was just Friday afternoons.

V.B.: And with your own school or with other schools?

L.G.P.: If there was any rural school that was close, but most of them were quite far.

V.B.: Especially in Colorado.

L.G.P.: Yes.

V.B.: Where the hill country made a difference.

L.G.P.: That's Right.

V.B.: Did you do any singing in your schools? [10:38]

L.G.P.: Yes, I played the piano, and we had music in the mornings. We also went out to the flagpole and saluted the flag, then we came in and had the morning song.

V.B.: Did you have any art in your country school?

L.G.P.: Oh, we had lots of art because that was one thing that the children enjoyed so much. While the – while the materials were scarce, we usually found something to do for art that the children would all enjoy.

V.B.: And did – did you do a lot of memory work? Like poems memorized?

L.G.P.: Quite a bit, yes – we did quite a bit.

V.B.: So that those grown-up children remember those poems all their lives [chuckles]

L.G.P.: Probably they did.

V.B.: And – from Colorado, then, you went up into Nebraska to teach?

L.G.P.: Yes. I taught just 2 years in the rural schools – in Nebraska. One was near Bridgeport, and one was on Schuler Ranch. I taught my own children and one or two other neighbor children.

V.B.: Were those quite modern schools or still – [11:48]

L.G.P.: They were very nice schools, we had to build a fire in the morning when we got in – and - in the school near Bridgeport. But in the school on the Randal Ridge there was a furnace in the basement, so the school was always warm when I went there in the morning.

V.B.: Oh, what type of fuel did they use to heat that?

L.G.P.: It was – it was a propane, a gas furnace –

V.B.: It –

L.G.P.: Oil burning, I expect it was.

V.B.: In Colorado, what types of stoves did you have?

L.G.P.: You always had to build your own fire right as you got in to school. You had to get to building one before the children came in and sometimes that was put on the contract. Another thing that was put on the contract was that you must be out on the playground with the children. And that was a must, all of the recesses, things like that had to be supervised. Which is good, because a lot of trouble could be –

V.B.: Be avoided. And how many years altogether did you teach in rural schools?

L.G.P.: In rural schools…oh, I suppose maybe ten. [13:02]

V.B.: About 10 years?

L.G.P.: Yes, but I taught 32 years altogether.

V.B.: And some of that was in town schools?

L.G.P.: Oh, yes, uh-huh.

V.B.: And – you taught in rural schools after you were married as well as – before, right?

L.G.P.: Yes

V.B.: Can you think of any other exciting or important events that you would like to tell us?

L.G.P.: Well, I don't think I had any exciting events at all with the schools that I was in.

V.B.: Let's see, then, your first year of teaching was what year?

L.G.P.: high school…

V.B.: When did you graduate?

L.G.P.: It was – 1928, I'm quite sure.

V.B.: Oh, 1928 – was your first year, right?

L.G.P.: Right

V.B.: And –

L.G.P.: Then I skipped 10 years to raise my family, and then I went back to teaching in a rural school. Again, I had an emergency certificate because of World War II –

V.B.: Oh, World War II, uh-huh. [14:20]

L.G.P.: Yes, and I had an emergency certificate, and that's when I taught up in Nebraska.

V.B.: Oh, uh-huh. Then, from country school, where did you take a vacation before you went to town school to teach again, or did you just continue right on.

L.G.P.: Well, I missed 10 years, as I said, and then I came back to rural schools in Colorado again, for a time.

V.B.: You were living in Colorado, I presume.

L.G.P.: Yes, just four years, and then I went over to a consolidated school, had many buses bringing in the children and I taught the 3rd grade.

V.B.: 3rd grade, oh, uh-huh.

L.G.P.: From then on, I got in mostly city schools or county town schools.

V.B.: Well, thank you so much, Mrs. Phillips. [Interview ends at 15:14]

V.B.: This is Violet Blodgett again, completing this tape - recording. A few more thoughts on the schools. At its peak, Kimball county had 42 school districts, some with two school houses, a few with two teachers, as district 23 Southwest of Bushnell, where they even had the 9th and 10th grades in two classrooms. A few buildings still stand. When the dis-distict- the districts were dissolved, the schools were sold. Many were moved away and remodeled for homes, shops, and some were torn down. The Plains Historical Society has plans to move the oldest school building still standing and renovate it. It was built in 1891. It stands in a field, along the road, about 7 miles south of Dicks, Nebraska. Unfortunately, the history hasn't been researched, but it will be as the project progresses. The toilets and flagpole have been gone for many years. This is a typical, One-room school – rectangular, three windows on each side, the chimney in one end, and the door in the other. There is a little alcove –a – a – porch, or whatever, very small. It faced the south. I think this building is in - on its original location. However, some years

later, another modern school house was built with a basement, much larger, with – anti-rooms upstairs. But this building has been demolished some years ago.

[17:24] This school, I believe, is in district 8 – was district 8. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to get a-hold of any old-timers to confirm this. I don't know exactly how many years they used the small building before the big one was built. The building, of course, is now someone's personal property, but the society – historical society still plans to acquire it. I would say it's about – hum – oh, approximately 19 by 27 foot – for the size of the classrooms. Of course, there was only one door and one room. It was a wooden structure, the foundation was stone – blocks, evidently cut from native stone. Hence the typical V-roof. And, of course, the outhouses, playground equipment, had long been gone. And you cannot tell what color the building was. Probably, it had – a shed, but we do not know. I do not think there was a teacher [something].

[18:55] And, of course, as we in the historical society look into this, we will probably find a lot of interesting things to place in this old school. In Kimball County, the records of the schools are – somewhat poorly kept, in a way, but - the county super intendant's office does have some records available. [long pause] I – I wish that I had been able to contact more teachers, but this seems like this is a poor time of year. And, of course, the cold weather was a little bad for my polaroid camera, and the pictures I took are not first quality. I'm looking forward to getting to see this program next summer. And – if you have any more questions I could help you with, I would be happy to do so. And – I guess that will be all for my report. [monologue ends at 20:15]