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Arkansas Memories Project

Interview with

Monica Strack
Conway, Arkansas
2 July 2002

Interviewers: Michael Pierce and Charles Nabholz

Michael Pierce: Hi, this is Michael Pierce, here in Conway, Arkansas. It is July 2, 2002. I am talking to Monica Strack about her life in Arkansas. The first thing that I wanted to ask you is when and where you were born?

Monica Strack: I was born in Minnesota, Watkins, Minnesota.

MP: What was the year?

MS: 1905.

MP: 1905. Who were your parents?

MS: Mary and Antone Strack.

MP: How did they arrive in Minnesota?

MS: My father came from Germany. He was only six when he came. My mother was born in St. Joseph, Missouri. Her father and mother came over much earlier. My grandfather was only six years old when he came over.

MP: Where in Germany was your father from?

MS: Coblenz on the Rhine River.

MP: Where is that?

MS: That's on the Rhine River, where the Rhine River flows into the Moyelle River.

MP: Why did he come to the United States?

MS: Actually, I do not know that. A lot of people were coming over to the United States in those years. They always heard about the land of opportunity. It was called that already then. I guess that had a part to do with it.

MP: Minnesota, was there a large German community?

MS: Yes, there was a large Germany community there. In fact, we were close to St. Cloud, Minnesota. The Benedictine fathers had come over there very early. I think it was through them that we came to St. Cloud, Minnesota. They were pioneers there and had a big establishment. They tried to bring immigrants over, and so as we were related to some of them. I guess that was why we came over.

MP: Your father and mother's family knew fellow immigrants in Minnesota?

MS: I guess that is what brought them here. Especially my grandfather. My father was only six, so he just did what his parents did.

MP: What did your father and mother do in Minnesota?

MS: My father was a cabinetmaker. When he was old enough to get a job and get out from under the main house, he went in with my uncle, who was an undertaker. He made coffins. They called them coffins because they were made out of wood. My mother lined them, and they looked pretty nice. They painted them or varnished them, whatever you want to call it. That was what he got into. The reason he had to quit that was because he got inflammatory rheumatism in his hand then. He went and bought a little place about a half a mile out of town. He farmed a little and did whatever he could until his hands got better. He then went into building furniture.

MP: When did your parents get married?

MS: Somewhere in the 1800s. Oh, I would say about 1886.

MP: How many children did they have?

MS: Fourteen. I am the tenth.

MP: Fourteen!

MS: I am the tenth one and the eighth girl. There were six boys.

MP: What was life like? When you were born in 1905, they had already moved to the farm?

MS: Yes.

MP: What was life like on the farm? What did you raise?

MS: We had hogs. Everyone raised as much of their own food as they could. We had a garden. It seems like they had cattle, too. They had a little patch of wheat. I remember my oldest sister talking about how our father used to take the scythe and cut the wheat with that. She stacked them into little piles. It was just a very small place. He did some carpentry work, while his hands were getting better. He couldn't do much.

MP: When did they leave Minnesota?

MS: In 1903. Actually, the doctor told him his hands would not get better unless "you go south." The severe winter was too much for him. He said the only thing that would really help him was to move south. My uncle and father got on the train, and they went to Kansas and then to Oklahoma. There was a little settlement there already from Minnesota. They had left, too, because of the cold weather.

MP: What was the name of the settlement?

MS: They called it Stillwater, but the name of the settlement was called Glencoe.

MP: Glencoe. What year did you arrive there?

MS: In 1907.

MP: So you were only two?

MS: Yes, I was just about two. We moved in the fall, and I would have been two in February.

MP: Did you move to a farm?

MS: We moved to a farm. By that time, the oldest son, my oldest brother, was old enough to help with the farm. They rented a farm and raised cotton, which was the thing they raised around that part of Oklahoma at that time.

MP: What are your first memories of Oklahoma?

MS: I even have some memories of the trip. [Laughter]

MP: Tell us about the trip.

MS: I was the tenth child and the baby. I was sitting on my mother's lap, and the conductor came by. He had the stub to put in our window for our ticket. I was sitting on my mother's lap, and he leaned over. They wore those blue coats with the flashy buttons on them. One of those buttons got hung in my curls, and he couldn't get rid of the curl, and I couldn't get rid of the conductor. It was kind of a traumatic thing for me. I guess I started crying and made a scene.

MP: When your family moved from Minnesota, did they sell the livestock and start over?

MS: I am sure they did. We went by train, and all my father took were his children.

MP: Home was on the frontier at the time. I think it was only opened up to Caucasian

settlement in 1899. That is where you get the Sooners. They were the cheaters.

MS: There was an Indian settlement very close to us. The Shawnee was a big Indian reservation.

MP: Did you have much contact with the Shawnee children?

MS: Not really. When we left Oklahoma, we went by the reservation. That was the first time that I had seen bison. It was really exciting, seeing the Indians in their native dress.

MP: The homestead in Oklahoma, what was the house like?

MS: At first we rented a farm. We did not buy anything there. My dad wanted to be sure that was where he wanted to settle. We rented a farm that had a lot of cotton on it, and it wasn't picked yet. It was in the fall. We lived there a year, and then the next year we were gathering the cotton crops. My brother was in the field with some of the older sisters and brothers, and my father had gone to town with a load of cotton. All of a sudden, my brother was called from the field, our house was on fire. What we did in the fall of the year, the boles would not open real good. They just pulled them off the stalks and took them to the houses, and emptied them onto the floor. We sat around and pulled the cotton out of the boles. Mother didn't know what to do with the burs. They were good to make a fire with. She threw a lot of those in the stove, and the flue caught fire. It went to the second story, and it was just an iron flue. The flue got hot and some clothes near it caught on fire. Our house burned down. That was about when we were there a year. Mother went to the phone—we had a party line—she just hollered, “Strack's house is on fire!” It was a telephone, one that you rang. It was one of

those old-timers on the wall. The guys came over and did a bucket brigade. The well was just about fifteen feet from the house. We had an outside cellar.

Everybody did at that time in Oklahoma on account of the storms they had at that time. Mother was very good at putting up things, it was full of stuff. They saved all of that, but the house burned down. The neighbors pitched in and took us to our grandfather's. We had to start all over again. The livestock and all of that was saved. We then moved to a rock house. It was made out of rocks. It was a real neat little place. It had a little upstairs, and we all thought that was great. We lived there the rest of our time in Oklahoma, which was about four more years.

MP: Fourteen children in the house. Probably, they weren't all in the house at the same time.

MS: No, one of my brothers was born here in Conway. Three of them were born in Oklahoma. The older girls started to work in Stillwater. I had relatives there, and two of my older sisters were working there. They met a family living there in Glencoe, Oklahoma who had two sons who were single. My two sisters were real anxious to move to Oklahoma, and later they got married to the two brothers.

MP: The people in Glencoe, a large number of people in Glencoe moved to Oklahoma before. When your family arrived in Oklahoma, they knew many of their neighbors?

MS: Yes, that is right. That was very good. I guess that is the reason they finally settled there.

MP: I would imagine that these houses were not large by today's standards.

MS: I imagine it would have been about four rooms downstairs and a kitchen with a

big room upstairs. It would be just a big attic-like thing.

MP: How many people did you share your bed with?

MS: My mother knew how to take care of all of that. She had a big curtain put through the middle. At that time there were only five boys and six girls. The six girls slept on one side and probably had three beds on each side.

MP: Kind of like a bunk situation. Do you remember picking cotton in the fields?

MS: I remember the second year that we were there that everybody went to pick cotton. I remember thinking that must be fun. I told my dad, "I want to go pick cotton." He said, "Oh, you are too young." I said, "I want to go." He took a flour sack (we bought flour in fifty-pound Pages to bake bread) and put a handle on it and put it on me. They had planted cotton real close to the house. He said, "You can pick right there." I got out there and picked, and it wasn't as much fun as I had imagined. [Laughter] I thought he gave me that sack and wanted me to fill it up. When he came looking for me, I was out there bawling like a baby. I said, "I don't like it." [Laughter]

MP: Was that your last time of picking cotton?

MS: Oh, no! When we moved to Conway, I helped to pick cotton.

MP: Why did the family decide to move to Conway?

MS: The dust storms started to come up. We were cotton farmers, and my dad would say when a big yellow cloud would show up from the west, "Run to the cellar. There is a big storm coming, and it is a dust storm." We would do that. He would tell us to close the house up tight, and we did. We would run to the cellar, and after about an hour it would be over. We would go back to the house, and there

was dust all over the place. We could scrape it off because there was that much dust. Then, in the fields, the cotton stalks that were there would just be blown away. He decided to find another place. Some of the other settlers who had been there before decided to go back to Minnesota. Papa said, "That isn't for me. I am going to stay in the South." They went down to—he and my uncle, again—look for a new place. They went to Fort Smith and through the Arkansas valley. When they came to Morrilton, they nearly settled there, but they decided to go a little farther and came to Conway, about twenty miles farther. Everyone was really friendly here. They were anxious for us to move in because it was a nice large family. Some of my sisters and brothers were of dating age. The guys were looking for partners. They had a nice Catholic church here, and we were Catholic. That had a lot to do with it, too. We finally settled here. My dad and uncle rented four places. They went back to Oklahoma, and told us all about it.

MP: Where were the four places?

MS: They are here in Conway.

MP: Where?

MS: The industrial park. There were two in the industrial park. One was along the highway. The others were farther back.

MP: Your dad and uncle went back to Oklahoma?

MS: Yes, they got ready to move us. First of all, they rented a freight car because they wanted to take some of their things along. I remember there was a bedroom suite that had escaped the fire when our house burned down, and they wanted to take that along. My uncle and dad filled the car. The rest of us came by train: two of

my sisters and two of my brothers, my grandfather, my uncle. My married sister and husband came by wagon. They had so much fun getting ready for it. For two weeks, they were cooking up a storm, sausage, roasting peanuts, and whatever they could. They packed some mattresses and an oil stove. They were going to camp out and come to Arkansas. My uncle had a wagon, and my grandfather had a wagon. In fact, my grandfather took his son-in-law's wagon because his wife was pregnant and couldn't come on the wagon. They stayed a little longer in Oklahoma and came by train. There were four wagons, and they started off. My sister kept a diary. They came through different parts of Oklahoma, and she described how it was. They had good weather all the way until they got close to Arkansas. They had snow, and they couldn't camp out. There were a lot of wagon yards at that time. That was the social life of the settlers then, and they got together with their neighbors. When they got to Atkins, Arkansas, one of the guy's horses got sick. They had to stop off and stay in Atkins. They finally settled there. That was really the fifth wagon because four were our folks, and the fifth was just a neighbor. The rest of them got to Morrilton on Christmas morning in 1912. They arrived in Conway in the afternoon on Christmas. The neighbors were so nice. They had a stove in the house. The travelers went to the closest farm on the highway. They had a stove there, and two or three men were there for a welcoming committee.

MP: Since you came on the train, were you already there when they arrived?

MS: No, we stayed with our uncle and his wife until the day after Christmas. First of all, in the meantime, we had our auction for all the rest of the stuff that we did not

bring. The day after Christmas, some of the neighbors who were still there, brought their wagons over. On the wagons we went to Shawnee, Oklahoma. That is where we passed the Indian reservation. We boarded the train and went to Claremore and Tulsa, Oklahoma and then to Arkansas.

MP: Was that your first time in a large city?

MS: Yes, that is the first time that I remember. I thought it was really nice.

MP: Do you remember anything specific about Tulsa?

MS: I remember seeing a lot of oil wells. I would have been about six years old then.

MP: What do you remember about the train ride?

MS: It was something. At Claremore, we all had to go to the bathroom. We had to go all along the tracks to a little place. I remember some of the people were laughing in the train. I said, "What are they laughing about?" They said, "All the women went on the train with their little ones." My dad was the only man. They said, "Do you reckon all those kids are really his?" [Laughter] By that time, two of my sisters were married and four were on the wagon. It wasn't quite that big. My aunt had about six little ones with her on the train, and her husband had one of the wagons. I remember hearing them say, "No, they aren't all his children. Some of them are his brother-in-law's children." I remember that. When we came to Arkansas, we stopped at the station and got off. We were so excited! I was old enough to know what a train ride was like. The ones who were here were there with their wagons to get us.

MP: They got here first?

MS: The freight car got here first, too. They were able to set up the houses before we

got here. In a couple of days, they did all of that. The weather—they must have had a snow, yes. It was just thawing out. It was a beautiful, sun-shiney day. It was just as pretty as it could be out. It wasn't too cold. We had the biggest house because we had the largest family. It was a brick house and two story.

MP: Where was this one?

MS: This was on the old Little Rock highway around where Lake Conway is now.

MP: Around Highway 65. What were your first impressions of Conway?

MS: I thought it was a nice little place. At that time, it was just about 2,000 in population. The depot we had a long time ago was really nice. There were no pavements anywhere. It was all dirt roads and streets. There were no electric lights. They had gaslights on the street. It was just about two blocks of city at that time.

MP: This is sort of off the subject. Something you said reminded me. Do you remember the first time that you saw an automobile?

MS: Well, I sure do. You know, it was in Oklahoma. Our pastor served us from Stillwater. Just shortly before we left, he came in a two-seated auto. Have you seen any of those antiques?

MP: Yes.

MS: It made a lot of noise. We would all run out when we heard that car coming because we knew it was Father Phil.

MP: When was your first car ride?

MS: I don't know. When we moved to Conway, there was just one car that I knew of. It was Julius Favre. He had an undertaker's establishment here in Conway. He

came out in it. We used to have fish fries out on the lake. He came out in his car. I remember my brothers used to have sons who would make the noise of the car. We lived on the rented place about two years, and then dad bought a farm of 167 acres on Lower Ridge Road. We lived on this place two or three years, and then Dad bought a Ford. He went to town one day and came home driving a Ford. My mother said, "How in the world did you know how to drive?" He said, "Anybody who can drive an engine, can drive a car."

MP: When you arrived in Conway, you were six or seven. Did you start school?

MS: I went to school the day after New Years. At that time, we just had a small school, just four rooms. It was a Catholic school.

MP: What was the name of the school?

MS: St. Joseph's School. The Notre Dame Sisters were our teachers. They were from St. Louis. We had a four-room school. After a couple of years they had to build another room. The place we bought after we left that first place—the place we moved to—Dad bought that place. It was five miles from school, and we walked to school.

MP: How long would it take you?

MS: We started out at seven in the morning, and school started at nine.

MP: Wow, that is amazing. How many students were in your class?

MS: I would think—they would have two classes in one room. I imagine about ten.

MP: Do you remember any of your teachers?

MS: Oh, yes.

MP: Who was your favorite?

MS: Sister Benoit. She was a French nun. She taught the seventh and eighth grades. I liked here a whole lot. I prepared my lessons well, and that goes a long ways. I think she liked me too.

MP: What were the subjects that they taught?

MS: I guess everything. Before World War I we had a German nun. She demanded that anybody of German descent had to take German. We took reading, writing, and church history in German, besides our other subjects. It is the same subjects which they are teaching now.

MP: When you were growing up—I should have asked this before—in Minnesota and in Oklahoma and here in Arkansas, did you mostly speak English or German?

MS: German at home and English otherwise. My older brothers and sisters got most of their education in German. The teacher was my uncle, and he lived in the same house with us until he married again. His wife died in childbirth. Two of my mother's sisters lost their lives in childbirth. Their husbands would always go back to my mother, and she would always take care of the children for them. They had a good school.

MP: Where did you learn to speak German?

MS: From my mother and father, also my sisters and brothers. When I went to school, I could talk German. I couldn't read or write, so I had to learn all of that. We always said to our dad after that, "Why do we have to take German?" He said, "Well, one of these days you will thank me for it and be happy." It is true.

MP: You and your siblings did not want to learn German?

MS: My youngest brother definitely did not want to. We had to talk German at home,

and we went to school in English. I didn't mind it that much. We thought we might have a German accent and people would laugh at us.

MP: Did you ever speak English at home in the family?

MS: A lot of times I did like my brother and answered in English. Both Mother and Father had an education in German. They both could talk and write pretty well.

MP: You mentioned World War I. What was it like being German American?

MS: At that time so many of the settlers had come over and belonged to the church who were German, Swiss, or French. If you were Catholic, you were German, so we were all German. They didn't take us in too good for a while. As the years progressed, there is a nice relationship now in Conway between the Catholics [and the rest of the community].

MP: During World War I, were there any anti-German sentiments?

MS: Well, I believe there was. We didn't associate out of our realm too much. We were mostly with our friends at school and church. We did not feel it that bad. During the depression years, they were glad to come to us. Most of us German people were farmers, and they had wonderful vegetables that they could buy. They were glad to associate with us then. As a rule, people were pretty friendly.

MP: How far did you go through school?

MS: As far as our school taught at that time, the eighth grade. Later on, I took a little course at the university.

MP: Now it is the University of Central Arkansas. What did you do when you finished school?

MS: When I finished school? I helped at home. When I was in my late twenties,

David Goldstein and Theodore Dorsey gave a forum at the courthouse here in Conway. They were Catholics and stayed at the rectory where the priest lives. At that time, the pastor did not have anyone to take care of them and to cook for people. He asked my father if I could help out for a week. I didn't want to. They insisted, and at that time one of my sisters had married into the pastor's family. I went and stayed that week. The next week, the week before Easter, Mr. Goldstein said, "We have no appointment, so could we stay another week?" I was asked to stay another week, and so I did. The next week our pastor came from Pennsylvania, and he had gall bladder trouble. The pastor here had made an appointment with a doctor in Little Rock for him to see about this gall bladder trouble. He said, "I have to go to the doctor, and there will not be anybody at the rectory, so will you stay until I get this all straightened out?" I said, "Well, I guess I can." In a way, it was kind of nice. I had lived on the farm, and here I was in the midst of everything. I was in the choir, two or three bridge clubs, and I was at every dance there was. I had a really good time. It lasted forty-two years.

MP: When did you start working at the rectory? What year would that have been?

MS: 1935.

MP: So you were twenty-nine by then.

MS: By that time I had to do the admittance, take care of all the calls that came in. I felt like I was one of the pastors. [Laughter] I was important.

MP: You did everything except for the sacraments.

MS: [Laughter] That's right. When the pastor wasn't there and they needed

counseling, they came to me. I gave them the best that I could.

MP: In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan made a resurgence. It was all around the nation.

It wasn't anti-African American as much as it was anti-Catholic. Do you have any memories of that?

MS: I don't think they were active here. I don't recall it.

MP: What about the state of Arkansas in general?

MS: It might have been in the outlying places, but I don't think it was very active here.

Wasn't that more in the south?

MP: Conway's being a college town had a little bit of influence and was probably different than most communities. I know in Monticello, the Klan was quite active. The Klan was active in the Democratic Party in Arkansas. The Klan's influence was crucial in the 1920s with the gubernatorial elections. I was just wondering if you saw this on a street level or in Conway.

MS: I don't remember if I did. I don't believe it was very prevalent here.

MP: What about anti-Catholic sentiment in general?

MS: I don't think it was that bad here. The people who moved here from Europe were pretty good quality people. They were very nice. They mixed pretty well with the non-Catholics.

MP: Getting back to your father, your father was a cabinetmaker, a carpenter. Did he take up that trade again when he came to Conway?

MS: When we bought the farm, there were just old buildings there. He was going to go into the dairy business. He said, "The first thing we have to have is a good barn." He built that and, afterwards, the house. Then he would go around and

help his children build.

MP: His farm was basically a dairy farm?

MS: Well, dairy, cotton, and diversified.

MP: How many acres?

MS: One hundred sixty-seven. We thought it was 160 acres, but it turned out to be 167.

MP: So you got seven acres for free?

MS: Yes. That seven acres on the hillside there.

MP: What was one of your most vivid memories of growing up on the farm? What would an average day be like?

MS: Being in a big family you always have plenty of people around you. We had an organ and at night we all got together at the organ and sang. We had a lot of cousins and neighbors to come over because there were a lot of young folks. It was pretty wonderful. Sunday was the day that we looked forward to. All of the neighbors got together at one place or the other.

MP: What sorts of chores would you have to do? What would be a typical, say, Wednesday?

MS: I would get up in the morning. We didn't have milkers at that time. We milked by hand. My sister and I would go to the barn and milk. I would light the lantern and we'd go to the barn and milk.

MP: How many cows would you milk in the morning?

MS: Maybe about three or four. My sister would milk about that many. They sold milk, so we had several cows.

MP: Where would the milk go?

MS: At first, we would churn it and make butter. Later on, we had creameries around town, and they would come around and pick up the cream. We had a separator and separated the milk from the cream. Later on, we gave up on that and left the dairy business because it was too much trouble. They were so strict, and then there was bitterweed that the cows would eat. The milk would get bitter, and then they wouldn't take the milk. We just finally gave it up. We went to beef cows.

MP: When would that be?

MS: Maybe in the 1940s, somewhere around in there.

MP: You mentioned that there was a lot of singing and visiting as a sort of entertainment. Did that change with the radio?

MS: Well, a little bit. My goodness, the radios that we had at that time were by battery. Most of the time the battery was down. We still reverted to the organ.

MP: When did your family get its first radio?

MS: It could have been—it was when “Amos and Andy” were on. [Laughter] I guess in the 1930s. My dad really enjoyed it, and he died in 1939, so it had to be in the 1930s.

MP: What about the 1920s and radio stations?

MS: I guess maybe we had one in Conway then. My dad was pretty up to date. I tried to get the things that were new.

MP: So radio was battery powered. You could listen to a few shows. Do you remember what all you listened to? “Amos and Andy,” what else?

MS: What else? “I Love Lucy,” “Amos and Andy,” “Yeller Sleeve”—I just don't

remember any more.

MP: In 1929, the Great Depression hit. Do you remember the stock market crash?

MS: Yes, it was a sad time. All the banks closed. We didn't have much money in the bank, but the little we had did mean a lot. I even lost a little. I had some from picking cotton. It was pretty bad. The farmers were better off than the people that lived in town. We raised nearly all of our food, and they had to come out to us to buy it. There was not much money to buy it with. It was pretty bad.

MP: I am trying to think of the best way to phrase this question. You might not know the answer. What was the political mood at the time?

MS: There wasn't as much competition in politics at the time. There weren't as many Republicans living in the area. It was mostly Democratic.

MP: Was there a lot of enthusiasm for Franklin Roosevelt?

MS: Yes, that really put people on their feet. I remember my two brothers-in-law working for the PWA [Public Works Administration]. That really did something for the farmers. They dug ponds and put fish in. They contoured the land. It was just a different world. There was a little money coming in. Of course, we ate a lot of turnips in President Hoover's time. [Laughter]

MP: Did you follow politics much?

MS: My dad did. He was a pretty strong Democrat. Women couldn't vote or do anything when I was young.

MP: After 1920, you could.

MS: I signed up just after I started working in town.

MP: Did you vote for Al Smith?

MS: Yes.

MP: Was there much enthusiasm in your community for Al Smith?

MS: I don't know. It wasn't that bad. As much as I knew about it, it didn't bother me too much. I guess men were the most politicians at that time. The women didn't bother.

MP: The reason that I am asking is that he was the first Catholic to run for president. The 1928 election is seen as pivotal.

MS: My dad was a really strong Catholic. I sure he voted for Al Smith. We had to walk those five miles to school because we had to go to a Catholic school.

MP: Was there a closer public school?

MS: Yes, several district schools. There was one on German Lane and one out close to East Liberty.

MP: In the 1930s, you see the rise of Hitler in Germany. When was your first sense that there was going to be another war with Germany?

MS: The Second World War? It was when my nephews were being called into service. MP: Before that did you have a sense that we were going to go to war?

MS: No, my dad watched the news very carefully. He didn't share too much of the bad news with us. The news didn't go like it does now. The media didn't have access to it all.

MP: Your first indication of the war was your nephews being drafted. What was it like to be back home in Arkansas during the war?

MS: It was pretty ordinary. During the war, a lot of the guys that I went with were killed, and that was terrible. We would get that news, and we were afraid to go

anywhere they were giving the news. In the Battle of the Bulge, I remember that one? There were about four or five of our parishioners killed. That was a sad thing. So many families were affected.

MP: Do you remember the rations?

MS: Yes, we always had it pretty good because we grew sugar cane, and we made molasses. We always had molasses, and we had our own lard. We had our own meat from chickens and hogs.

MP: The rations didn't affect you because of the farm?

MS: The sugar and flour did. We grew corn and had our corn ground. We made meal out of it. We ate quite a bit of cornbread at that time.

MP: How big was Conway by World War II?

MS: It grew pretty fast after they started improving the place. It would have been about seventeen or eighteen thousand.

MP: What were the biggest employers in town?

MS: Frauenthal and Swartz. That was right on the front street, where American Management is now. It was a store that they sold groceries in and also seed and general merchandise. The people said they made their money from the poor sharecroppers. They would buy their seed and all of their things they needed for the farms, and the farmer would have to make a crop before he could pay back his debt.

MP: They would buy on credit. I am going to turn the tape over.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

MS: That was really something. After we were there and liked the climate, it was so mild after being in Minnesota. This is in Oklahoma in Glencoe. My grandparents had visited us there, and they said they thought they would make the move, too, and move to Oklahoma. They moved there and probably they had lived there a year. They bought a place and had a driveway that had cedars on each side. The sage grass had grown up there, and my grandmother didn't think it looked nice. They decided they would burn that off. They didn't know that Oklahoma had those winds that could come in gusts without any warning. They were out there burning, and all of a sudden a gust came. At that time ladies wore long skirts. The flame got under her skirt and started burning. She said, "Oh, Alex, I'm burning." She started running, and he ran after her to try and get her on the ground. By the time he got her and put her down, she was so burnt from the bottom up that she died that night. The doctors—they had to come from Stillwater—they phoned and said to pack her up in linseed oil. Soak a blanket in linseed and wrap her up in that. It did take part of the pain away and the shock. She was probably in shock. She died that night at midnight. They buried her there. Later on after everybody had moved away, my grandfather had her taken up and moved to Minnesota to be buried.

MP: Did your grandfather move back to Minnesota?

MS: He was a widower for so many years. He was so lonely, and he was only in his sixties at that time. He would go back to Minnesota, and then he would want to come back to Oklahoma. He was so restless. He would come to stay with us three or four months at a time, and then he would go back to Minnesota. I have

very fond memories of him. He always stayed busy. He had some beehives and raised bees. He made honey. He was good with his hands, and he would make baskets. Finally, he invented a broom-making machine.

MP: A what?

MS: A broom-making machine. He invented this machine and made brooms and sold them by the dozens. He would get the labels and put them on the brooms. They looked just as professional as those that were made in the factories. He was always busy, and I guess that is what saved his life. He lived to be eighty-seven. Later on when Dad retired and couldn't work in the fields, he took up the broom making. We sold them at the schools a dozen at a time.

MP: One of the things that I wanted to ask you about—most of the people who were farmers worked on the side for extra income. What were your father's extra jobs, or did he have any?

MS: As I said, he would go and help his neighbors to build and remodel. I guess that was about it. He took up these little things, like taking care of the bees when my grandfather would leave and also making brooms.

MP: After World War II, this part of Arkansas started to change rapidly. What were some of the major changes?

MS: I think at first Conway was called the City of Colleges. They did not want any factory or anything to come in. They thought that would bring in riffraff or something like that. When they started letting the factories in, there was work. Instead of the guys going somewhere else to find work after they finished college, they stayed in Conway. They started businesses, and it started to thrive.

MP: When did the bus factory come in?

MS: The bus factory? Oh, my, that was one of the first things.

MP: One of the things I am asking people who lived through almost all of the twentieth century—what were the biggest changes that you saw?

MS: Oh, my goodness! In my life I have seen a lot of them. Electricity is one of the main things that affected us.

MP: When did your family receive it? Did you have it in Oklahoma?

MS: No, we didn't have it in Oklahoma. We had a telephone but no electricity.

MP: That was very common. About forty or fifty years before electricity they had telephones. When do you remember the electricity?

MS: When rural electricity came in? I suppose in the thirties. It really made a big difference to the farmers and the people living in the country. They got the nightlights then, and it lighted up the area. Electricity in the house with toilets and running water with Frigidaires and deep-freeze. Oh, my, what else?

MP: Did that happen in the 1930s?

MS: It could have been in the late 1920s. When I worked in the rectory, it was in the late 1920s.

MP: Getting back to the changes brought by electricity, how did it change the household chores?

MS: Even cleaning the lamp chimneys and the wicks was a chore, and when we got rural electricity we didn't have to us lamps—we were able to have lights everywhere. We still scrubbed floors on our knees, but we didn't have to scrub those lamps anymore.

MP: One of the things a lot of people are interested in, just domestic work. When you were growing up, how did you do laundry?

MS: On the washboard. Do you know what a washboard is?

MP: Can you describe the whole process?

MS: We had a big iron pot. It would cover two burners on the stove where we put it. We would get the water from the well and fill the pot with water and get it hot. You would transfer that to the tubs. First of all, the night before, we would soak the clothes in cold water. Then in the morning, we would take the clothes out of the cold water and put them in the tub with the hot water. We had homemade soap made out of lye and cracklings and stuff like that.

MP: How would you make the soap?

MS: We had a big black pot outside in the yard. We would put so much lye and dissolve it in water. We would put these cracklings in and bring that to a boil and it would finally make the soap. We had to stir and stir and stir. Finally, we would take it off the fire and let it cool overnight. You would then cut it into bars.

MP: How did you dry your clothes?

MS: We would hang them on the lines outside. Everybody had lines outside.

MP: Even in the winter?

MS: In the wintertime also. The clothes would freeze. Everybody wore union suits in the winter for warmth. I don't know if you know what that is. Those suits would fly back and forth and you would think people were out there walking. We would bring them in frozen and dry them in the house by the fire.

MP: Your family has been in the construction business since 1948 or 1949? Was that

related to your father being a carpenter?

MS: I don't think so. It could have been from some of the early learning of my grandfather. It probably had something to do with it.

MP: Let's go back to the 1950s and the post war prosperity that came to Arkansas. Do you have any memories of how that specifically changed your life?

MS: It probably did in a lot of ways. By that time, we had radios, cars, and such as that. We got around better. Up to that time it was very slow. We had a buggy and horse. That was really up-to-date at that time. The next thing was the car. In the 1950s, things got better for everybody.

MP: One of the issues that has shaped Arkansas in the twentieth century is the issue of race. Historically, there has not been a large population of African Americans in Conway as compared to eastern Arkansas. When you arrived here in 1912, what were the race relations like?

MS: I will just tell you my experience. When we walked around, we took short cuts where we could. We took a short cut through the African American's part of town. There were a lot of black people there, and I was afraid of them. We had not seen too many Negroes until we came to Arkansas. The place in Oklahoma, there wasn't one Negro there.

MP: In southern Minnesota?

MS: Nothing, nothing. No black people at all. A lot of Swedes and different nationalities, but no Negroes. I was dreading going to school due to going through this part of town. Finally, we changed our route and went a different way. They were mean. Some of them were mean. If I had not been scared, I

might have been mean back to them. I think the boys made it okay.

MP: Was there much contact between whites and blacks?

MS: No, a lot of the more affluent had black maids and cooks.

MP: Do you think race relations have changed in Conway since 1912, and if so, how so?

MS: Everybody seems to get along so well now. At that time you were still a little bit leery about whether you were being accepted or not. I think there is a really good relationship in this place. I think a lot of people started businesses in town after they got to where they had a little money on the side. I think that had a lot to do with it. They started to mix with the other people in other parts of the city. I think that had a lot to do with the relationship.

MP: Did Conway ever have any racial violence like places like Elaine?

MS: No, I don't remember.

MP: The one area that I wasn't anticipating asking you questions about, but want to go back to and talk about, is the role of the Catholic church in your life and its growth in the twentieth century. When you first came here, how big was St. Joseph's?

MS: Maybe about two hundred people. That was a pretty good size then.

MP: How many priests were there?

MS: Just one.

MP: What was his name?

MS: Father Peter Zell, a very friendly person. He was good for the town also. He made good contacts.

MP: Was he a German?

MS: Very German. He was probably Swiss-German. One Sunday we had an English sermon and also a German sermon. The next Sunday we would have a French sermon and also a German sermon. He knew both languages fluently.

MP: Was there a big difference between the Swiss-German and the non-Germans?

MS: I think there was always a little animosity there. They always thought Father was a little more German than French. I think he treated them alike.

MP: How big was the French population of the parish?

MS: I brought you a book that has a lot of that information in it. I just can't give it to you. I think about one-third French and two-thirds German.

MP: Do you remember your first communion?

MS: Yes, I do.

MP: Can you describe it for me?

MS: I made my first communion in Oklahoma. That was called a private communion. It was very nice. They made a special day out of it. We had a big breakfast. When I was about thirteen. They called it a solemn communion at that time. We dressed like a little bride and the boys were dressed up in suits. That would have a bigger crowd. They were both highlights in my life.

MP: Let's get back to Father Zell. He was a big German. How would he spend his time?

MS: He was great at visiting his parishioners. He had a horse and buggy. His horse was his pride and joy. I remember going to school. We had summer school about six weeks. We had to quit early to work in the fields, and then it took up later on.

He would come in that horse and buggy—the roads were not paved—there was a cloud of dust. One fellow was hair-lipped, and he said, “Here comes Father Hell.”

[Laughter] He visited his people quite a bit. He loved to play cards. On Sundays someone would always invite him out. He was very sociable.

MP: I know where I come from in Ohio, the German population set up a lot of breweries.

MS: Oh, yes, they loved their beer.

MP: Was that the case in the German community here?

MS: Yes, they loved their beer. They made beer themselves. Every Sunday at our house, all the sisters and brothers who were married would come to our house in Conway. Some lived in Little Rock. Papa would always say there was plenty of beer. For the kids, he made this root beer, made out of the same thing but sweeter. My dad made wine. The first thing he did when he bought the farm was to plant a big vineyard. He always made wine, and the people from town would come out and drink wine. Then prohibition came in. We were then kind of leery.

MP: Prohibition didn't change your family's habits?

MS: No, we were a little secretive about making beer and wine. They didn't bother you too much if you didn't sell it and only made it for your own use. Most of the people from Europe were so used to wine that it was a part of their food. They had to have their wine.

MP: During prohibition, could you have wine at your communion?

MS: Yes, we sure could.

MP: After Father Zell, who did you have?

MS: Father Pobleschek. He was a Polish priest. He came here from Pennsylvania. He was a real Polish descendent. He was stricter than Father Zell.

MP: In what way?

MS: In the dress code when we went to church. He wanted us to behave. He was a lot stricter. He had a different temperament completely.

MP: Did he come and visit?

MS: Once a year, he would go and visit everyone. Yes, once in a while, we would have him out to dinner. We would enjoy it. He was a good teacher and he taught in school, too.

MP: How did he deal with animosity between the French and the Germans?

MS: By that time it had kind of settled down. The older people were more or less retiring, and the young folks were normal and got along well.

MP: Do you think they recruited a Polish priest?

MS: I don't think that his nationality had anything to do with it. He was just a different temperament and was stricter, much stricter.

MP: I was just thinking that the French might not have seen him . . .

MS: It did not seem to bother them. At that time, the younger set had more or less taken over.

MP: When you went to work for the church in 1935, who was the priest?

MS: It was one of our native sons, Father Lachowsky. He was only about thirty-seven years old at the time. It was unusual for a native son to come home and be a pastor in the parish.

MP: What was he like?

MS: Very nice, very easy. The town people really took him in. His father was in business in town, and they practically grew up with him. That made a good relationship between the non-Catholics and the Catholics. He joined the civic clubs.

MP: By this time, 1935, when you went to work for the church, how large was it?

MS: Maybe about four or five hundred families.

MP: And now?

MS: About two thousand. I knew everyone. When new people came in, I was the one to register them and to put them on the books. The last five years about five or ten families would come from different places.

MP: What were your duties?

MS: Everything. I took care of the house, the door, the phone, and I did the books for a while. I went to college and did a business course. They did not have a health nurse in school, so when somebody was sick, they sent them to me. I even gave a girl an enema one time. [Laughter] She swallowed a marble. I said, "Who is your doctor?" She said, "I don't know." A lot of the parents did not have phones at that time. I called Dr. Dunaway, and he said, "I don't think it will hurt her, but give her an enema to help her feel a little bit better." I thought, "My gosh, how do you do that?" I had not had an enema myself. I didn't know how to give one. I got through it, and kept her the rest of the day. One time my brother and nephew were playing touch football. One of his brothers came running in and said, "Aunt Monica, call Dr. Henderson. I just got through breaking my brother's leg."

[Laughter] When the doctor heard that, he got a big kick out of it. He said, "It looks like he had a hard time of it, but looks like he got it done." Sometimes it was minor things like an aspirin or something that always helped.

MP: By the time you left in 1976, how big was the church? You said it was five or six hundred families?

MS: Yes, I imagine about that.

MP: How many priests? Just one?

MS: No, it could have been more than that. There were about three (one retired one lived there), and I got help. I got a black lady to come in and do the housework. I had to cook—I guess they liked my cooking.

MP: Are there any other vivid memories that you have of growing up in Arkansas, Oklahoma, or Minnesota, that you would like to share?

MS: I loved the dances. That started when I lived in Oklahoma. At that time, if a girl wanted a job, it was like a maid. You couldn't find a job anywhere else. These people from Stillwater would come out and get my older sisters and get them to work. Many times they would come home and bring their friends along. Papa would help us roll up the carpet, and he played an accordion. He would get the accordion going, and we would have a dance. Before the evening was through—my dad loved to dance. He loved to waltz and would dance with every one of his girls. I got to dance with him, too. I was just a little tyke. I remember that real well.

MP: What about when you moved to Arkansas? Would you have dances at the house?

MS: At the house, and once a month we would have one at the school. They had a

hall, and we would have a dance there. They called it the social supper, and later on people would come in and we would have dances. We would sure have fun.

MP: Was this sort of a place for courting?

MS: Oh, yes, and church and home parties, too. I remember so well when his [Charles Nabholz's] mother and dad started courting.

MP: How did courting work in the 1920s?

MS: You walked a lot of time to the parties, and sometimes you would go with horse and buggy. You would hold hands while walking. We would play the game "Wink" and many other party games. That was one way. They would wink at a girl, and she would try to get away from them. There were two deep, and the guy who had to do the winking would try and get the girl away from the other guy.

MP: I have never heard of that game.

MS: There was a little animosity sometimes if two of the guys wanted to go with the same girl.

MP: How do you play Wink?

MS: Two deep, in a circle, ladies in the middle and guys on the outside.

MP: So there would be two circles, with the women on the inside and the men on the outside. Was there music playing?

MS: No, you would just keep on looking. All of a sudden a man would wink at a girl, and they would have to try to get away and go to the guy that winked.

MP: Would the men wink at the women or would the women wink at the men?

MS: The men winked at the women.

MP: Did the women ever wink at the men?

MS: They did, but not in this game. [Laughter]

MP: The courting would be done at church and at the dances?

MS: Yes, at those dances. All of a sudden, you would see someone getting sweet on someone, and that was the beginning.

MP: A lot of people talk about the 1920s and the way the automobile changed the American teenagers and young adults and the way they were dating. Do you see that happening in Conway?

MS: In my dating days, it was almost always in the car. We always double dated.

MP: Talking about dating with the car and taking it out of parental control.

MS: Yes, it did. You could go a lot farther.

MP: I am not going to ask you what you mean by that. [Laughter]

MS: I don't mean anything else except farther away from home. [Laughter] I didn't word that very well, did I?

MP: Do you still go to dances?

MS: Some.

MP: When did bingo start in Conway?

MS: At the church. Actually, at the socials we played bingo in the early 1930s. No, it was in the 1920s. If we had a social, we had bingo.

MP: How much would a bingo card cost in the 1920s?

MS: At that time, we would play ten cents a game. Later on, it started being fifty cents a card. Now when we play bingo, we use all paper material. We use daubers. At that time, we used corn or seeds.

MP: So you would put a bean on the number they called? What would the prizes be?

MS: At that time, they were just prizes. Things that people donated. I won a food colander, dishes, and maybe some towels or something like that. Now it is different.

MP: When you first went to work at the rectory in 1935, how much did you make?

MS: I made twenty-five dollars a month and room and board. That seemed good because I didn't make any money before that.

MP: What did you do with your twenty-five dollars?

MS: I was able to save something, I really was. I had a car and did all the grocery buying. I used it quite a bit. I went home every Sunday and Wednesday afternoon and helped. I drove out there in a Model-A.

MP: Did you buy anything for yourself?

MS: I had to have some clothes. I tried to get one every new season.

MP: While you were growing up, after you moved here in 1912 during the teens and 1920s, what were the Christmases like?

MS: It was wonderful. We always had a big Christmas tree. We strung popcorn for our garlands, cranberries. Even doing that together was fun. We never helped trim the tree. It was always a surprise. We did the garlands for Santa Claus, and that was it. That was on Christmas Eve, and the next morning was the beautiful Christmas tree. They, my parents, had to wait until we were all quiet in bed to start trimming the tree. It was never put up before, like it is now. They put candles on the tree. How they didn't burn the tree down, I don't know. The little candleholders had clips, and you would clip them on the tree.

MP: My grandmother told me that their present every year would be an apple or an

orange.

MS: We always put those on the tree. We would put a string on them, and they hung on the tree. On New Year's Day, they would untrim the tree. It was up for seven days. We would wake up the next morning, and they would have plates out at the table. We would have an apple and an orange with a bag full of nuts and candy. We put cookies on the tree, too. They were homemade cookies. We would always look forward to that as much as Christmas.

MP: What kind of gifts would you have?

MS: Dolls at first. We had those China-head dolls. They were very nice. All they have to do, a couple of days before Christmas, or a week or so before Christmas, our dolls would always get lost. On Christmas Day, the head was on a new body. They would make the bodies, stuff them. They had new clothes and everything. We would get articles of clothing.

MP: What were the other big holidays? Was July 4th one of them?

MS: Oh, yes! I remember in Oklahoma they had these sparklers and firecrackers. It was a big day. We always got together with our neighbors. I remember one time getting burnt by one of those sparklers. After that, I didn't play with them anymore. It was always a big day with homemade ice cream. Later on, we would carry on the tradition and all the family would get together. The young folks would play ball, and we would have sack races. It was always a fun day. The neighborhoods had more togetherness then at that time.

MP: Why do you think that togetherness has ended?

MS: I think that television had a lot to do with it, and cars. We couldn't go too far at

that time. We just got together. Now, there are too many other distractions, golf and whatever.

MP: What have caused the most changes in Conway that you have seen? The interstate?

MS: That did some, too. When they let the factories come in, so many new people moved in then. The place started growing, and they did the streets. At one time, this was a really big cotton-growing area. On Saturdays, we lived on lower Ridge Road, and there was a ridge on the side of us. There was a road that went up that hill, and there was another valley or ridge there. On Saturdays, there would be one wagon right after the other coming across the hill with cotton on it. They would go to the gins, and at night they would stay in the wagon yards. That was their way of getting together. One line after the other, they had cotton buyers. They would bring it to the gins, and then they would have the buyers. They had their cotton bars, and they would pull out their swigs of cotton and test it. I guess they went by the length of the cotton.

MP: Your family grew cotton. Was it picked just by family members?

MS: At that time, yes. When we got through with ours, we went and helped our neighbors. They paid us, and we made a little money that way.

MP: Eventually, you hired other people?

MS: Later on, when most of us were gone, a black family lived right below our farm, and they helped us a lot. Later on, my brother got one of those guys, and he worked for him every day. We always treated him just like we would treat a white man. They ate at the same table with us. We did not discriminate.

MP: After you have retired, what have you done?

MS: It was when I was ninety. They had places open for desk jobs at the hospital. It was answering the phone and directing the people to different places at the hospital. My sister-in-law had worked there for fifteen years already as a volunteer. She said, "I know who would be good for that. She won't do it because she thinks she is too old." That kind of got my ire up. [Laughter] I said, "I think I could do that." So I went and they put me to work right away. I have been doing it ever since.

MP: Two or three days a week?

MS: Just once a week.

MP: That is amazing. Do you still go to the senior citizens dances?

MS: Not all the time, but I go quite a bit.

MP: You probably hear this way too often, but you do not look ninety-seven.

MS: I do hear it a lot, but I am.

MP: You sure have a sharp mind for ninety-seven. Thank you so very much. These stories in fifty years, a hundred years, will help to understand the twentieth century. I will take this back to the University of Arkansas, and we will transcribe it, and I will send you a copy for you to read over. You can make sure all the names are spelled right and that type of stuff. It will then be deposited in the university library.

MS: I hope you can get something out of it.

MP: The story of just coming to Arkansas from Oklahoma is just a wonderful story. I know people who will appreciate hearing it.

MS: I know when I tell about the wagon train that came from Oklahoma to Arkansas, the young folks always say, "Tell me more! Tell me more."

MP: I actually would like to read the diary.

MS: I will give you a copy. This is a really good book of those people who came to Conway from Europe. It is written partly in German because the priests were more German than French. There is a translation of the book by somebody who could translate the German to English. I also have a book about the beginning of the St. Joseph church.

Charles Nabholz: One thing that I remember about German—when my mother and aunts were still alive, when we first got a party line at home, one of my aunts lived close by. There were also Italian-speaking families in the neighborhood. You didn't know if anybody was on the phone until you picked it up. There was always gossip about people listening in on the line. Whenever my mother and aunt would be talking and they heard the line pick up, they would go from English to German. Sometimes when my mother would pick up the line, she could hear the Italians go from English to Italian. My mother was nearly ninety-eight when she died. Every Christmas we would get together, and Aunt Monica and my mother would sing German Christmas carols. They could really sing well together.

MS: My mother loved to sing German, and she would always say, "Come on, Mary, let's see, how does this go?" She had this German songbook. She was a great singer.

MP: The story reminded me—it came from another oral history—about these party lines.

Of course, everyone would deny they were eavesdropping on other people's conversation. One had received a call that someone had died. They wanted the family to go twenty miles away to take care of the family. All of a sudden, the ones who were eavesdropping said, "I will baby-sit your kids." They chimed in, not caring they were caught. Are there any stories that you have heard her tell that she hasn't told today?

CN: Talking about Oklahoma. Another tragic story . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

MS: I remember a time with my sisters—I was the youngest girl—they were partial to me as the baby. Sometimes when they had a date, they would say, "Come on, let's go sit on the porch." Then their boyfriend would come. One time my sister Mary's boyfriend came, and they were on the porch. We were sitting on the porch floor that had a long overhang. They were sitting quite a ways apart. I noticed this. Then the guy picked up a limb and started whittling with his knife. He would drop the limb and every time he would pick it up, he would scoot a little closer. I noticed all of that, you know. Finally, he was sitting right next to her. I thought that was so funny. There were quite a few other things like that.

MP: Like what?

MS: One time she had two boyfriends. She liked one better than the other. This old house that we lived in when we moved to this place, it had a hole in the floor. We were upstairs, and it was a night they were courting. We looked through the hole to see what was going on. We liked one of the boys much better than we did the

other one. We would say, "We want Emil. We don't want Frank." I bet they could have killed us downstairs, if they had heard us. I think she liked him very well. He was a very nice guy. One Saturday afternoon, when we still lived in Oklahoma, we got word that Ray Brewer had drowned. It was one of the boyfriends that she dated in Oklahoma. That was sad for all of us. There were a lot of tragedies.

CN: I'll ask the question. You might be thinking of it. We have asked you before about your love life.

MS: I don't like to talk about it.

CN: Okay, that is fine.

MP: I am glad that you asked.

CN: She was sought after. . .

MS: After a while when I went to the rectory, all my girlfriends died young. Their husbands would come and try to date me. I didn't want a secondhand. [Laughter]

CN: I am sure she had a special boyfriend or two that took her a long time to get over. She just committed herself to being a single person. She had all of us kids. How many did you have?

MS: Sixty-five.

MP: Sixty-five nieces and nephews.

CN: She loved every one of us.

MS: They are all good to me. They are like my kids.

MP: Can you name them all in order?

MS: [Laughter] Fifteen have preceded me in death already.

MP: That is unfortunate.

MS: There were two just this last year.

CN: In talking about the 1930s, when with sugar, gasoline, automobile tires were rationed—because she lived in town and we lived in the country, she was able to get gum. On these Wednesday and Sunday afternoons, you would see Aunt Monica coming down the road. Sometimes she would come by our house. We knew we were going to get some gum.

MP: Was it rare for a single woman to have a car?

MS: To have a car? I guess it was. I didn't even think about that.

MP: Do you know any other single women in the 1930s who had a car?

MS: No, I don't. I even won one, one time. Safeway had a thing, and I won a car full of groceries.

MP: When was this?

MS: It must have been in the 1930s sometime because I still had the Model A. I called my brother because it was late in the evening when they called me to tell me I won. He went and got the car for me, and I went with him. They said that an old woman had won the car. Actually, I was pretty young then. They said that she couldn't even drive it. It kind of got to me. I had my car already, so I sold it for fifty dollars. I got the groceries, but I sold the car. It was a used car. They called it a fishing car.

MP: What is a fishing car?

MS: It is just an old car they used to get to the docks.

CN: What about births? Did you attend a lot of births?

MS: I would go over and help after a day or two. Women had to stay in bed two weeks at that time. Somebody had to go and help take care of the baby.

CN: They were born at home?

MS: They were born at home. My mother was very good. She wasn't a midwife, but she helped with a lot of births, with all of her girls—except later on when she got a little bit feeble. Then they would bring the little children home to our place. I would take care of them at home or afterwards at their house. I got to be real close to most of them.

MP: How many births did you attend?

MS: I didn't attend the birth.

MP: You helped out later?

MS: I helped out later. The births were all at home.

MP: In Conway, Faulkner County, when did people start having their kids in hospitals?

MS: We didn't have a hospital in Conway for a long time. They had to go to Little Rock. They had a clinic here, Dr. Dickenson. They didn't do births there.

CN: It was probably the mid-1940s.

MS: They all went to St. Vincent's at that time.

CN: Doctors made house calls?

MS: Yes, they made house calls.

MP: How many doctors were there?

MS: Maybe about four.

MP: Do you remember any house calls, specifically?

MS: I remember one they made for my brother. Dr. Harrod was a country doctor and lived close to us. He was a good doctor. When he came my brother had gone into seizures with the high fever, I remember what he said—and that brings me to another story, too—he said, “Get a big tub, and put hot water in it. Let it get really hot, so he can sweat. Then wrap him up, and it should break the fever.” It did. Afterwards, put cold packs on the head. That reminds me of another home remedy they had. His [Charles Nabholz’s] mother, after his second sister was born, she was so sick. She went to the doctor. He said, “I am pretty sure you have Bright’s disease. It is a disease of the kidneys. She should go to Hot Springs for the baths. She needs to sweat this out.” Mother said, “She can’t go. She has two babies.” He said, “Well, I will tell you, there is an alternative. You can take her and get this big tub of water and build a tent over it. Get her in there and get it tepid and keep getting it hotter and hotter. Then let her in for thirty minutes, pick her up and put her on the bed, wrap her up real good in a blanket. She will perspire a whole lot and that should help her. It should be as good as the bath in Hot Springs.” They did that, and after a week she was better.

MP: Do you remember any more of these remedies?

MS: Home remedies? I remember my brother—there was a leak of gas in the bathroom—he foolishly, he thought he would find the gas leak. He took a match and lit it. It exploded right in his face. He was burned real bad. The doctor treated him. My mother stopped in—they lived in town, and we still lived in the country—and found my sister-in-law crying, and said, “I don’t know what to do. There are little pockets of puss forming” [on her son’s face]. Mama said, “I know

what I am going to do.” There was this old remedy that the Indians taught her. The Indians would leave their canoes in Grandpa’s shed during the winter. They would always bring presents and would give a lot of clues on how to make medicine. She said, “I am going to make a salve that will heal him. I know it will.” She went home and got a sassafras limb. She peeled the top bark off. There was a green next to it, and she scraped it off. She took some lamb fat and heated it. She let it come to a boil. It made a green salve. She took it and put it on him. His face was really bad. It was just like a miracle.

MP: Do you have any other stories about your mother or father and the Indians?

MS: Mother would get those little beaded slippers from them. They were never afraid of the Indians, because they were real friendly, the Sauk Indians.

CN: This made me think of another tragedy with your brother.

MS: He was twenty-two and a baker for Bon-Ton Bakery, here in town. He got a real bad stomach ache. He went to the doctor, who said, “You have an infection in your system. It will be all right. I will give you something.” He came home. He was staying with my other brother at the time. He was listening to the World Series. We thought he was getting better. One night, he just hollered with pain. We had an upstairs, he and I were sleeping upstairs. I went and said, “What is the matter?” He said, “My stomach hurts and I feel terrible.” I called my mother, and she came up there and said, “My gosh, we have to take him to the doctor. There is something bad wrong.” They had to take him to Little Rock to the hospital. They packed some pillows in the backseat of the car and drove all the way to Little Rock. On the way, he got real quiet. When they got there, they said the

appendix had ruptured. It had already been leaking. He had blood transfusions and different things. Nothing helped. They didn't have any of those antibiotics that they have now. He died at the hospital. He was twenty-two. It was the first break in our family.

MP: In 1918, there was a big nationwide epidemic of the flu. Can you talk about the annual bouts with the flu?

MS: There was a lot. I remember quite a few of our guys from the church died with it. It was very bad because they didn't have the miracle drugs. If you had the flu or pneumonia, you were just about dead. There was nothing to treat it with.

MP: In 1918, more people died of the flu than in World War I.

MS: It was really bad. The boys got it in the camps here, and it was bad in Europe, too.

MP: Your brothers would have been in World War I, right?

MS: My oldest brother was, but the second oldest was about to be drafted. He got typhoid fever and was just recovering from that when the peace was signed..

MP: Where did he catch typhoid fever?

MS: At that time, I guess at home. My sister, Clara, had it too. That was very bad too. We had a good doctor, and whatever he gave them helped. I imagine it got so dry in the summer, and the water wasn't as pure as it should be. I don't know where else he could have gotten it.

CN: Do you remember the flood of 1927?

MS: Oh, Lord, yes. That flood of 1927, that was really something. That was scary.

MP: Tell me about it.

MS: The rains came, and the rivers got out of their banks. It started backing up, and all the little creeks were backing up on everything. It was as far as Gleeson. Everybody would go out to see the water. The roads were under water. Everybody went to Donald Ridge to see the houses, cows, and horses float down the river. It was really bad. We got a lot of rain that came down from Oklahoma. They were afraid Conway might be underwater.

MP: Where were the people who lived near the river?

MS: They were told to move out. Sometimes they couldn't save their livestock. That must have been real bad. A lot of people would go out to the ridge to see it. They would say, "You won't believe it until you see it. It is just rolling." It backed up into town. It didn't put it under to where you had to move.

MP: How long did the flood last?

MS: Do you remember? It was at least a week.

CN: I wasn't born. I just heard my dad tell about it.

MS: They started to build dams on the river.

MP: Was there a large migration of people out of Conway because of the depression?

MS: No, I don't think so. The young folks didn't stay because there wasn't any work for them. I don't remember that a lot of people moved. There might have been some.

MP: I know around Fort Smith and throughout the River Valley, there was a large migration from Arkansas to California. The Arkies and the Okies taking Route 66 west.

CN: One thing you might really be interested in—she has personal knowledge of it

because she was working real close with the program—we had a big displaced person [program]. Father Lachowsky, the pastor at St. Joseph church, was the administrator of the program.

MS: I helped Father with that displaced program. I could interpret German to English or English to German, whichever it was. Most of those people who came over were from concentration camps in Germany, a lot of Polish and Czechs. Having been there for a while, they all spoke a little German. Father Lachowsky needed an interpreter, and I happened to know German. They were nice people. They had to have a sponsor here before they could come. They had some kind of deal where they interviewed the people at the camps in Germany and they sent their resumes over here. If one knew anything about farming, a farmer could adopt them. They would pay for their transportation, and they would have to pay it back after they worked. We had a lot of people come in during 1945.

MP: How many people? Hundreds, thousands?

MS: For this part of the country, maybe a hundred. They were educated. One was a tailor. Most had trades. They weren't much at farming. My mother and father were gone already. My brothers were still at home, and they adopted two of them, nice guys. They were Polish. As soon as they were on their feet, they wanted to go to a Polish settlement. They went to Chicago where a lot of them settled. A lot of them went to southern Arkansas. Some of them went to wineries in Arkansas. They had knowledge in making wine. There were a lot of bakers. We settled a lot of people at that time.

MP: How long would they stay?

MS: They had to stay a certain length of time. They had to pay you back for the money that you spent on them. Then you gave them wages after that. They got a certain amount of their wages.

MP: They were able to go to Chicago.

MS: There are so many Polish people in Chicago.

CN: When this was going on, I was in grade school through high school. I remember all these kids coming in. They were very smart kids. Despite the language barrier, they were able to make good grades.

MP: It had to be jarring to leave war-torn Europe and come to America.

MS: A lot of them did well after they got here. They got on their feet and got into businesses.

MP: You know your aunt's life better than I do. You are asking better questions.

CN: I didn't want to jump in anywhere. I didn't know if you had a certain sequence there. After you retired in 1976, you were involved in every family's get together.

MS: For my eightieth birthday, they gave me a surprise birthday party at the Knights of Columbus. That was wonderful. Charles did you ever see the tape? At my ninetieth, it was even better. They roasted and toasted me. Some of the things they did to me!

MP: What did they do?

MS: They told cute things on me.

MP: Like what?

MS: Like what? [Laughter] It was really fun and nice.

CN: Tell them about your two sisters in Texas.

MS: I had two sisters who lived in south Texas. One lived to be one hundred years and eleven days old. The other one was ninety-seven, close to ninety-eight.

CN: Tell them about one of your sisters having three boyfriends.

MS: Which one? Every time she wrote she would put a paragraph in German. She came up with these things she cut out of the paper. She said, "You know, I am living with three boyfriends now. First of all, I wake up with Charlie Horse, then later on Art Ritus comes. I then go to bed with Ben Gay." [Laughter]

MP: Do you have any vivid memories of your father?

MS: Oh, yes. I was a daddy's girl. I was sitting at a high chair at the table in Oklahoma. I was about three. He would get his spoon and dip a little sugar on it and give it to me. I would say, "Yum, yum, yum." They would say, "You sure are your Papa's baby, aren't you." I would say, "Um, um. He gives me sugar."

MP: What about your mother?

MS: She was a great mother.

MP: Do you have any stories that really capture who she was?

MS: I would have to say she should have been a nurse or doctor. She was so good with sick people. As soon as someone would get sick with a high fever, they would call Mama. She would go over there, and they would all get well. I know one lady who lived across the ridge from us. Dr. Henderson was called to deliver a baby. It was a breech birth. The doctor said, "I need someone to help me" and they called Mama over there. She couldn't get her to the hospital or anything. Somehow or another, they got that baby born. Up to this time, that baby remembers her because her mother told her what a hard time she had being born.

If Mother had not been there, the doctor could not have done it. I thought that was a great story about her. As I said before, she really had fourteen children of her own. She raised three others up to two years, until her brother-in-law got married again. She raised seventeen children.

MP: Looking back, what were the big events in your life?

MS: Well, Christmas, Easter, Fourth of July.

MP: What would Easter be like in the teens?

MS: Something new to wear. Easter egg hunts. We had a lot of good company and good food.

CN: What did you color your eggs with?

MS: We had egg coloring. I don't know what it was made out of, but we had egg coloring. One thing to keep the kids good was to say, "The Easter rabbit will not come if you don't behave. I will tell him not to bring you any eggs." One day when we first came to Arkansas, I went outside and there was a white rabbit hopping around. I just knew that was the Easter rabbit. I was looking under him. They always said that an Easter rabbit dyes his eggs with his tail. I was looking to see if he had a colored tail. [Laughter]

MP: Were there any events during the year?

MS: We always looked forward to a bazaar. There was always a bazaar during the fall of the year.

MP: What was the bazaar?

MS: We all got together at the church or wherever it was at. We had like a big picnic. We had chances we could take, a fishing pond, sold lemonade and homemade ice

cream, hamburgers, big prizes. They would have a bale of cotton, a cow, or a horse, and they sold chances on them. Everybody got together.

MP: When did these end?

MS: At midnight.

MP: What year?

MS: We still have them.

MP: When did they start?

MS: Maybe in 1910. You could buy most anything for a nickel. At that time one of the nuns taught embroidery and crocheting at school. She was also in charge of the choir. Every one of the ladies in the choir would make crocheted doilies and embroidery pillowcases and tablecloths. They would have a sale on those. It was for raising money for the school.

CN: Now the school bazaar still goes on, and they bring in about \$400,000 during a three-day period.

MP: Wow! Unless you have something else. . .

CN: I don't but I am sure she will think about something else that is interesting, and I probably will, too. Did you enjoy reminiscing?

MP: It was wonderful. As I have said before, this is going to be a tremendous resource for generations to come.

CN: We have never recorded anything. We have had similar conversations, and no one thought ahead of time to bring a tape recorder along.

MS: I was going to tell you about one of my nephews and when he went to school. He said, "Aunt Monica, you have to help me." He came holding his hand like this. "I

stooped over and my blue jeans split all the way up the back. I need to get them sewed up." I said, "Well, I can do that, but you will have to take them off. Go in my room there and close the door. Just leave a crack and give me your blue jeans." He was scared to death. He was embarrassed because it happened at school in class. I sewed them up, and he was happy. Another time, the sisters were expecting the priest to come over there and give a conference. His name was Father Carr. Sister Harold called up to the rectory and said, "Monica, is there a Father Ford over there. He was supposed to come and give us a lecture over here." I said, "No, but there is a Father Carr here." Another time, Sister Harold said—oh, I have to tell you this—"When I first came to Conway on the first day of school, I told my children, 'Now I am going to introduce myself. I am Sister Harold. I want each one of you to introduce yourselves as I go as I go down the line. I don't want nicknames.'" She had a few names and, finally, one of my nephews, Raymond Strack, said, "Ray Strack." She said, "I just told you no nicknames." All of the class started laughing. They said, "But that is his name." She said, "Race Track, that's not a name." They said, "Ray Strack, that's his name."

CN: If any of her nieces or nephews forgot their lunch when they came to school, they could go over there to the rectory and Aunt Monica would make them lunch. It was a source of getting out of school. If you were the least little bit sick, you could go see your aunt. She would feed them a little bit and convince them they were all right, and they would go back to school.

MS: They just needed that little loving touch.

MP: So you were the excuse that people used to get out of school.

MS: The kids would have to do the lawns to work out their tuition. They would be lazy. They told me that I said, "Now you are getting some money. You don't know exactly how, but you better get out there and start to work."

MP: I would imagine there are thousands of people in Conway who have these great memories of you.

MS: I think being here so many years in the school -- no phone, no nothing -- they always came to the rectory to phone. I remember taking a person home. They said she had a sore throat and asked if I would phone her parents. If I couldn't reach them, would I take her home? I had that little old Ford, so I said, "Okay." I said, "I don't know where you live. Can you tell me where you live?" She said, "Yes." It was past the country club here, and I took her out there. The next day she came down with the mumps. I was already in my adulthood. I got the mumps a week later.

MP: Those are nasty.

MS: There were a few things like that. They all remember it, so that is the payback.

CN: She is known all over the town. She is known as the "Volunteer of the Year."

MS: I got the "Oldest Volunteer in the State" award.

MP: Congratulations.

MS: Thank you.

[End of Interview]