

NELL WOOD SMITH

Interviewed by:

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Oral History Project

Latah County Museum Society

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I. Index

NELLIE WOOD SMITH

Bovill; b. 1892

homemaker

1.5 hours

minute page

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Side C (continued)

babies around Bovill that it would make Teddy Roosevelt happy. Knowing by a baby's cry when to pick it up. Idea that cats could steal baby's breath. Had to be careful about baby getting colic from fresh air; hot water bottle treatment.

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She heard of a baby raised on mare's milk, crossing the plains. Mother's needlework was for herself, not for income.

with Sam Schragar

September 22, 1975

II. Transcript

SAM SCRAGER: This interview with Nell Smith was made at her home in Bovill on September 22, 1975.

NELL SMITH: ..most of it before I came here, then I began to learn it when I was just a little kid. ^{cause} Mother always did that work, so much. Their mother and their grandmothers, you know, were always doing something like that. They never sat down with their hands empty or idle. They ^{er} going all the time they were visiting or talking, their hands went in ^{to} some kind of work. I tried to get that pillowslip - I just laid it out here the other day...

S.S.: Now what were the different kinds of work again?

N.S.: Well, there was embroidery, and knitting, croch~~e~~t, tatting, and this weaving - they had a little frame board, you know, that they ^{laced} the twine went on to. They made so many tidies and hot mats and things - hot dish mats. And it was at the time that the CCs were here - then, that we made those. Maybe you've heard of them - the CCs?

S.S.: Un-huh. You made them for the CCs?

N.S.: No. We made 'em. But after they'd - you know, they had balls and balls of twine - great big balls of string that they'd mark out the spot that they had cleaned from your wild gooseberry - what's it called?

S.S.: Rib^{es}.

N.S.: Rib^{es}. I had forgotten the name. And then stake it off and the next fella would work up to it and they would try to clean ^{out} all the Ribbes around that area.

S.S.: So they had a twine that they brought into the area? And that's what you used?

N.S.: Well, then they'd go on to the next one and probably they'd forget, they'd get lost with their twine or go to lunch or to supper or something. And the next time start in some-
place else. And I know a lot of the folks found balls or half balls of that string in the woods where they had been working.

S.S.: Well, would they use that, for - for macrame or what?

N.S.: You mean the people here?

S.S.: Yah, what would they use the twine for?

N.S.: No, we had frames, whatever size we wanted. I think that's what they call the macrame now. But we just called it mats, I think.

S.S.: What'd you make out of that? Place mats or what?

N.S.: Anything you wanted. Placemats (and the things for the back of your chairs, for protection, hot dish mats for on the table, and lots of them. They even made bedspreads of it. And those were all - you see, they were strings put across and then was put the other way - would cross.

S.S.: Would people ever dye the material first? Or just use it as the color?

N.S.: No, they used the white bedspread. And, I don't know, there was one lady that her husband, that made an awfully pretty bedspread but I've forgotten whether they had it trimmed in any color - a touch or it or not. But then it was made of a ball of that twine. He found it cached in - stuck into the woods.

S.S.: What color was the twine?

N.S.: Well, it was supposed to be white, but it was kinda a beige white, or eggshell ^{almost} type.

These strings, you know, were put across at nails at each side, and you hooked them on these nails back and forth. And they were oh, about - well, it all depends on how big you want your squares between them. You could make them quite a ways apart or you could make them just very small, whatever size you put your nails in there. And then that one diagonal - I mean the longitude and the latitude of the thing. Then you go along and hook across the corners of each place ^{where} they crossed and tie that knotted. And tie that good and strong and onto the next one. And keep on until you tied that all solid. And then you would go to work with the scissors. When you got through, turn it over and take about half of it and clip it with the scissors and that made a puff ball where each one of those crossings was. Now isn't that what they call macrame now?

S.S.: I'm not sure how macrame is done. I think, it's similar. It sure is similar, anyway.

N.S.: Well, I haven't seen any of it. I haven't had any experiences yet – I haven't been out anywhere lately where they have been sewing or doing that kind of work. No sit still Ernie, OK? You sit still now. Don't run around. Where are you going Ernie? Are you going in the kitchen? Oh. Well, lets – now that's not the way to the kitchen.

Well, oh, sometimes they would ^{make} scarves of it or they could make, you know, the ^{woven} bonnets or anything like that, you know. There was so much of it that, oh, it seemed like the woods were full of the twine. And everybody was making something of twine.

S.S.: Was that partly 'cause there was so little money at the time, during the depression?

N.S.: Well, it was just something just laying there and probably going to waste. In time it would all weather – it'd be weather-beaten and everything if it layed there. When they had finished that certain area and left it and gone to the next, then the CC had gone then, about that time. After they left, why, of course, ^{just} it layed there, and anybody that found one, a cone of it, would pick it up and bring it on in. And well, the people were thrifty enough that just looked like a shame to leave that lay there and go to rot, you know.

S.S.: Well, what do you think was the most popular of the different handwork? Was knitting the most popular? Is that what people did the most?

N.S.: Well, a whole lot depends on the person. Some people took to knitting, some took to embroidering, and ^{all} like that. And some people can do all those things. I could, I know. I could embroidery and knit and crochet and tatt. I could do all those things myself. This drawn work too. All this drawn work – they draw the threads in a piece of material, and then you embroidery into those things. There's an old lady here, she was getting up in years, but she didn't let it bother her any. She

was a live-wire, just up and going, you know. Busier than a bird dog. She was a German lady and that counts for part of it. But she said that whenever – when she was little – her mother taught her to knit. Gee, I think, it was about four years old she learned to knit. Anyhow she said anytime that their hands were empty, that they had nothing to do, they got their knitting out. And they knitted their own socks. Most of them had big families and that's quite a job for one person to knit socks for – well, their husband and the rest of the kids too. So she had learned to knit and so she just kept it up. And she'd knit socks for her grandkids and all the little ones and every once in a while she'd knit a pair for somebody else, that wanted some of that done. Oh, she was quite a hand to watch sports on TV. And she'd get her knitting and get out and get herself all fixed up, you know, and she'd turn on ^{her} TV. And then she'd watch, the – oh, what is it they have their games, or – well, she wanted to be sure to find out who – and she'd sit there and just be knitting to beat the cats a fighting, you know. Her hands just flew and she was knitting an intricate pattern of a bedspread, a knitted bedspread.

S.S.: Without looking at it?

N.S.: Un-huh. She just never looked at it. She just knew what she was doing and ^{every} once in a while glance down but she didn't never miss a thing that was going on on that ~~T~~V. I was over there one afternoon when she was sitting, working at it. She was talking to us too, at the same time, you know. Visiting with this other lady and I that went there.

Here now, listen Ernie, now sit down or else...

Ernie: ^{there's a person}...an that end.

N.S.: Well, now come on, sit down somewhere so you won't bother us.

S.S.: What did the work that you did– when you were young and doing handwork – what would you do? What kind of things would you make?

N.S.: Well, I had - I started with hem stitching when I wasn't ^{that} old. Yes, I was just about that size because we were at Grandmother's just before we came out West. We were at grandmother's - or at great-grandmother's and visited with her a while. I suppose ~~mother~~ was kinda making the rounds before she left for the West because we didn't expect to ever get back. I had forgotten about it though, but I had left a little handkerchief at great-grandmother's house and I just had forgotten it. And when I was about 13, I think, about 13 when I was living out at Troy. We were looking through her trunk one day - she was living with my aunt - right there at the mill. So we lived at the mill too. ^{there} Dad was working at the mill. And we would be ^{look through that, be} kinda bored, and she would say, "Come on, lets go in there and see what you need. I think I've got so-and-so" and she'd be talking about, "in my old trunk in here. Lets go in there and see what we can find it." And that was just my keen delight to look through something like that. But we went in there and she was talking and explaining everything to me as we went. And she came across this handkerchief and said, "Here, this is yours. I'll give it to you now. I've had it long enough." And she said, "You left it when you were to visit us that time in Marceline." ~~And~~ she said that ~~mother~~ had ~~said~~ that I had made that handkerchief when I was six years old. And I had pulled threads and then hem-stitched it. You know what hem-stitching looks like, don't you?

S.S.: Um...tell me.

N.S.: Well, there would be little ^u you know, the threads are all even crossed at the place that they have pulled the threads. And then you take a little bit ^e at - oh, you can do it several ways, but you can have little straight up and down things by the time you take little bite with the needle and tie it off and go on to the next one and tie, you know. Or you can tie that and when you put the bottom of it, you don't take the same bunch, you take half of each one and that makes it go zig zag. And mine was

that zig zag kind.

S.S.: At the age of six?

N.S.: Um-hum. I can't see how I did it but Grandma said I did, you know. And she said that Mother said that I had made it. I know I can remember sitting beside Mother when she would be sewing and when I wasn't more than oh, 3, I think or something. But like lots of little kids I was always right at her side. "And I want to do it too" whatever she was doing. So she went....one day - I think, Dad had made me a little doll cradle - and she whipped up, she made me a little feather bed for that cradle and then she fixed it with a pillow - or bolsters it was, in those days it was bolsters. And she gave me some scraps, you know, and she had made me a little quilt. And I played with those doll things. I can remember my sewing machine was just like it was sitting there, and I sat against the wall right by her at her side and she was busy sewing and I was right by her close. And she'd, of course, she'd have handwork to do too, with her buttonholes and all. And so she'd give me, to keep me out of her hair and to keep me from pestering her, I guess, why she'd give me something to do. Some sewing or something, like make a doll dress or something. So, I would sew those things and I can remember that. I can remember the scene. Say, now, listen Dad, sit down and sit still. Well, money's foot, you haven't got any so it hadn't oughta worry you any.

S.S.: You can remember the scene?

N.S.: Um-hum. I can just remember Mother sitting - well. I don't remember much about it. Well, there was a bed over behind, but I can remember that picture in my mind of her working at the sewing machine and I was down there beside her. And I was sewing whatever little trinkets I had to sew. She'd give me some things - maybe cut out the doll dress or something like that for me. And I was trying. And I don't know what that looked like at the time. But I was sewing too, anyway. It was

probably mussy, sewing up those things, I don't remember them.

S.S.: But this was even before you were six.

N.S.: Oh, yes. That was when I was just a little tyke. Just in her hair all the time to sew too. But then – so I know that I was doing the other, fancy work. Well, she let me do that, of course. I was learning to use my needle and thread and all. By working there with Mother so much, I had – anyhow, I was just learning – like. It's clumsy for a little kid just starting, you know, and their needle doesn't go where they want it too and all. I guess, eventually I kept on and I suppose improved on it and I got so I could sew it. I have that little old handkerchief here yet. Grandma gave it to me. I didn't remember it at all.

S.S.: Do you remember doing much work as you were growing up out here in the West?

N.S.: Handwork?

S.S.: Yah.

N.S.: Oh, yes. We had it in school on the first – the first school we had here.

S.S.: In Bovill?

N.S.: No. It was the second school that we had had here. And every Friday afternoon why we'd have sewing. The first year, we had Mrs. Bovill come in and she read books to us. She read those books that would be most interesting. And, what's his name, who wrote Freckles and the – some of those books. And she'd come and read as many chapters as she could before the time was up. And she read those books clear through to us that way. And that was interesting.

S.S.: But did you already know how to – when you took up the handwork in school – you already knew how to do it pretty well?

N.S.: Yes, by that time because I was making a lot of my own clothes by that time. Well, that picture out there this morning was lying over there under the blouse. I noticed it. I was looking at it and there's my blouse. But I was getting pretty catty with the sewing machine and cutting and everything then by that time. I had a white Indian linen blouse I had made and it had little tiny fine tucks across the yoke, these little patches of them. And then kinda puffed the sleeve with the little puff here and lace at the end of it. I ^{guess} that's about all.

S.S.: Did you need a pattern to make something like that?

N.S.: I did at the time, but I soon got so I didn't need any pattern, ^{any longer} after I was married and got to doing more of it all the time. Well, maybe some before I was married, but.... (I don't know what's a matter with me.) Before that I had cut my own patterns mostly because I'd kinda size up about what I wanted, and ^{then I'd} maybe take measurements if it was for somebody else. So I'd take the measurements with a tape measure and I would cut that and cut some of those patterns myself. But most of them I just went kinda ~~kind~~ by guess or, well, not exactly by guess either. Maybe I'd kinda lay down a garment that did fit and was just about what I wanted, and then I'd cut it by that. But you can't get an accurate pattern by that unless you're pretty catty with the pins and the scissors. I made all the wedding clothes for one of my granddaughters living here with us. See, her parents had separated and I inherited the three kids. She wouldn't let him have them and he wouldn't let her have them. But they agreed to let me have them. So, anyway, I made all of her clothes as she grew up. And everybody always said, "Why, Nell, that kid just looks like she just stepped out of a band box or something like that. You make those things look so tailored, like they're from the store." "Well, heck," I said, "It's no trick hardly. Just whack them out and go at it." It was kinda easy. But it was easier for

me to do than them. I suppose it was because I'd practiced it for a long while. And I liked it, that's one thing.

S.S.: When you were growing up, was that usual? Did most of the kids have their clothes made at home? Or make them themselves?

N.S.: Oh, most everything was made at home. Mother, I know, used to do sewing for one of the ladies in town. ^{here} She had quite a large family and they were awfully good friends of ours. And she was always sending over a bunch of material for Mother to make up. She would try to do it herself sometimes but goodness!, she would -

I don't know - instead of making a felled seam or something like that, you know, a nice smooth seam, she would have it a half dozen different thicknesses piled up so it would make a knot, you know, where all the seams would cross and all. She was trying awfully hard and she was doing the best she could but she didn't know how.

She hadn't - she wasn't as used to it as I was. But I just kind of grew up knowing because Mother was that way and I was in the midst of it all the time. But now, my sister wasn't. She didn't take to it so much and, I guess, maybe Mother didn't - she probably didn't bother Mother so much about it. And Mother'd have to kind of

give her some rags to keep her out of her hair - like she did me. I guess, because Edna, my sister, was well - we told a joke on her that - they used to use a lot of flour sacks. Mother made me a whole outfit. She made me the underskirt, you know, the underskirt had a band around the waist, and then the skirt went on down and there was a flounce - a gathered ruffle - went onto it about at the knees, like that, and it was gathered full from there on down. And that had little tucks in that flounce and I think she had crocheted lace on the bottom of it, too. I don't remember if it was crocheted lace or if it was some store lace. But, Edna and a little girl, a

neighbor to us, took a notion that they were going to sew something. And they laughed about – well, they didn't laugh about it now. My sister passed away but the other one, every once in a while – I saw her at the picnic not so long ago, and she asked me if I remember the sewing that she and Edna did. And I said yes. And I just can't forget it yet. She gets ~~such~~ a big kick out of it, she just laughs.

S.S.: Well, what happened?

N.S.: Well, they said they were going to sew. They were going out to the playhouse and they were going to sew. They asked – Mother wanted to know what they were going to do ^{with it}. They each had a flour sack. Well, they didn't want to tell her. They'd wait and show her when they got through. So she let them alone. And I don't remember whether they had any pattern. I think maybe mother ~~ad~~ cut out a kind of a half pattern out of a newspaper for them. I'm not sure but anyway she gave it to them. And they were supposed to be a pair of panties and they had the hems at the bottom and the gathers on the belt at the top. So they worked real hard and, of course, they had a piece of material then about that wide at the top that had to be gathered up so that it would fit the belt – be smaller. So they gathered it up and when they got it through, why they had just put it on plain and when they got to the end of it, all those gathers went in one bunch. Instead of making it even all the way around, the gathers, they put it all together plain and then had a whole bunch of gathers right at the one side. The joke was – that was pretty funny. Well, anyhow, ^{when} they come in fussing about it, "Well, what's the matter with these things?" She hadn't asked any questions before and she didn't know what to do about it. And they didn't look like she thought they ought to. ^{anyhow} And I was in a hurry from school one morning and I grabbed those pants and put them on. I was in a hurry to get to school. And I came home a fussing at noon. I was just about to have a fit. And mother said,

"What's the matter with you?" And I said, "These pesky pants that Edna made."

I said, "I had to walk crosslegged and they'd fall down halfway." And I got those off

just as quick as I could. I reached in the cupboard and got a hold of, I thought they

were my pair and ^I was in such a hurry. I thought it was mine. And Mother and Edna

just laughed until they were sick, pretty near. I told 'em what a time I had with those

things. And I said I was afraid I'd fall down everytime I took a step. And Georgie

was the other girl, she just laughs everytime she thinks of it, how ~~the~~ ^{her} sewing turned out.

S.S.: The way they were set up, they would really just fall down off you all the time

you weren't careful.

N.S.: Yes. Of course, if you could get the band pinned but whatever it was, why

they were safe. But here were all the gathers in one place and the rest was just

plain around. So - I can say, when I was 16 or 17 - 16 I think - when Mother

was sewing for other people quite a lot and the girl worked up at the restaurant, her

mother ~~run~~ the restaurant. And her name was Bean, Ernie Bean, Ernestine Bean.

She brought up some material and wanted Mother to make her some dresses for her

to wait tables in. She ~~helped~~ her mother in the restaurant. Well, Mother thought

she just didn't have time, she had so much on her hands she just couldn't do it.

Just then, anyhow, she couldn't. And I was showing her one my dresses that I had

just finished and she said, "Why, you made that?" and I said, "Yes." Well, she

said, "Why don't you make my dresses then?" Well, I had never been sewing for

anybody else, I was scared too. "Well, she said, "You just go ahead and make them"

she said. "That's good enough for me." I made her - she wanted the dresses made

out of black sateen. And they were trimmed, around the edge of the belt there was

a little piping. You know what piping is? The edge of it show^d just like a fitting, you

know. (break) END OF SIDE A

NELL SMITH: Well, like this would be and that edge of it was bound, with a little – like a little binding and then the little blue edge was showing. You know that little streak of blue. And the other was two suits. I can't remember what the other was, but anyhow, she wanted them made shirtwaist style and with plain skirts. And the button holes from the neck to the bottom, that was the style then. And I used to make all those button holes by hand. And I'd hate to have to do it now. But that's what she wanted so that's what I made. I took the job and made her two suits and she liked to have a fit about them. She thought they were so nice. They were just what she wanted.

S.S.: How long did it take you to do something like that?

N.S.: Oh, well, I guess, a few days.

S.S.: Did you have your own sewing machine?

N.S.: No. It was whenever Mother wasn't using it, I would. We just had her sewing machine. That one he bought for me in 1913. And that was the first year we were married. And that's the machine that he bought. The machine agent came along and we proceeded to get one. We were going to move to ourselves. We were still building this house and we were living with Mother. We were at her⁺ place yet until we could get our house finished. I was pregnant and was doing up a lot of sewing and he bought the machine for me. And it was the 5th of August that we got it and my baby was born the 30th of August. It was just about not quite a month after that. But I was just a sewing up a storm there because Mother was – and my sister were going to – my sister was taking music^{lessons} at the time – had been from Mrs. Klickner. Her husband was depot agent here and they lived up on that hill by McDonalds. And she had been teaching this class quite a while and she had arranged for a recital that Saturday night, I

think. So my Mother and my aunt lived near us over there and she was to go with her to the recital that night. So they were supposed to go at 9 o'clock. There used to be an old Italian lady, I think she was, or some foreign person, that used to pedal things through the town. Here she'd come ^{through} every once in a while with yards and yards of dress materials and all fancy tidies and paintings and things to sell.

S.S.: Paintings?

N.S.: Yah. They were, I suppose, done by machinery or something. Dora, I think we called her. I think that was her name. But she'd just come with the biggest suitcases you ever saw. You wondered how in the world she could possibly carry them. But she came. And she liked us. She'd been there before, several times. So we always stopped and talked to her and looked at all of ^{her} pretties she had. And sometimes bought. She was real keen about, just felt at home at our place. So anyhow, that was just a week before my baby came that I started out - that she came there. Well, I picked it out and I said, "Now that way you can have your new dress, you know, for the recital up there." I ^{was gonna} pitch in and make them. So I pitched in and made those three dresses for them.

S.S.: Three dresses?

N.S.: Un-huh.

S.S.: For your sister, for your -

N.S.: Mother and - oh, one, two, three - yes. My sister Edna, and aunt Mary and Mother. And Aunt Mary was a large one, about 225 or 250. And she had a light - rather light - blue, a pretty blue dress. It was the full length dress. And it had - oh, I guess it was just about, you know, where they were. About that length then. I don't remember so much what it was made of but I think - oh, I know, - they had that kinda of an apron like thing - a tunic affair that was ^{kind of} pointed in front and then shaped up toward the back.

S.S.: You did this one week before you had your child?

N.S.: Yes. And, but I was having fun. I was just hurrying like everything because I was afraid I wasn't going to get those three dresses out.

S.S.: I'll bet. Was that the only – the main way to get material then from this lady or did they have much in toown?

N.S.: No, they didn't have anything like that. She carried quite a lot of fancy materials and that was a part – it had a silky flower woven in, you know, ^{little} fine flowers.

S.S.: Did she go from town to town, this lady?

N.S.: Yes, she went all over this part of the country. Everybody knew her.

S.S.: Did she stop by the house and say ? Is that how?

N.S.: Yes. She came right to the house and we always welcomed her. We'd say, "Come on in." And she felt at home so she would come in and talk and laugh. But she didn't talk real plain, all of it, but we could understand her. But that dress I made for Aunt Mary, I think hers had that little silk, kinda ^{fringy} edging on it.

S.S.: On the tunic?

N.S.: On the tunic, un-huh. And I got hers done and ~~she~~ made Edna's and she was kinda slender, tall and slender. Now hers was a tangerine color. It was made, I think, with the seam went down the side and ^{this} was ~~wa~~ puckered up here with kinda a slash.

S.S.: In the front?

N.S.: In the side, front. And this piece was gathered up here and that one straight.

That was – a lot of them made that way then. And there was some kind of a droop there. The collar affair of it come across this way and then the other piece lapped through like that. And hers had the lacy fringe all around that collar.

S.S.: Sounds very fancy.

N.S.: They were. Real ^{dr} messy dresses, and...

S.S.: Did you have patterns for those?

N.S.: Um-hum. Just had the common pattern that we all would use for things like that. Whenever I wanted something else, well, I just put it on without that.

S.S.: Did you have a pattern for each – the size – that each one was? Or did you know the size?

N.S.: No. I'd just take their measurements with the tape measure and then add to or take from. Maybe pin it big and then if it was going to be too large for them, ^{why then} add to it.

Edna's was that kind that had the surplus –

S.S.: Surplus in the top.

N.S.: Un-huh. In the top. My mother's then – her's was black taffeta. It was made with these, kinda a panel in the front, here. And those panels were placed in there like that.

S.S.: Pleated right in the front.

N.S.: Un-huh. Just across here –

S.S.: Across the chest...

N.S.: But his piece here was lacy, some kind of a lace front.

S.S.: Lace in the collar?

N.S.: Well, this was across here and down to the waistline.

S.S.: Oh, I see. Across the front.

N.S.: Un-huh. It was, I think, white lace in there. But these others – the edge of her – the other thing – where it met the lace, had a pleat like your shirt front. Like that that went down on each side of it. Well, that was piped in deep rose color to kinda shed off so much of that black. And that was piped in that rose color and piped on the sleeves, on the cuffs, and on the belt.

S.S.: Well, now, where did you get the ideas for the design? Were they just dresses that were being worn at the time?

N.S.: Yes, it was. We would pick up a magazine or catalogue or something and saw something I like, well, I would copy it usually. I do yet, go quite a lot. I find something I like in a catalogue I like, why I go ahead and make it. I don't so much anymore. I never get time to sew and I'm about to forget how.

S.S.: Did you make all three dresses before you had your kid?

N.S.: Um-hum. I got mother's all done and I was working on it the day of the recital. I was working right up to the time and I was scared I wasn't going to get it done. I was hurrying like everything. So part of it I didn't get stitched solid or something. I know I had to almost leave part of it. I had to leave it to be finished afterwards.

I got enough so she could wear her dress and her hair fixed. I had to leave
 But I got pret-near everything - oh, I know - the hooks and eyes. I had to leave those off. I had to put pins in for the recital. But I got enough so she could wear her dress and her hair fixed. I sometimes had to help with that. I think she probably did it herself that time. But anyhow, she wore the dress in and went to the party.

And along about twelve o'clock they came back home and I was sitting by the fire. I had started a fire. I had started to have a party myself at that time. And when Mother came in the door, she said, "Well, what are you doing up here this time of night?" I said, "Oh, you folks like to go to parties so well, I thought I'd maybe give you another one - party night." I just kidded with them. "Why, are you sick?" I said, "Nope. Never felt better in my life." But I had indications that showed there was liable to be trouble and that it would probably be - probably things would finish up all right. She want - my, she wanted to hussle around. And she turned back to Edna and said, "Run back up to -" my aunt just lived two-three doors ^{from us} up the street. "Run on up there and fetch Aunt Mary before she gets in bed and tell her to come on down. We

might need her here." And I was laughing and kidding with them. Every once in a while I'd have a little kink that wasn't so good but I didn't pay any attention to them. And I said, "I'd had lots worse pains than that when I was five eating cabbage and vinegar."

S.S.: When you were what? Five and when you were what?

N.S.: I told them I'd had lots worse pains than that - than I was having then. I said, "for eating cabbage with vinegar on it."

S.S.: What do you mean "eating cabbage with vinegar on it?" That was a worse pain?

N.S.: No, that would sometimes give people cramps - yes, I had lots worse ^{than that} from just eating supper. So, I figured I was gonna know when I got the real thing because I had heard others talk about it. And one lady - one of our close neighbors, had just had a baby two-three weeks before that and she said she called the doctor in and he said, "Well, in this case it was a good thing she hollared when she did." 'Cause he said whenever you began to have those regular pains five minutes apart, you can look for a youngster within the hour. And I think she said it worked out that way too, with her. And, listen now, well, when I thought that sounds funny ^{for} a doctor ^{say that}, because that can't be my deal, the way I would be, because I thought I'm not ready yet, I don't think. They kept wanting to go for the doctor. "We'll send Ernie for the doctor." And I said, "Well, I don't need him. There's nothing now - I don't think I need any doctor now, I feel fine." Well, they were all standing around having a fit 'cause - "You better go get the doctor." Well, finally I - begin to get a little tougher. "Well, if it'll make you folks feel better, well, go ahead and get him." So they did and about the first thing about it. There was like a door there, and he came in that side door. And he was taking off his gloves and set his little black bag down on the chair near by there. And my bedroom's off here. It was just a ^{curtain} across the door and there was a lamp, lit in there, no electricity then, you know. And so she had the light lit in that room and he was standing facing that way

talking to the bunch of them. And I was standing over this side, over here where the stove was. And I was standing in behind the stove. Just room enough I could squeeze through between the stove and the wall, 'cause I got so I was chilly then. I was freezing – it was working on me all right. But I was getting shakey and chilly so I got in there where it was warm. And he stood there talking to them and he started to pick up his bag and ^{go} on in. And I snickered. It struck me funny. I kinda giggled and he turned to see what had happened. He looked so funny and I said, "Well, I guess I'm the one you're looking for." Well, "All right." he said. And he wanted to know how I was and all and I said, "Well, fine – so far."

S.S.: He hadn't really noticed you?

N.S.: Oh, he'd seen me before. He had been expecting that youngster for two months. He told me he thought it would be about the fifth of August.

S.S.: So what did you say to him? You said...?

N.S.: "I guess I don't look like the one you're looking for – but I guess I am." Or something like that I said. Anyhow, he came back then and stood there and talked to me. He said something then about pains, how far apart and everything. And the severity and I said, "No, they weren't bad at all." I had gone in and sat in the rocking chair in front of the stove. And he was watching me and finally he said something about the timing. How the time was and I said They were about a minute or two minutes apart or something like that. And he looked like he didn't believe it. So he took out his watch and began timing me. And once in awhile I'd kinda screw my face up, kinda little more severe and he watched that for awhile. He thought I didn't know the time but I was sitting facing the clock on the wall. And I did happen to notice the timing all. And after he had checked two or three of those and there wasn't any intermission between 'em hardly. And so he said, "Why, I think we better get you in here and find out what's going on. So clean the bedroom there." And they came out just on high. / "Mrs. Wood, How long will it take to get some boiling

hot water? Get these things going." She said, "It's already boiling." And he said, "Well, good. Get these instruments on to cook just as quick as you can." And he was hurrying on like everything and the baby was already on the way then. So - he gave her a lecture, then he came back to me and he said, "Now, I'm going to tell you. I see trouble on my hands here but we'll ^{have to} avoid it all we can." And he said, "You're going to have a buttocks presentation."

S.S.: A what?

N.S.: A buttocks presentation, he thought it was going to be. Something he had. And he said, "One foot is appearing now." I said, "All right." And he told me he'd give me a little lecture. He said, "Once this all starts," he says, "I'm sorry to tell you, we can't give you a speck of ether or anything." But he said, "Once this all starts, you have to work just fast and hard, 'cause once this starts we have five minutes to get this over with or we'll probably have a dead baby." So I said, "All right, I'm game." I said, "I'll do what I can."

S.S.: Were you afraid?

N.S.: No, I wasn't. I thought - well, I used to be kinda in the first part of it, but I thought, "Well, there's been thousands of them born before my baby so I'll make it through too." That's what I thought.

S.S.: When you say "the first part of it," do you mean when you were first with child?

N.S.: Yah. Then I was kinda thinking then, "Well, how can it all be?" But then when I finally figured out, I said, "Well, there's been thousands of 'em and hardly any of them ever died in childbirth."

S.S.: Were you in pain at this point when you were laying in bed there? Was it hurting you pretty bad?

N.S.: No, not bad. There would be intermission and some, but anyhow, he said he wanted me - just five minutes to spare during that time for trouble. And I thought, "I

don't want that." I'd a done most anything because I was so afraid, ^{that} I knew I might have a dead baby and that baby was pretty precious to me. And I was wanting it to be all right. After awhile, we were boarding - we had some boarders that were staying in a little shack we had on the back. It was a perfectly good little house but it was just a small place. And they had rented it. They were taking pictures or enlarging pictures or something like that. And they rented that for it. ^{so} I was so scared that I'd make a lot of fuss. And I'd heard of people just screaming and yelling that were in the hospital and making such a fuss. And I was just scared to death I'd do that way. And I didn't want those fellers to hear me hollering around. So anyhow, he went back then to tell Mother something and when he came back in here, why the - he said, "Hurry". And then he said the feet were presenting. And he had someone to help get his garters on and tie his apron and get his gloves and I don't think he ever did get the gloves on. He just - the baby came just right now! And then he began to say, "Well, wait a minute Mrs. Smith. ^{Now hold back, Mrs. Smith.} Now wait a minute." So - but it was coming too fast then, but that was easier said than done. So in about two minutes why the baby was there. And it came all right. But there was another baby born just a week later up at this end of town, a girl. Born in the same position, the same, you know. The same thing happening and they broke her collar bone, her arm was ~~is~~ kinked up someway or other. So they kinda had her taped up for quite awhile. But mine came fine - just wonderful.

S.S.: It sounds like he was more nervous than you were.

N.S.: Like what?

S.S.: It sounds like he was more nervous than you were.

N.S.: Yah. Well, the doctor - he was a good doctor and all. He just told me the bare facts. Well, I think he knew too that I was pretty much out and out - whatever

the name was - to face it. And do what I was supposed to do. And I think that I did

S.S.: Was this Dr. Gibson?

N.S.: Um-hum.

S.S.: Do you think that it was different with some women? Did some women have much more trouble? I mean facing this kind of a thing?

N.S.: Yes. Yes, they do sometimes. Some of them 25-30 hours sometimes in labor and that's no fun.

S.S.: In those days when they were having babies at home, it was the same way? Long labors sometimes?

N.S.: Well, some of 'em. In fact, I shouldn't be telling you all this stuff. I don't suppose it's very proper conversation.

S.S.: Well, that's the way people lived in those days. I think it's important to know.

N.S.: But another one of our neighbors lived over there. She was quite a chum of mine and she was expecting. And she did have a twelve pound baby in the long run.

And the doctor was there and she had worked and worked and she was worn out. And

it had been quite a long time - stretch. And he had told her now she must work hard with this next pain. And she must bear down and she just had to work hard for that.

And she ^{had} just give out and she finally said, "Well, I can't. I've done all I can do."

You know. And she just kinda relaxed, you know. And give up. And finally he just up and slapped her along side of the face. Give her a good sound slap. And she got so mad at him she - if she could of done it - she'd a got up and tried to throw a shoe at him. And she just got so mad and he let it go. And she went to work then. Oh,

she was all stirred.^{VP} And the baby was there in a little while, had it over with. After it came, he apologized to her and he said, "Now, my apology, now to you but I had to do that."

He says, "With some people you have to do that. ~~It~~ They just get worn out and just give up. You have to make 'em mad with a good slap or something. You have to make 'em

good and mad and then they'll tend to go to work stronger." And she said, "Well, you don't know how it hurt." He said, "Oh, yes I do." And she says, "Yes, like fun you do." And he said "Yes, I do." He says, "I dreamed one night I had a baby – a youngster and I was never in such misery in all my life as I was in that dream." So she got over her mad spell.

S.S.: Was this the same doctor?

N.S.: Yes, it was the same one I had.

S.S.: Was that the way most all the women had their kids – at home in those days? They didn't use the hospital then?

N.S.: Yes, Well, they – some of them did. But I didn't want to go to the hospital. I just wanted to have my youngsters at home and I had them that way, the whole six of them.

S.S.: Well, when the baby was born then, he just stayed with you at home and you just were supposed to lie in bed and recuperate. Was that how it worked?

N.S.: Yes, you were supposed to stay in bed for ten days, anyhow. But you know, why that was the day that everybody considered – that had been kind of a hand-me-down idea from way back. Sometimes 12 days, but they were supposed to stay anyhow, 10 days in bed. And the tenth day, why, everything was supposed to fall back in its place and everything ~~it~~ would all become normal again. But I said, "Well, of all things. Why everything isn't going to wait until the tenth day and just jump back into –

S.S.: Well, I would...

END OF SIDE B

SAM SCHRAGER: You get weaker than the dickens not doing anything.

NELL SMITH: I laid there, I think, it was the full ten days that time. But I didn't feel like it. I felt like getting up and going to work or something. But that was the rule at that time, you were supposed to stay in there. And then when I had the last - no, not the last one - the next to the last one, I just lay - I was in bed six days and then they picked me up and took me up to the hospital. Took my baby girl up there and - because it had trouble with her and they were going to operate on her. She had - oh, I don't remember now the name they used - but, anyhow, it formed an ostome - I can't think of it - but anyhow she had a malformation of her bowel. And she'd been laying there - a beautiful baby, and a sweet little cozy, cuddly little thing, you know. Beautiful child. But she didn't have the - well, I don't know whether it was - something was missing. They thought it was either a malformation near the rectum - it was either a disconnection or it was knotted or something, because nothing could pass. And she had been lying in bed there with me and - that's here at home - she had been taking her feed all the time, but again the last two or three days, burping it up. And it was some kind of a stoppage there that prevented it going on through.

S.S.: So they took her and you both to the hospital?

N.S.: Well, they took her up here - up there to operate. I think that was one of the hardest things I ever did, to let them take her up there to operate. Little tiny thing, six days old. I thought - well, they said that she only had a 50/50 chance of success if they took her there. And she would have to have another operation later - when she was maybe five years old. When she was old enough, you know, to stand it. So there I was, deciding whether to send that baby up there and let them cut into her and thinking probably there was no chance for her. And then I'd think, well, if there was a 50-50 chance, maybe I better lean on the little bit of hope. And they took her up there and she was just six days old, I think, when they took her

up there. And they came down and got me. I sent mother up to the hospital with her – when mother was here. I said, "You go and stay right there with her and see that everything is done right. Take good care of her." Mother went up there and then that evening she came down then and said that – the hospital was right up there where that building is, up there where the Hall Apartment House, was the hospital then – and she came down. She said, "Well, you know, I'm not doing a thing up there but just sit there with my hands folded. There's nothing I can do for the baby." So she said, "Why don't you go up there and stay with her and let me be down here? And I can be doing some work down here." I said, "Well, I didn't know. The doctor – she said the doctor said that would be all right. I could do it. So he came down and got me in a car and took me up there. She died on the day she was eleven days old.

I held a grudge kinda against the doctor from that time because the morning that she took worse, of course, I wasn't suppose to pick her up or do anything for her really. But, oh, I could give her a sip of water or something like that. So I was watching carefully. I was following orders. And I noticed that morning she was having more trouble breathing and all. She was worse. And I called the nurse and she came upstairs and said, well, she's...yes, she's – I know, I said, "Does she need anything more to eat now?" I said, "She acts like she's awfully worked up and nervous. Acts like maybe she might be hungry. Maybe if she had a bit to eat it might calm her."

(Ernie: I thought you were going to shave me this noon?

N.S.: What?

Ernie: I thought you were going to shave me this noon?

N.S.: Well, I shaved you awhile ago.

Ernie: What?

N.S.: You been a dreaming. I just got through shaving you before you ate.)

And so the nurse went back down and said, "No. She don't need anything now." She said, "Regular time for her feed, on schedule. When it comes time, well give it to her." So she left me and I thought, "Well, that was very consoling." But I sat right by her and watched her closely. Finally, I asked her if she wouldn't call the doctor then, he just lived up the next place above it. And she went and called the doctor to see if there was something he could do, maybe, in a pinch, you know, something in an emergency. She was supposed to have called him. I don't know whether she did or not, she said she did. But he didn't come. It was about 4 o'clock, I think, in the morning. And I asked her later on if she, you know, - why he wasn't coming or if he couldn't. I was expecting him to come right on down, considering it an emergency. And she said that - he maybe had to ^{wait to} eat his breakfast first before he came down.

S.S.: He had said he was going to wait and see if the baby would eat or she wanted to wait and see?

N.S.: No, I ^{was ing} want to see if the baby could have something to eat and she said no, it wasn't time for the feeding. She was going by that. It wasn't time for it. But the time came then she got it. But I asked her then, you know, to call the doctor and have him to check her - her condition in general 'cause I could see she was worse. And so - he didn't come. I waited and waited and he didn't show up.

S.S.: This was the second time you'd asked her?

N.S.: Um-hum. And he didn't come. So it went on to about 7 o'clock in the morning or something like that and he never even showed up. And I finally - the baby had died. I didn't ask him the second time again, until I could see she was going fast then. And I took the baby up and held her in my arms and kind of elevated, you know, - kinda gave her better room to breathe by elevating her head and holding

her in a slanting position. He didn't come. So I asked the nurse then, I said, "What do they usually do in a case of this kind here?" I said, "She's gone now."

Well, first, when I saw she was bad and was going, the nurse looked at her then and oh, said, "Oh, she needs changing now, let me carry her in and change her then." Or fix her up or something like that. And I said, "No. Just let her alone." I said, "She's suffering enough as it is just now." I said, "It will soon be over." And I said, "That little bit of mussed diaper isn't going to hurt her at all." And I said, "I'd rather you don't. You just let her alone. Let her be as comfortable as she can." And, well, "All right, if you say so." And I said so. And I said, "What do they usually do?" afterwards, when she was gone. I said, "What do they usually do here in cases of that kind?" And I said, "Do we just let her lay here on the bed until he comes or what?" And she said, "Well, no. They usually take them down in the basement." And I just thought, "You're not taking my baby down in the basement." I didn't say anything to her but I just asked her to get the janitor there. He was, ^{a boy I} ~~she~~ had known me for a long time. I had gone to school with him, I think, known him for a long while here.

And I said, - I sent Joe down - I said, "Would you go down and tell Ernie to come up. I think the baby is dying now." And he just hustled right down and got ^{back with} Ernie. And she was gone by the time he got back. That's when I asked Peggy what they usually did. So I sat and waited a little while. Ernie sitting there with me, when he came in. I took her things and packed up a suitcase. Finally when, I think, it was about 7 o'clock came, I said to Ernie, "If you can carry these suitcases, lets go home." And I said, "I can carry the baby." It was only eleven days after and ordinarily when in those conditions they would of thought

But anyhow, I carried my baby in a blanket, walked out from that hospital, and carried her home myself. And you know, that doctor never did see that baby after she passed away. He didn't know whether she lived or died. Except the nurse said so. He had the nurse's word for it. You'd of thought, he'd have made some apology to me or some bit of condolence of some kind. But never a word. So, we just brought her down to the house here and laid her out here at the house.

S.S.: Had the baby's condition been pretty stable after the operation?

N.S.: No. That was the trouble. The two days after the operation they had had to go in there again and they said they had made too large of an incision and they had to go in there and, I don't know, close that a little, I think, or something like that. And they had to give her – what is that – it wasn't ether but it was some other anesthetic they had given her. And they thought she was too delicate and too little to – too much of a strain – the whole thing in general.

S.S.: It seems really – it must have been very hard on you during that time.

N.S.: Um-hum. It was. And deciding whether to send her up there knowing what they were going to do and knowing it was serious – that probably no chance. I^{just} felt like you were leading a little lamb out to the slaughter.

S.S.: She's the only girl that you ever had? All the rest were boys?

N.S.: Only one. Five boys and one girl.

S.S.: When you had babies at home, when they were first born, were there certain precautions you were supposed to take about the first days and the first weeks? Were there certain ways of doing things that the mothers were supposed...?

N.S.: For her? Or for myself?

S.S.: No, for the kids. For the average baby that was born in those days at

home. Since the baby wasn't in the hospital and they didn't take care of them for you, were there certain rules that the mothers were suppose to follow?

N.S.: Well, they all kinda grew up knowing that, I think. You know, it was handed down from mother and grandmother³ and all. And many of them were born with a midwife in attention and that's all there was to it. The midwife would - took care of the case.

S.S.: The midwife would stay at the home?

N.S.: Well, no. She would just go and come, I think. Sometimes if it wasn't handy or if they lived a long ways away, then she would stay in. But I didn't happen to run into any of those. Of course, he was here - the doctor was here at the time when I had ~~them~~ ^{him}. ^{Let's see,} ~~she~~ was my fifth one and then I just had one more and that was a boy and he wasn't here for that one. He had gone, been transferred to Potlatch, I think. And he had given his - turned ^{over} his book and all to the doctor that was in charge, Dr. Onsborg. He was, I guess, a big Dutch man or something but he had been in charge of the naval hospital for, I think, he had been in the Navy for about twenty or twenty-five years. I think it was twenty-five. But he had been a Navy doctor. And when he got here, why Dr. Gibson had his book all filled up with - oh, there were an awful lot of babies ~~were~~ born that year and he had it all filled up with that. And I went up one time for a check-up when I was expecting Lloyd and I went up to see him the first time. And he said something about Dr. Gibson leaving him - he said, "I never saw so many babies in one place in my life!" He said, "Oh, Teddy Roosevelt ought ~~of~~ been in ~~this~~ town, I can just see his big old grin a-coming-shin ing yet." 'Cause he **was** always pictured him as a big, shiny grin.

S.S.: He'd be grinning because there were so many babies?

N.S.: Un-huh. And he was always rather in favor of large families and loved kids, I guess.

S.S.: Teddy Roosevelt?

N.S.: Un-huh. But he couldn't help - him saying he thought Teddy ought to be here at that time.

S.S.: Did they have the idea then that if a baby cried you were supposed to pick him up?

N.S.: No, they didn't want you to hardly. But I kind a did as I pleased. If, you know - you're armed against it at all. Know your youngsters, know a few things about 'em, why, you're going to know when they cry if something's a matter with them or whether ~~their~~ just hungry or something else. It's a different cry and you learn to know that cry. Son

Sometimes they have cramps in their stomach and need you. You turn them over on their stomach and pat them a little while - that helps them or else hold them over your shoulder and brings up the burp or two. And sometimes it'd heal the whole thing. They don't like it if you pick 'em up. Well, there is such a thing as picking up a baby everytime it moves, and spoiling it to death. And they'll cry then just to get up. But you got to kind of learn that - know whether - the different tone of voice and all, generally.

This woman over here - she's getting hers spoiled now, I think. It's only four weeks old now. She was over here the next day or so after the baby was born. And it was born in a hospital over there, but she was up and going around here, had the baby on her arm, ^{just} doing fine. They just let her come home the second day. Things have changed considerably. And I think the girls are really healthier. They don't loose their strength, you know, like they do if you just have them lay down

and lay there for ten days. They get up the next day or two after the baby's born or something like that. Or maybe if ^{it's} 's born during the night, they get up the next morning and go to the bathroom and then go back to bed and just up and down and they don't loose their strength at all, hardly.

S.S.: I know there used to be - oh, I've heard people say stuff like - one of the old ideas was you had to be careful not to let a cat near the baby because the cat could really hurt the baby. Is that something that you learned when...?

N.S.: Yes, I've heard that a good deal. Never let them - the cat they say will purr and, you know, how they'll work with their claws...

S.S.: They knead.

N.S.: Kinda kneading like and they say they can stop the baby's breath because the little chest is tender and gives a lot. They said - that's what their theory was, anyhow. But I always, seen them - to watch 'em ^{awful} close to see that the cat didn't get to the youngster. We don't want a cat up there with a youngster anyway.

But this woman over here she picks up her baby, throws ^{little} a blanket around it and comes over here. She's been over here two - three times now since her baby came. Just the other day she was here and the baby was a month old then, four weeks old. And she had it on her arm with a blanket on it, just wrapped in a little sheeting blanket. And a little cute baby, cute as a bug's ear. Just pretty and plump and , you know, even features, and just real pretty. And never says a word. Never. Just as contented as can be. It never seems to - the other day it ^{did start} to whimper a bit and fidget and cry. And she said, it's time for eating again. It's dinner time, she knows it. So...

S.S.: Did mothers used to be careful, when you were a mother, did mothers have to be careful about taking the kid out? And that sort of thing or would you do that with babies - take them with you when you went places?

N.S.: We were pretty careful right in the beginning because a little wiff of air – fresh air – they weren't used to it. And they'd give 'em a little wiff or two of that fresh air or wind in their face and they'd have the colic. If they got colic it would be bad. If you put a good warm pad, a hot water bottle or something, you know, on the blanket right under them, and turn them on their stomach and something warm on their feet, they'd generally get over it in a little while. Or sometimes a little bit of – oh, just a drop or two of peppermint or something like that in a little sweetened water. But generally just give 'em a bottle with warm, just as warm as they can stand, with warm water. A good big drink of that would generally do it.

S.S.: Well, I wanted to ask you about that fire that came down from Beall's Butte and almost took the town with it.

N.S.: Well, that was, I was just thinking, I got kinda sidetracked on the doctor's business.

S.S.: Oh, I enjoyed that very much because it helps you understand how different things were in those days. Now, its all so different. The mother that wants to have her kid at home is looked at as being pretty –

N.S.: ~~It's~~ Backwards or something, I guess, kinda back-woody.

S.S.: Well, I think its the way everyone did it, but still it's history now, that way they had a child.

N.S.: Yes, a good many of them had the – the youngsters were born in the covered wagon on the way out West or something. Or sometimes the mother died or she didn't have milk for feeding it. I don't know. Someone I heard talking about that they were raised on mare's milk on the crossing the plains. They had a mare and her colt that they were taking along there and the mare furnished the – or the mother got sick or something. I don't know, but it was an emergency

anyhow, and they got along fine. There's a lot of things a person can do in a pinch if they just know about it.

S.S.: Was your mother tended by a midwife when she had her kids, do you know?

N.S.: I don't know. No. Because she said the doctor's name who took care of her when I was born was, I think, Dr. Brosish in Missouri. So that's all I know about him. I ^{we} heard her mention him, Dr. Brosish. I don't know ^{that} maybe Grandmother had – probably – a midwife there when mother was born. I don't know. That was back in 1868.

S.S.: I was going to ask you, when you talked about all the work – the needlework that your mother did. Now, did – she got an income for doing that, or a small income from doing? She just did it.

N.S.: She did that for her own self. And she made a lot of things. All her doilies and things, you know, she had 'em trimmed up and did the work on them and all. And then if anything she made was for anybody else – I don't think that she did that kind of work hardly for anyone else. But if she did it was a gift or something she was planning on making for them.

S.S.: Was that sort of a skill really prized skill, was that something that was considered...?

N.S.: Well, now you scratch up some of those old pieces from that time and show them nowadays and they're prized. They're something to hand-me-down. Something worth – that's one reason I was going to show you the pillowslips that I started to make. I got one of them finished since I was 80 years old. So... and then the other one I haven't even gotten started, yet. I have too many – I sit down and if I don't get busy, I'll run out of time. But now you take some of those old fashioned things that are on display in museums and things.

S.S.: Well, you know, what I was thinking when I....

END OF SIDE C

typed and transcribed by Karen Purtee