

INTERVIEW SUMMARY-TAPE INDEX

NAME: Roach, Mercedes  
DATE OF INTERVIEW:  
LOCATION:  
INTERVIEWER:  
REEL NO.

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This is an interview with Mercedes Roach on January 21, 1975. The interviewer is Lillie Hermann.

LH: This is Lillie Hermann interviewing Mercedes Roach for the, "Rural Women's Oral History Project," on January 21, 1975.

MR: In 1940 I had been married three years and was working as a pickle packer at Morgan Brothers Plant in Lewiston, Idaho and commuting to Genesee on weekends. My husband was attending short classes or short courses in mechanics and repair work during that time at Moscow and he lived in Moscow and we just were <sup>at</sup> Genesee on weekends. Then in about '41 and '42 he taught courses to other young men who were interested in farm mechanics so that they could help keep farm equipment in order. In '42 our first child arrived and I had given up my job at the pickle plant in December of '41 and since that time I've more or less have just been at home raising a family.

LH: This was a rather unusual circumstance at that time although it's quite common now for a going to school and living in separate places and this sort of thing. How did you feel about this and how did you feel about having to give this all up to start your family?

MR: Well I didn't mind, I enjoyed working away because I was raised to work. There was no work in Genesee so I had to go to Lewiston to find work. I lived with my mother, a widow, and younger children at the time and I enjoyed this because I had never lived at home. I left my home at age 10 and I was subsequently raised by my grandmother, although we were in the same community. But I enjoyed living with the family in Lewiston and I enjoyed working and there was nothing to do at home. You just died of boredom at home. I didn't mind this and I wasn't at all happy about giving it up for the birth of a child. I wasn't sure that I needed children. Wayne was convinced that I needed children, that we needed children but I wasn't all that excited but once the child arrived there was nothing to do then but stay home and take care of the child so that set the pattern.

LH: Did it ever occur to you hire, have the child taken care of?

MR: No it was my child and I'm sure that Wayne would never<sup>of</sup> allowed that either.

LH: This wasn't a very common thing at this time anyway.

MR: No that wouldn't of, it never occurred to me, <sup>really and truly</sup> The first place I don't believe I could've made enough money to have made it practical, because I had no family here to take care of my children, as I child I would've had to hire someone. And <sup>then</sup> too once I had a child I ~~was~~ confidentially expected that there would be more and there were.

LH: How many more?

MR: Well all in all there's six.

LH: And then you said, then your life was rearing a family?  
*yes that's about it,*

MR: In 1944 Wayne went into business for himself, prior to that he'd been working as a repairman you know, mechanics for a local dealer and then he went into business for himself. And then in '45 our second child arrived. As soon as he started business for himself I also became a part of the <sup>of a</sup> business, well this made staying at home not quite so chilling<sup>^</sup> thought. I wasn't just at home period. Then I did hire a girl to come in every evening at 7 and put the child to bed, you know what I mean for three hours and then she stayed until 10. She was just a young girl and I paid her by the hour, 10 cents an hour, <sup>because</sup> that's all her mother would allow her to take home because she said she didn't want the child spoiled with big money but it was <sup>the</sup> a little rag doll girl, Maryann. And then I would come back to the shop and we'd work down here on books and things in the evening or inventory or stocking or whatever. But then after the second child was born and passed on we were raising a single child for seven years because Cheryl wasn't born til '49 and there were still no thoughts about ~~doing~~ <sup>being</sup> anything <sup>but helping</sup> with the shop and taking care of kids.

LH: Now did this meet your expectations, as far as marriage and this sort of

thing went or was this just one of those things that was expected of women at that time?

MR: Well I don't think I ever gave it a thought. My mother stayed home and raised six kids, more or less 5<sup>living</sup> and once you're married this is just the pattern, I never, I thought it was great before I had children to get away from home but truthfully, once there were children this was <sup>just</sup> my place. And I'm sure that Wayne would've certainly agreed.

LH: And how long did you know your husband before you married him?

MR: Approximately 7 years. Not well but we went to high school together. I met him when I was a freshman in high school <sup>which was</sup> in 1930, and I met him in the fall of 1930.

LH: And on what basis did you decide to get married and how did your parents take all this or feel about it, his parents?

MR: Well my parents weren't very excited about Wayne. He was not a Catholic. The year he was a senior <sup>the year</sup> and I was a junior he asked me for a date and I wasn't allowed to go out with him because he was not a Catholic. But in the fall of '34 I went to Spokane to go to school and he in February came to visit his sister, Mildred Cameron. And knowing <sup>that</sup> I was up there, although I lived in the north end of town and he was visiting in the south end of town, he did call and he came over and we had a couple of dates over a period, oh like 3 or 4 times we went out together, over a period of 2 or 3 weeks. So then I came home in '35 because of illness in the family I didn't go back to school and I was needed at home. I was needed <sup>IN</sup> ~~at~~ the store because the folks needed the business and Wayne was here. By that time I was older and not as prone to listen possibly to what grandmother and mother, father had to say. Father had nothing to say, he was in Boise, he went to Boise I think about '32. So we dated after I came home and we just started going steady and after you go steady for a year or two you get married. It was just that simple. And my mother

was very upset about it. My grandmother had more or less come to accept Wayne because he'd been around so much but Mother, I'm not sure she's accepted him yet. He's not a Catholic.

LH: Soon after your marriage the United States was into the Second World War, what effect did this have upon your life?

MR: None, really I'm sure. It probably touch<sup>ed</sup> me very little. Wayne was, he had a differment because of his employment and finally in 1944 he was called<sup>up</sup> for a physical and they were calling so few men then that he was rejected, not only his employment but he had also had<sup>also</sup> a physical disability, he had a hernia. If they were really wanting men they would've taken him but he also had a wife with a child and they weren't interested in him. As far as other than a little bit of rationing and trouble finding shoes for a growing child you know and something like this,<sup>but really</sup> right here in Genesee, we weren't really.

LH: Food rationing is what you were referring to?

MR: Shoes and gas and tires you know things like this but really I don't think I felt of the war. If you lost a friend or two maybe but you do that every day.

LH: Your comment after you were married and started your family, this has been your life since. What do you think is the most significant thing that you have done in your life to support your family?

MR: I can't, other than supporting them physically with nourishing food and clean clothes and a roof to come to and I'm here if they want to talk to me or if they want to bring their friends in. But as far as supporting I don't know. I attempted to join PTA when they were in school and aid and assist them when they were in 4H or if this is the type of support you mean. When they wanted to join campfire I became a leader and if they wanted to be a cheerleader I took them out of town on their trips, now is this the type of support you're interested in?

LH: Well what we're interested in is what you feel is, if you contributed to their support.

MR: Monitorailly, never. I didn't work or do anything like this. I just stayed home. I raised a garden and canned the food.

LH: What value would you place on all this if you<sup>r</sup> family had to put out the money to hire the sewing, the canning, the gardening, the cooking.

MR: I don't know but it would probably be at this point an access of \$1000 a month. A cheauffur, you know.....

LH: Do you look upon things that you do as valued in this way?

MR: No not really. If they just open their arms and receive it without giving it a second thought, I'm sure. In fact I even catch the devil mouth from Jay because I picked up the clothes off the floor and hung them up and he can't find<sup>r</sup> them.

LH: What organizations do you belong to for your own benefit?

MR: At this point I get a great deal of enjoyment out of campfire, really. I enjoy being a part of the civic club, the work that I've done there. I used to be an active member of Altar Society until I started driving school bus and<sup>now</sup> I can't attend the meetings but I enjoyed the Altar Society meetings at the church. I enjoyed singing in the choir if this is an organization, I guess it is. I enjoy my work at the library but that's not an organization. I enjoyed bowling and the group when we had a group here. But truthfully I don't belong to really very many organizations.

LH: Some of these things you referred to as possibly not being organizations then fall under the whelm of volunteer work.

MR: Yeah, right.

LH: Now do you feel that volunteer work is valued in this community?

MR: Not really.

LH: Apparently then it's valued by you?

MR: Yes. I feel it's necessary. I feel there's a need for campfire groups

in this community and so therefore I work with campfire. I feel we need to support the consolidated fund drives so therefore I work but I don't think it's valued in the community. I work with Community days through the Civic Club and I don't think very many people really value. I think they kind of look <sup>upon</sup> ~~at~~ me as a fall guide for going ahead and doing it.

LH: Do you think you influence your husband's thinking?

MR: No.

LH: Why or why not?

MR: Well I may influence it, if I make a concrete suggestion he will unbearably do the opposite so maybe I influence him.

LH: And who in your family is aware of the current issues?

MR: The immediate family right here at home now probably, well I'm sure Wayne isn't, he's too tied up with his work. I don't think Jay is because he's too tied up with school, and I don't suppose they stress very much at school, what is going on. So if anyone is going to be concerned with current issues it's probably me.

LH: And then do you bring this to the awareness of your family?

You go about doing your bit in your own way?

MR: Right. Because I mention recycling and Jay refuses flatly to help in any way. He says there's no need to conserve gasoline because by the time we run out of gasoline they will have found something else to replace it. Wayne is too busy to worry, the only worry he does about recycling is the fact that the stuff usually piles up on the back porch and I don't get to Moscow often enough or Lewiston.

LH: What magazines do you subscribe to?

MR: National Geographic, Reader's Digest. Wayne takes some <sup>trade</sup> ~~tree~~ magazines.

Oh, Catholic Digest but Wayne has several Trade magazines which he does not pay for which are sent to him by the publisher for the advertising.

LH: If you could go back and live your life over again, doing anything you

wanted, what would you do or change?

MR: I really don't know. I felt at one time I wanted to go to Business College <sup>and</sup> ~~to~~ pursue a career and that did not work out. I mean I wasn't given the opportunity nor did I take the opportunity, maybe. The folks were, dad was away and grandfather was ill and I was needed at home to run the store.

LH: So then the alternative then was to marry?

MR: Truthfully yes. When you were talking about courtship and marriage I think this was true. Here you were in a little town of 500 and no chance, really and truly no chance to continue your education. Grandmother and grandfather were both terribly old, mother was still <sup>home with</sup> at four tiny, not tiny but younger children and all in high school or grade school and I suppose, in fact I told Cheryl this <sup>one day,</sup> ~~once~~ when she was talking about marry-  
ing and we were <sup>up</sup> ~~out~~ here talking about it one day and I told her <sup>I felt</sup> I probably married out of, it was in February, after a long hard winter, during a long hard winter, '37 was the worst snow we've ever had. And I think after a while you just simply get bored to death of looking at the snow and the same people coming and going and possibly the thought of getting married and going off on a wedding trip was, as far as I can think, was exciting! Yeah. Truthfully I thought about this, not until Cheryl was concerned, I was, we were talking because she was engaged and thinking about breaking her engagement and she came up just to talk and listen and we were just talking. And that was only like 5 years ago so I was married 37 years before I even gave the matter any thought. I'm not a deep thinker.

LH: Would you not remarry, or would you remarry if the situation came about?

MR: I don't know. There again, I don't know. I just don't know. I've often thought that marrying was probably a mistake but who really and truly can know.



LH: How did your life set with what you would consider your ideals?

MR: There again I was too busy to be sitting around forming ideals. I was working from 6 in the morning til midnight from 1935 until I got married and for a year or so after. As far as sitting around and forming ideals, I looked at my mother and father and I looked at my grandfather and I guess those were my ideals and they both had, I suppose good marriages, although I mean nobody was ecstatically happy or anything like that, you know what I mean. They just got along great. I think of ideals I think possibly, I thought that probably Wayne would join the Catholic Church which he hasn't. And I thought too, probably that I'd get more help, more support from a husband than it has turned out.

LH: What kind of support?

MR: Oh any kind of support. More help in the house, more help in the yard, more help raising kids.

LH: Do you think that part of this is because these sort of things are considered women's work?

MR: No I think for one thing his background, I mean his mother and father<sup>certainly</sup> set the standards for his thinking in lots of ways. His father was a free agent more or less, so to speak and his mother was home you know all the time.

LH: Doing the women's work?

MR: Well, right. I mean butchering the chickens, putting in the garden, milking the cow. Basically I blame it on the fact, we<sup>d</sup>ve been married less than 7 years when he went in the business and really I'm not blaming him <sup>not</sup> for supporting me, I mean I had hoped for it but I mean he's busy. He's trying to scratch a living out there, he doesn't have a paycheck. Of course I mean a man with a paycheck too is working for a living but it is different. I know because my family were always in business. I was serving lunches and waiting on tables when I was 10. And I was younger than that

when I was in there just cleaning. Before school and after school and all summer long, dusting and cleaning and mopping and keeping the rest-rooms clean and we didn't have a family life of any kind, everybody was busy at the store and this is the way its been but the few years that Wayne worked for wages, we had a different type of life then but that was before children and I mean we were free to come and free to go when it was basically a very happy, relaxing<sup>ed</sup> situation. Had I known, I swear, had I known that Wayne was going to go into business I wouldn't of married him for \$1000 on the line.

LH: You realized at that time the business of being tied down to a business.

MR: Oh Lord! I couldn't play basketball, I couldn't participate in the church choir. If I went to a dance I had to be back at the store in time <sup>help</sup> to serve the intermission crowd, and then of course I couldn't go back to the dance because you were washing the dishes and cleaning up so you could lock up.

LH: And you more or less resented it?

MR: I resented it terribly. I hated the store. We had summer baseball, I couldn't go to a baseball game, I was at the store. You were there Sundays, we ate our Thanksgiving Day dinner at the store. Grandmother was at the store, grandfather was at the store, dad was at the store until of course he went to Boise. And<sup>then</sup> as the children were a little older and off to school, mother came down to the store to help out because I was in high school and then she came down to the store to help. You were there at 5:30 in the morning so you could open at 6 and you were there at midnight.

LH: And do you feel the same way about your present business?

MR: I'm not excited about it. I didn't want him to go into business but it ties you down, yes. We used to hunt birds, we used to fish, we used to go camping. Since he's had the store you're there at the store, you're

at the shop, *it was a store now its a shop.*

LH: Do you care to get into why you were raised by your grandparents and the reason?

MR: So I could work at the store. I was three blocks closer to the store living with my grandparents than I was when I was at home. I was about 10 and I would work at the store until about 8 or 9 at night and they didn't want me walking that distance alone at night and the folks' grandparents lived where Stubb Guilts lives now so it was just a half a block from the store to the house and that's why the house was built there. My mother and dad lived up in back of the public school, so it was a long walk, you know not long as blocks go but it was a hike and of course they didn't need to pick up and drive a kid home 9 o'clock at night. By 9 o'clock at night grandmother could take me home. She was ready to go home by then, too, you know. It was merely convenient so <sup>that</sup> I could go to work for them and spend longer hours at the store.

LH: Did you feel that your brother was treated differently?

MR: I don't know how my brother was treated. My brother was a freshman in high school when he moved, after dad died in '37 mother moved to Lewiston within just, well he died in September, she moved <sup>in</sup> late October. I don't know how he was treated. Let's see he was born 7 years after I was so he was 3 when I left home. I'm sure he wasn't treated any differently. He might of been treated differently, he was an only boy, a surviving boy because they had lost one boy and then there were two girls since his birth, there were two more girls so possibly he was treated differently, I don't know.

LH: Did you feel that boys were treated differently in general in your grow-up years?

MR: Oh yes.

LH: In what way?

MR: Oh I felt that boys were allowed more freedom than girls. You never hung down at the store, girls didn't hang around the store. There was always a group of boys from town hanging around the store, working crossword puzzles, playing chess, the girls were always, you never saw a girl, I think girls were treated differently than boys.

LH: Were you aware of this at the time?

MR: No, it was just natural. Just one of those things I guess.

LH: What are your plans, if any, that you have for the future? Your family is gone. Do you have any particularlly, maybe I should say.

MR: No I'm just gonna stay here and work like I have been accustomed. When I'm not cleaning house or cooking or washing clothes I'm over at the shop keeping books. And that's it. I'd like to stay with as much or as little volunteer work as I'm doing but I'm gonna be forced to give that up sooner or later because Wayne is just rabbit about my staying with the campfire. I'm just babysitting other people's kids at this point, let the mothers do it. You did it when your kids were that age let someone else do it and so that's my one big interest as far as volunteer work goes because that goes on all year long.

LH: But then I know, too, that you have an interest in just outdoor type things in general so that this interest in campfire is ~~gonna have to~~ <sup>connected with your interest in</sup> outdoors.

MR: This is true, it's the only chance I get to get out, was with the campfire group or work with day camps <sup>now</sup> ~~you know~~ and things like this. I mean once I stop that, I won't get outside. Outside of gardening and yardwork.

LH: The hunting trips that you've gone on all through the years, you expect to just do away with those.

MR: More or less because there is no game. We have never gone out on an elk

hunt just for the sheer joy of hunting an elk or being in the woods, it was, we needed the meat. So therefore, you went out and you hunted and you brought home your elk, your deer and you got them in the locker and there was your meat. But now you can hunt for 3 weeks and never see an elk and I can't justify, I'm too practical, I can't justify going out here on an expensive elk hunt never seeing an elk.

LH: Do you see this sort of thing coming to an end?

MR: Elk hunting?

LH: Hunting, yes, because of this. Not only for yourself.

MR: Yeah I think it's coming to an end, it may resurge but right now it's *certainly* going downhill. The elk and the deer may come back by some miracle but I think that's what it's going to take. I have a lot of ideas what the problems are but probably nobody else would agree, you know. Everybody that you talk to has a different idea about what happens and what not, <sup>there's</sup> but ~~there's~~ more hunters than ever so there's no chance to try to find a new area. We've hunted the same area since '43 and we'd see herds of 15 and 20, never give it a thought, it was common. Now, if you see 2 elk, well we went out with six in the party and we hunted for 5 days in '73, the fall of '73 and not a soul saw an elk and there were six men hunting. I didn't hunt that year I stayed with camp with Naoma and Nyla and we just visited and chatted. And this year they went out, I didn't go out as they were only gonna be gone over the weekend which is no hunt. I mean if you can't stay longer than that it wasn't worthwhile. If they had gone for a week or <sup>ten days</sup> ~~two~~, I would've made the effort and gone but over a weekend it wasn't worthwhile. But we will continue to hunt, I'm sure for a few years yet but Wayne is reaching a point, physically that he is unable to hunt, <sup>to</sup> really get out and hunt like he used to and like you have to. Now if you're going to bring home an animal and I still can't justify spending that kind of money and that type of preparation and that

much effort if you're not gonna bring home an elk. Maybe I've got the wrong attitude here.

LH: Your liking of the outdoors, the hunting disappearing, your getting out of campfire and this sort of thing, do you plan anything for the future to take this place in your life?

MR: No, I think I'll probably just slow down to a point where I can't keep up with the work I have without looking for other interests or other hobbies. Nothing would make Wayne happier than to have me report to the shop every blessed day of the week, including Saturday at 8 <sup>every</sup> ~~in the~~ morning and stay there until 5. And I think eventually it probably will come to that.

LH: So is this because the business is getting bigger?

MR: Yes, both, the business is getting larger and more far flung. We <sup>used</sup> ~~just~~ to work just around here and now he's working further out. <sup>Duwayne</sup> ~~Wayne~~ would like to see me come to the job site up there at Mica and pitch a tent and just live there for the summer so I could be the flunkie and make the parts runs and probably learn to grease and a few more things to take this off his shoulders and keep books and keep the time sheets and the maintenance reports on the equipment and I think that probably after I give up campfire there will probably be a few things around here. If I lived in Moscow I could probably find more volunteer things to do, but living out here. One of the objections that Wayne has is <sup>the fact</sup> that I'm running into Moscow all the time to do these things. If I could basically do them right here.

LH: Would you ever consider taking paid employment in Moscow?

MR: Well at this point, no. There was never an opportunity, really. I've been too busy here. If Wayne were working for wages and I had nothing else to do except keep the house, yes, but basically I really feel that I'm practically employed except for wage. Because the books over there, I can spend, well usually I spend about 2 days a week, about 16 hours a week

on bookwork during the year except during canning season. Then I don't spend that much time.

LH: What happens to it then?

MR: Well a lot of it you have to keep up with, payroll, but then a lot of it <sup>is pushed back,</sup> ~~it's~~ the records are pushed back and then I spend almost three months, Jan., Feb., and March over there almost exclusively, probably 4 days a week to get caught up and get my income tax form filled out. I suppose I could probably <sup>would</sup> say the work will take me 2 days a week, 16 hours a week on a 52 week a year basis if I would go over there. Wayne would be tickled to death if I would be over there more often because he feels anytime he needs me to do anything, I either have to go drive bus or it's my day at the library or I promised that I would be in Moscow for a meeting or something like this, it always works out that way. But as far as taking a job away from home at this point, no.

(end of interview on side 1 of Tape no. 2)