Ruth Anne Piper Dykman

Interviewed by Lorraine Orchard on March 20, 1985 at Madison, Wisconsin.

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The goal of the oral history project of Historic Madison, Inc. is to record Madisonians' reflections on their early lives and those of their antecedents. The following conversation is extemporaneous and is based upon memory, consequently, there are a few questions about dates, but basically the material is accurate. I am talking with Ruth Anne Piper Dykman. Ruth Anne is a Madison resident who has a lot to tell us, if we can find it out, about her ancestors, the Pipers. And if we have time, I'd like to find out about Ruth Anne herself. First of all, I'd like to ask her where her father and mother's families came from, in whichever order she prefers.

Well, the Piper family was originally from New Hampshire. Benjamin Piper, who was my great-grandfather, moved from Pipersville, after he had come from New Hampshire, to a farm, a 120-acre farm, I believe it was, on the Odana Road. It extended all the way over to the Mineral Point Road.

Ruth Anne, could you give us some dates here, either your father's birth date or something, so that we can get this in focus.

I wish I were better at dates. I do know that Daddy was born December 2, 1867. I imagine it was a few years before they came to Madison from Pipersville. I wish I could give you a better date as to when Benjamin did come with his family. There were five children. Daddy was the oldest of four boys; then there was Sam, Howard, and Alfred. The girl was Anna Maria. She was not ever active in any part of the business.

They first farmed then? Then did they go directly into business? Now, I remember the Belmont Hotel area, the Piper Cafeteria area on the Square. When I was growing up in Madison they were thriving and it was exciting for me to go there. How long, about, if you have any idea, did they farm? And did they always stay in this one spot or did they move someplace and go into another area?

Well, I'll have to tell you about Daddy's various vocations. Although he only had a high school, not even a high school education – I think he had two or three years in Central High – he went to the Northwestern Business College and then to a college in Dixon, Illinois, where he received business training. When he came back he taught for a couple of years at the one-room Nakoma School. He taught everything. I often wondered how he got by, but I realize that he was as well-educated as many of the teachers of his day.

Well, one time, his father sent him to town and he wanted him to get some groceries. The stores were actually a marketplace down on East Washington Avenue, the first two blocks off of Pinckney Street on East Washington Avenue. There was a little store, a little grocery store, by the name of Beet & Schubert. Daddy went in and he said "My, you're doing a thriving business here. Is there any room for anybody else in the business?" They said "Well, my partner and I," – I think it was Mr. Beet – said "my partner and I don't get along very well and we're thinking of selling." Daddy said "Well, I'd really be interested in buying."

He went home and he talked to his father about it. I imagine his father put up the money – I don't know – but Daddy from that time on went into business. Mr. Beet left the business, but Mr. Schubert agreed to stay on for six months so Daddy could learn the business. He enjoyed groceries and selling to the public, and it was a good place. This was the marketplace where the first of the month the farmers used to come down and trade horses and, of course, they always had to come in and get groceries. It was also a place where Daddy, as the Town of Madison treasurer, could have the people from the township come and pay their taxes, so at the same time they would buy groceries.

It was a flourishing business. I remember Daddy talking about how they used to buy various things by the carload, such as binder twine and flour and, later on, Sturgeon Bay cherries even, by the carload. It was a big store! It was one that Daddy did not, after a few years, operate all by himself.

I hate to break the continuity, but while you were talking – this is fascinating – I wondered, when your father went downtown how did he get there? Did he go on horseback? Or horse and buggy? Did he take the streetcars? I can't remember whether... do you remember whether streetcars were in Madison then? And then I thought how enterprising he was. He was what, Danish?

German.

German. I should have known that, with that Anna Marie in there. Did we tell your father's full name?

Charles Edward Piper.

I don't know if we ever said it, but it's interesting, I think, to get that right. You don't know how they traveled?

I assume that Daddy traveled by horse. I'm not sure. But they did a lot of walking. Now, I was going to tell you about my uncle Sam Piper, Samuel Piper. He went to the university during these years that Daddy started up the business. He used to walk. He walked down to the university. Of course, that's not unheard of; it's not too long but I imagine that there was a lot of walking.

And, of course, the children walked to school. They had to obtain rights of passage from the homestead on Odana over to the Nakoma School. Many of my friends who have purchased land in Nakoma have said "Oh, we have something dating way back to where you have a right-of-way or a walk on our property." Pearl Kanote was one person who told me that. I thought it was interesting.

The two of them, Daddy and Uncle Sam, were in the business for a few years before Uncle Howard and Uncle Albert came into the business with them. I do think that Uncle Howard really wanted to stay on the farm, but he must have been persuaded to come back into the business.

I was going to tell you, too, that as the business progressed and as Madison grew, Daddy was quite a promoter of Madison. At one time, and I can't remember just the date, he organized what they called the "40,000 Club," trying to promote Madison to be a town of 40,000. He was really royally laughed at because everybody thought that utterly crazy to expect Madison to ever be a town of 40,000.

I was just thinking, Ruth Anne, that this grocery store must have been operating some time around the turn of the century. I'm not sure how long. It would be interesting to know what sorts of things people bought. You mentioned some, in big quantities. But maybe you can think of something, other roles the grocery store served, or something your father told you about his experiences. Anything about the grocery business.

Well, Daddy always liked to tell this story on himself. It was when he was first in the business. A printer in the neighborhood came in and asked for some sugar. Of course, at that time there were no paper bags. Daddy had to put this up in paper, just plain wrapping paper. Evidently he made quite a mess of the paper. The printer said "Young man, where did you come from?" He said "Well, I came from the farm." The man said "Well, I think you'd better go back to the farm." But I guess he persevered and learned how to wrap sugar in paper.

Did he expand to any other stores then after he had been in this business?

Well, they did have five grocery stores in Madison at one time. One was where the present Triangle Grocery is on State Street. I have read in some of the papers that I have been nostalgically looking through that they did have one in the 500 block on State Street. I wonder if it could have been prior to the time when Mac Olson had a grocery store, but I'm not sure, down about that place on State Street.

Another enterprise that Daddy went into... I don't know why Daddy was always the one to do these things, but he really was quite an entrepreneur and enjoyed the many, many facets of his business. I think it was in 1906, I have a letter that he wrote to my mother. They weren't married, of course. He wrote that he was in business in Middleton and they had bought out another businessman, a general store. This general store evidently had everything from groceries to jewelry. In several of the letters, Daddy talked about the millinery department, which he was very, very proud of. He lived in the Hotel Middleton and the stationery bears the print of the Hotel Middleton, John Dick proprietor. The letter was March 23, 1912.

In writing to my mother he says that he hadn't been able to get to Madison, that the roads were too bad. He was enjoying writing letters but he wished that my mother would write some longer letters. She would write a very good letter but not very long. He did invite her and her friend to take the five o'clock train to Middleton. If they could take that on a certain day, she and her friend could both buy a hat or buy hats in the millinery department and he would give them to them at cost. Then they could take the seven o'clock train back to Madison. I guess Daddy spent all winter there, practically, without coming back to Madison.

Did he like life in the hotel?

Well, the letterhead says "First class accommodations for traveling men." Then, opposite of that, "Sample rooms and hot water heat." But Daddy has written "mostly sample rooms" and crossed off the "hot" and put in "cold" water heat.

Let's get in a little background about your mother. What was she doing all this time?

Well, I'm wondering if I should tell you about the other things that my father did in business. This, however, was after they were married.

I didn't realize we hadn't run out. He really was an entrepreneur!

Well, this was the tractor business. The tractor and the auto business. I remember the car. I was in high school and the name of the car was the Columbia. Evidently he was in the tractor business at the same time and used to have to go out to Denver and various places. He sold a lot of tractors, but he wasn't really familiar with the business and I don't think that it was what he liked doing best. He always had his fingers in many pies. They had lots of real estate, real estate such as farms around, a big apartment building in Milwaukee, houses in Madison. He was always going from one place to another, to trade a farm here, trade a farm there, or the three houses by Vilas Park for some other house or farm some place else.

And the brothers did this, largely, with him? All the brothers? Or was he mostly alone and then one or two would join him? How did they do that?

Well, Daddy always seemed to be the one to get into these things. I remember when he was building Orchard Drive that he was actually out there supervising the building of Orchard Drive. None of my other uncles was there. My Uncle Sam always took care of the bookkeeping, along with our bookkeeper John Fry, and the others worked in the store. But Daddy would be out going

to other businesses that they had acquired. Before he actually went into business in the grocery store, too, I forgot to tell you that he took his horses and helped with the construction of the Illinois Central Railroad. This was on Odana Road too, you know.

Yes, behind my old home on Gregory Street.

Yes, behind your old home on Gregory Street. He would spend the whole day and I think he got a dollar a day. I don't know if the horses were paid a dollar a day too, or not.

He just sounds like, I don't know, in a way, like a genius, inventive, and certainly an entrepreneur. It's interesting that he would see all these possibilities. A lot of people could be in that environment and not see the opportunities.

I don't know, Lorraine. Don't you think that at the turn of the century and years after that there were many, many opportunities for people with vision?

I think so. And he was one who took advantage of it, obviously. He must have been healthy and ambitious too. Obviously he couldn't have done all that if he weren't in good health.

Yes, I think our whole family has been blessed with good health. And he lived to a ripe old age. He died at the age of eighty, which was younger than my mother, who died at the age of a hundred. There is longevity in our family. I know my Grandfather Benjamin Piper lived to be ninety years old. They were healthy and vigorous people.

Ruth, you mentioned millinery. Somehow I don't picture a man selling hats. I know at the turn of the century that was a big business and probably operated differently. Can you tell us something about that?

Well, just from what I've read in the letters. Daddy said that he hired a milliner from Milwaukee and that he had any number of applicants, but he decided to hire the one who was the homeliest and an old spinster because he thought that she would pay attention to business and not goof off, although he didn't use that term, naturally, in the letter. So he had this woman who really did very well for him.

He used to sell coats. He said he didn't know much about selling coats, but he said that a woman would put it on and he would just tell her how pretty she looked in that coat. This is from what I read in one of the letters to Mother.

Evidently Daddy was very successful with women. He didn't marry until late in life. Mother and Daddy married in September 1913; he was almost fifty and Mother was thirty-seven. He enjoyed the company of women and I guess they enjoyed being with him, too. Somebody told me that he was called "Good Time Charlie."

Where did this bachelor live?

You mean where did he live in Middleton? Oh, he lived at the Hotel Middleton. This was evidently what the letterhead said: "first class accommodations for traveling men." Opposite that it says "sample rooms and hot water heat." But Daddy had crossed off the "hot" water heat and put "cold" above it. Before "sample rooms," he said "mostly sample rooms."

Well, now, that, of course, was all in Middleton. I'm not sure about the chronology of your family's businesses, but then he opened up that grocery store on the Triangle off the Capitol Square next? Or do I have this wrong?

No. The store that he first operated from, as I told you, was in the marketplace. Then they moved

to the one that is the present site of the YWCA, where they eventually built their hotel. When I was a little girl I remember going up to that store with my mother.

Then when I was probably around ten, which would have been... no, I was even younger than that, about eight, it would have been in 1923 that they built the large grocery store that had several departments. They had a bakery in the basement, a candy shop, rather a candy preparation place, where they would dip chocolates and had some very nice candies. When I would go up to the store I used to always like to go into the candy department. I never ate the candy but Daddy used to let me help, to weigh out the candy for customers, and I learned how to do this. Finally he'd just walk away and let me take over the department. It didn't seem to be a business that demanded too much of me, but I couldn't even see over the top of the counter.

My sister Helen, who's a year older than I am, used to like to work in the bakery. My younger sister Dorothy wasn't old enough. She was five years younger so she wasn't able to do any of that.

I'm not sure whether we've told exactly where this what I called your triangle store was located, the names of the streets off the Square and so forth.

The one that was built that was the one that I knew for most of my life was on Mifflin and Hamilton. It was a triangle there, but we were not able to get the Hartmeyer property, which was a little store in the front. It was a meat store, a place where Mr. Hartmeyer wouldn't agree to sell. That was always something that ruffled Daddy's feathers, as I remember.

Well, then, the Belmont Hotel comes in to history here. Did your father manage that, too?

Oh, no. Daddy had very little to do with the Belmont. At first we had someone who did manage it for us, but in later years my Uncle Sam managed that as well as the Madison Hotel, which was where the present Emporium store is. Oh, I must tell you about the Piper's Garden Cafeteria.

Yes. And the location of that, too, for those who didn't grow up in Madison and couldn't go there.

Well, I just expect that everybody knows!

Everybody from Madison knew it!

I mean, anybody can know where the little old business was on the corner that eventually was made into the Piper's Garden Cafeteria. This was on the corner of Mifflin and Webster. It was transformed into the Piper's Garden Cafeteria about in 1932. I remember that because I was just ready to start the university at that time, so I do recall that date.

It was a very attractive place. There was a garden outside and part of the cafeteria had windows that overlooked this garden. My Uncle Howard, who really had a green thumb and loved working in the garden – he was the one who didn't want to leave the farm, you remember – he always had some beautiful flowers that were blossoming with the seasons. After the lunch hour was over he would be out watering those flowers and taking care of that. There was also the bell that came from the farm that used to call the people in from the fields that was there, but it was never rung when it was up there.

Do you have any idea how many people you would serve in a day?

Well, I remember that it was always very busy and there would be between 800 and 1,000 people. We were open three meals a day. Uncle Howard always worked upstairs at the counter. He carved the roast beef. We would have various specials. I can remember one special which

was a businessman's special with a steak dinner that was forty-five cents. Uncle Alfred worked upstairs and downstairs. My father was one of the buyers, along with Uncle Alfred. I guess everybody did a little bit of buying when someone came around. They all worked in that business.

We had sold the store, the large store, to Carl Hommel and his brother. The Hommels had been in business in Madison. I believe they had the Hommel's Hofbrau, which was a restaurant on Mifflin Street.

I remember that. I used to go once in a while to the Heidelberg Hofbrau.

Oh, that was wonderful to dine downtown in that area. That was exciting, yes. I guess I neglected after all of this to tell you about my mother, who married my father rather late in life. Mother was almost thirty-eight and Daddy was almost fifty. They had three children. I think I'd better back up now and tell you about my mother, where she originally came from. Mother was of German descent and was born in the little town of Blintindorff, which is just over the border now in East Germany. If you go to Hoff you have to cross over into Blintindorff, over toward Blintindorff, which is a sleepy little town that hasn't seemed to change much since she left.

When she was seven years old she came to America. Prior to that, her mother [Ernestine Fiedler] had gone to America to spend two or three years. I'm not quite sure about the time. It might have been less than that. She had rebelled at working in the fields. As you'll discover, my grandmother was a very independent thinker. She had two children, but she left her husband, whom she later divorced, which was another unheard of thing at that time, and came to Madison and worked in the Stevens home. This was Breese Stevens. I think the home is on Carroll and Gorham. I'm not quite sure if I'm right about that. She worked as a housemaid and saved enough money to go back to Germany and bring my mother there. Each time she went to America and each time she came back she carried all of her precious china in a feather bed.

Oh, I see it in your room. It's lovely. Pitchers, coffee pot, vases. Beautiful!

She carried those in the feather bed. Then she brought my mother back and took her to her sister's family in Prairie du Chien, where my mother stayed for six years. My grandmother continued to work in homes in Madison. These were names of people that you recognize. She learned to cook and became a very expert cook.

What was her name?

My grandmother was Ernestine Fiedler. Mother went to school in Prairie du Chien and she went to the convent there. She always said that the sisters treated her so beautifully. She was a very shy child and she loved it there. But my mother's mother wanted her to come and live with her in Madison and so she left the family there and left the convent. She was just a day student in the convent there. She had had a very good education. Do you remember the letter that I showed you that was from my mother?

Beautiful writing. She was ten years old, isn't that what you told me?

Yes. It was a letter to her own mother. Not only was the penmanship beautiful, but I thought her expression was very lovely, too. Add the fact that she had been an immigrant and came here at seven. Well, my mother had a job at the Stevens'. Every morning before school she would have to go over and brush and comb Mrs. Stevens' hair. Sometimes my mother was a little bit rebellious. I guess she had some of the traits of her mother. But she had that job and she stuck with it.

She went to school here. She went to Doty School. She was so shy that it was always quite painful for her to be in classes with young people. But she was able to do well in school in spite of her shyness. She went through grade school and a couple of years of high school, and then she worked for a photographic place for a while, and then went to the Madison Gas & Electric Company. She was a stenographer. She said they weren't called secretaries in her day. She stayed there for seven years. Before she went to the Madison Gas & Electric Company she took a business course, where she had learned to do typing and shorthand. She stayed with the gas company, as I said, for seven years, and then she took the very first civil service examination in the state.

Can you date that at all? Closely? Like the 1930s?

Oh, no! It was much before that. I wish I remembered that. I should really know these dates better, but I'm sorry that I just can't seem to keep them in my mind.

Neither can I. If you come across it we can insert it.

I'll try to do that. She did very well in the examination: she was first in Madison and second in the state. She was offered a job at the university, in the department of agriculture, the College of Agriculture. She was the private secretary to Harry L. Russell for the years before she married my father, and then from that time on she became a very busy, busy housewife.

Incidentally, before she was married she lived with her mother in Madison, as I said, at 120 North Hancock Street. Mother's brother also came over from Germany after his father died. He stayed there until his father died. Then he came back and he worked for the Gisholt. He had a knack for mechanical things and liked puttering with mechanics.

He had the opportunity to buy a Ford car. This was one of the very first Fords in Madison. It was what Mother called a small Ford. He said that if she would pay half of it he would teach her how to drive. He bought it from the man who, I guess, was his boss at the Gisholt. Mother said that she would pay the seventy-five dollars. They got this second-hand car and one Sunday afternoon they decided to go out.

This was quite an experience. It was a very, very noisy car. Uncle Herman would start the car and jump in and the car would stall. Each time he would do it, it would make a terrible noise. All the people came running out because it was a novelty in the neighborhood and, I guess, in Madison, too. Finally, after many, many tries, they got the car started. Mother headed up Hancock Street to East Washington Avenue. She said she was driving about five miles an hour all the time and she turned left.

When she was going along, seemingly quite well and adjusted to it, she thought she was doing quite well, a man in a horse and buggy came in the opposite direction. This was right about at Gisholt by the railroad tracks. My uncle got very excited and Mother said "What shall I do! What shall I do!" My uncle started to swear and it was an awful experience. Finally he grabbed hold of the wheel and he turned to the right.

There was a ditch at the right and so he turned to the right and went up the tracks. Mother was so upset! The horse had reared and everyone was coming around and she was embarrassed. The two of them finally pushed the car off the tracks and headed back home. Mother decided she was never going to learn to drive again. But that was not the truth. She did.

Daddy always worked so late at night, until ten o'clock at night, in the grocery store. On Saturday nights when the farmers would come to town it would be twelve o'clock before he'd get home. He never seemed to want to do much on Sunday. That was when Mother used to like to go out for a drive. So my mother's mother said "Well, why don't you buy one of those

Columbias and learn to drive?" Well, Mother didn't have money of her own then – at least I don't think she did – and so my grandmother said "I'll give you the money for it. I'll lend you the money for it." She paid the $700, which I think was rather high.

For then. I think so, too. Prices I've heard of earlier cars were much less than that. It must have been a good car.

I don't know anything about it. She got one of the men at our garage to teach her how to drive. Daddy said "You can drive, but I never want you to take the children out."

Ruth Anne, I'd like to ask about you, too... I've known you a long time and I know about your contributions in music and your husband's business on State Street. I think you and I probably have a lot of similar experiences from our childhood, although we went to different high schools. I would like to ask about you. I know one place you lived in Madison, but did you always live on Lathrop Street?

No. I lived on Lathrop Street for fifty-seven years. Prior to that I lived until I was in the fifth grade on Gorham Street, 150 East Gorham Street. I was born in 1915 and as I grew up I went to Lincoln School. I thought that was the most exciting place to be. I loved to go to school at Lincoln School!

The old Lincoln School, that beautiful building on Gorham Street.

Yes. Not only on Gorham Street, but on the lake on Gorham Street. I think the thing that I liked best... it was about six blocks, I imagine, from my home. All of the streets that ran perpendicular to Gorham Street came to an end at the lake. I was able to, with my friend Florence Anderson, roller skate to school. I used to love to do that! I remember recess especially because we used to go down the decline, down to the lake, and there was a playground. It was not fenced in as it was later on in years later. We used to play ball and I can't ever remember any balls going into the lake.

Any children?

Not any children either. I think the thing that I liked best was that we were able to take the stones along the lake, and they were large stones. Each recess we would gather all these stones together and build a pier out into the lake. Now, no teacher ever came and told us that we couldn't do this, but after each recess somebody must have gone out and pulled those stones back in, because we had to start fresh.

What about winter activities in that area?

Oh, the winter activities were mainly sliding on the hills. I was thinking the other day that we certainly didn't have the toys that children have today. We had books and we had large equipment that we could play on: swings and sleds. In the wintertime I would have to put on my winter leggings, which were knit, wool. I remember those. I would put them on over my long underwear and over my white stockings and get all bundled up in my coat to go out and play.

Well, we lived practically to the top of the Gorham Street hill, which was a wonderful place to be. All you'd have to do is to go out of your house and on the days that we really had a snowfall, when cars couldn't get up the hill, the police would block off all the roads that led into Gorham. We were able to go up to the top of the hill by Pinckney Street and slide all the way down that hill. It was absolutely a marvelous experience and I loved it!

You know, I always thought I should say something about the long underwear. I thought I

was the only person ever to have to wear long underwear, until I have been discussing recently with friends of my age.

I remember folding it over at the ankle, do you? Then pulling your stockings over that, there'd be that big lump down there.

Now, you just took the words out of my mouth! Not only that, we wore our underwear for a week. I don't know if you did.

Yes, because of the washing machine situation.

Yes! On Sunday we had clean underwear and then you didn't have to fold your underwear over again so that your stocking would fit over that. But the washing machine, of course, was not invented at the time when we were little. Mother used to wash in two sanitary tubs. She would take all the white clothes, put them in a copper boiler, and boil and boil and boil.

Now those copper boilers are choice antique items. Do you still have yours? I have my mother's.

I had my own. I bought one myself when my children were in the diaper stage. I had it, but my daughter Erica has taken that. It seems that the thing I remember most about wash days was that Mother used to hang the clothes outdoors all year round, even though we had a nice basement. She used to like to take them outdoors because they would get so much whiter when they would freeze. You would bring them in and they would still be stiff. I used to like to watch them become limp again as they would thaw out.

Wasn't there an icehouse near you? Speaking of winter, I thought of ice. I think I remember one on Gorham.

Yes, there was one down two blocks. It was a large, ungainly-looking building. I never went in it. I was always afraid to go in it. It was dark inside. But we used to like to watch the men cutting ice on the lake – great, big, I suppose, two- and three-hundred pound blocks of ice. They would bring them in. I would peek into the building – I could peek in as I would be walking to school – and I would see that ice stacked up on wooden shelves.

What was the name of that company? The Conklin Ice Company was over off Monroe Street. Was this also Conklin?

This was Conklin. Now, you remembered that name and I didn't.

Well, that was Monroe Street too, near me.

Oh, so they cut ice on that lake too?

On Lake Wingra too, as well as Lake Mendota.

Oh! I wonder where they stored it?

Well, I don't know. In the icehouse, did they?

I imagine that that's what they did. Of course, we used to swim there, down off that pier, in the summertime, too. I learned to swim down there.

Back to that ice, I bet some people don't know the old iceboxes that our mothers had. These delivery men would come and they'd say "Do you want 50 pounds today?" Or 25 pounds? Or whatever. They'd come with these tongs and have to carry the ice blocks into the house and put them in one's icebox. Then that would melt and then your mother, or whoever did it, had to

empty a pan always, of course. In summer we'd have to get ice every day.

I remember that, when they would be delivering ice. We used to put a sign up in our window. It had four different sides: if you wanted 50 or 100 or whatever it was. Remember that? The ice man would come along. We would be standing by the curb and yelling "Give me a piece of ice!" Of course, he would throw us a little piece of ice. He'd chip off a piece. We would take it and suck it. My mother used to say "You shouldn't eat that ice until you wash it." Well, actually, when you think that the ice came from the lake, you shouldn't even have eaten it. But when we made lemonade we used to put a big chunk of ice in our lemonade and think nothing of it.

Well, didn't the iceman and the milkman all come in horse-drawn wagons? And I remember snowplows, triangular-shaped ones that would go down our sidewalks, drawn by horses. The horse, really, in our early childhood was very important. I'm sure it was important to your parents.

Yes, more so. I think by the time I was able to remember, everything was not horse-drawn. Mother used to talk about the horses that would pull the streetcars up Hamilton hill and how they were beaten. Mother used to be terribly upset about that. She would say that she used to feel that the horses should not have been forced to go up the hill pulling those heavy loads. The streetcar was filled with passengers.

Where did you go to school after Lincoln School? You moved to Lathrop Street when?

Well, not until I was in the fifth grade. There were so many wonderful things at Lincoln School. I loved the kindergarten class with all the dances. It seemed we were always dancing and I can remember "How do you do, my partner," and "Did you ever see a lassie," and all of these things. I used to love them! I also used to love it on the day that Fannie Steve used to come to our school. We'd go down into the gym and she would play the piano. She would play skips and walks and hops and whatever would come to her mind, and we would then, in a very impromptu way, just do whatever her music suggested to us. We loved it!

She was an institution. As you talked I immediately thought of Fannie Steve. I suppose she was the physical education director for the city, or whatever her title. I went to Randall School and she went to Randall School. We sang "Oats, peas, beans, and barley grew." Did you ever have Miss Minault?

Yes, for music. Miss [Alice] Minault would come in the door. Before she would say "Good morning" she would sound her pitch pipe, and whatever pitch she would give we would have to take and sing "Good morning, Miss Minault."

I think her first name was Alice, if I remember correctly, and she had red hair.

Yes, I remember that. I remember my teachers. I remember Miss Sutherland in the second grade, who was so dear. She also taught us songs. To this day I know all those songs. I can sing two and three verses of the songs that she taught because, evidently, she taught them so very well.

I was mentioning that we didn't have a lot of toys. I think that this is something that you wonder what children did with their time. Well, I remember in the summer we would go out and after the lawns were mowed we would scoop all the grass up and make grass houses and play in those grass houses. They were not piles. It was just the outline of the rooms that we would make; those were the grass houses.

Did you ever weave dandelion stems? Braid them is the word I want, not weave. Braid?

Oh, yes. We used to like to do that. I think the thing that I remember most were the dolls that we played with. These were small dolls. We had large dolls too, but we had small dolls that I loved to sew for. My sister and I would take our dolls and design dresses. Actually, they were very hard to sew for because the dolls always had huge heads, in proportion to the bodies. They were not well proportioned. Mother used to let us go up to Manchester's. That was when Manchester's was in their last building, on Mifflin and Wisconsin Avenue. We were able to buy an eighth of a yard of various materials for our dolls. That was always excitement. I think that was where I learned to sew and enjoy it.

Do you still sew?

Oh, yes. I'm in my third year of taking a tailoring class at MATC. I love it! I sew for my family. I had an SOS from my daughter in California that her daughter, her not quite two-years-old, was outgrowing all her clothes and needed spring clothes, and so I've gotten started at that. I really enjoy doing that. Another thing that I think was so nice at Lincoln School was that each spring we would have a May pole dance. Did you have May pole dances?

Oh, yes, at Camp Randall.

Oh, yes. Sometimes we would go over to Vilas Park for our May pole dance, too.

I guess we did, too. They were city-wide.

I used to love that! I couldn't imagine why anyone could make a mistake with a May pole, but there always seemed to be some mix-up. Let me see. Was there anything else about that?

About that neighborhood. Can you remember who your neighbors were?

Of course, I can. Florence Anderson was my dearest friend. She lived on Butler Street. Those houses are all torn down now and the little synagogue is moved approximately in the same place where her house was. Then my neighbors, not all children, but Anna and Ed Swain lived next to us [152 East Gorham Street]. The singer and his sister lived together; they were not married. They took on a relationship in our family that was very meaningful. We called him "Uncle Ed" and her "Aunt Anna." We really enjoyed them. She taught me how to sing, how to sing and how to dance. That was the thing that I remember most. And, of course, Ed Swain was a singer in Madison that everyone knew. A fine baritone voice!

Were the Herfurths on Gorham Street then?

The Herfurths [711 East Gorham] were across the street from Lincoln School. Ida Herfurth was a very good friend of my mother's. That's, of course, how I knew them. Theodora was a daughter of Theodore, and Virginia and Eleanor in that family. They were friends of ours, too, and went to Lincoln School with me. That was quite a distance up, so we didn't play with them. We went to their birthday parties and they came to ours, but they weren't close.

On the other side of us were no children either. My uncle and my paternal grandmother and aunt lived there. Across the street [137 East Gorham] was a large family, the Tormeys, Jack Tormey and his wife, Margaret, who was killed in an accident. They had six children and they were constant companions. Florence Marx was in the next house up.

Let me see. The Hobbins lived on the corner [102 East Gorham Street]. They had no children. I remember how one day a woman came by and said to me, when she saw all those... it was a long walk toward the house, and on either side it was lined with beautiful-colored tulips. A woman said to me, "Would you like to pick those tulips?" I said "Yes, I would!" So I went up

and picked them all on one side and took them home to my mother. Later on Mrs. Hobbins called my mother and told her that I had picked all her tulips. So some prankster had told me that! Wasn't that awful!

Oh, how mean!

The Hurst girl, Ann Hurst lived there. Do you remember her? Those were our friends. Valeria Stevens lived across the street on the corner of Butler and Gorham. Those were the friends. We had lots of friends in our neighborhood and I think fondly back of them. When I was in the fifth grade, Mother decided that she wanted to leave Gorham Street and, without telling my father, she went...

Oh! This independent woman!

This independent woman went out and bought the house on Lathrop Street, 106 Lathrop Street. You see, she had had her own money; she had worked for a good many years at various places. She purchased the house and made a substantial down payment on it and then told my father. Well, of course, Daddy was working uptown and he didn't want to take the time to have to drive all the way out to Lathrop Street to work and back again, you know, so he wasn't very happy. Eventually he enjoyed it.

I was glad I moved, too. This was when I was in the fifth grade and how I went to Randall School, which became a school I also loved but had a very harrowing experience to begin with. When I was at Lincoln School, all the girls had boyish bobs. It had been a style for several months and we all had absolutely short-cut boyish bobs. I can remember the seat I sat in: I was put right in the center of the room, the next to the last seat. There was a boy, a very handsome boy by the name of Roderick Heinze, who sat behind me. The first thing he said to me was, "Are you a boy or a girl?"

I was just crushed! I put my head down and I cried and cried. I went home that noon and I went to bed. I told my mother I was sick. I think I stayed in bed for two days. Finally my mother realized that I was not really sick and took me back to school. Evidently she said something to the teacher and the teacher made everything rosy again and I survived.

For heaven's sakes! Did you go through ninth grade at Randall? Or didn't it go through ninth when you were there?

It did, but when I wanted to go into the eighth grade, I wanted to go to Wisconsin High. Do you remember we had grades A and B? Now, B was the first part of the class and then at the second semester it was an A. Well, when I was in the first grade that change was made. Because they had to divide the class into two parts, I was put into the A section and consequently I was in the wrong section when I had to go to Wisconsin High and had to go to summer school in order to make up that half semester. Lydia Keone and Bill Keone and there were several others whose parents engaged Rose Knare to teach us for the summer so we could go to Wisconsin High.

I think a lot of people don't know where the Wisconsin High School building was.

Well, if you consider the mall down from the College of Agriculture, looking up to it from University Avenue, it was the first building on the right. I think it later became the *Daily Cardinal* after it no longer functioned as a high school. West High was built when I was a junior. It was during the Depression and my father was hopeful that I would go to West and not have to pay the tuition at Wisconsin High. My sister went to West.

I went to West for one day. But it was such a big building. Another friend of mine, Myrle

Kraege – her brother was a former mayor of Madison – she and I went. At the end of the day we decided we just didn't like to be in such a big school, that we would much rather be a big fish in a little pond than vice versa, and so we went back to Wisconsin High. My sister stayed at West; she was in the first graduating class at West.

The class of 1931, no doubt.

Yes.

Then you went here to school. When did you become interested in music?

At Wisconsin High School. I decided that I enjoyed singing. I started to sing and, of course, being in a smaller high school, you had many opportunities. I was able to play in a couple of operettas and have parts such as Buttercup in *Pinafore* and Ixjar in *Rosamunde*. Those were the first two experiences that I had. I really enjoyed that very much, and so I went to the university and majored in music.

That's what I thought. Now, did you teach? I know that you've performed, but what did you do with your music?

Well, as I said it was during the Depression. We had very little money and the tuition was high. It was $27 a semester. Do you remember that, Lorraine?

Plus lab fees, which you maybe had in music.

Yes! And that was just for the basics. My tuition totaled $75 a semester. It was really very, very difficult for my family to meet that. I used to work during the summers at the cafeteria, but of course I didn't make any more than anybody else and wages were very, very low. It was very hard to get to the university and to have enough money for everything that one needed.

Absolutely.

I also remember that when I was in high school, there was a period in my life where I only had one dress. My mother, who was always so benevolent and loving, took in tramps and people. I mean, when I was very young, she would take in tramps over at Gorham Street and give them shelter and meals. Well, she took in a woman who was a seamstress when I was about a sophomore in high school and the woman said she would make me a dress. It was a very lovely dress, I remember. This woman stayed and stayed because she knew she had room and board free. It took her about a month to make this dress. This just goes to show you that it was a hard time.

Not only that, I can remember I had a silk dress which I would dye, bleach and dye different colors. It was at times navy, red, and white.

I remember dyeing my Confirmation dress, which was white, so I could wear it to parties. You mentioned wages. I was in college from 1934 to 1938. On Saturdays I worked at the old Baron's Department Store, in the boys and men's department, about which I knew nothing, but anyway I learned. That was on Mifflin Street. I was paid twenty-five cents an hour.

I was going to say that I was paid twenty-five cents an hour at the restaurant.

Then I had to pay a ten-cent bus fare both ways to get there.

Five cents.

Oh, was it five? Okay. But I remember two cents off for Social Security, and then I'd get a thirty-

five cent lunch some place downtown. But, of course, money went lots further. When we hear about inflation and wages, people think, "Well, how did you ever exist?" I do have to point out that costs were much lower.

Of course, they were. I do remember one thing that I did. We used to have a pass on the bus.

Yes, to go to school.

No, we walked to school. A family pass. Sometimes, well, many times we'd walk uptown, if we ever had money for a movie, which was twenty-five cents, too. My sister and I got the bright idea that, since it was only one pass, we could both use it. If we would get on the bus, one of us would get on the bus and throw the pass out the window to the other one, and then I would take the next bus, or she would take the next bus. I can remember one time I threw the pass out and she called the conductor and said "Wait! I want to go, too!"

Well, did you teach? I guess that's how we started all this music business. In addition, tell what you did for the community, the singing and so forth.

Well, when I was in school, I would like very much to have majored in applied voice. But I never felt that I could take the chance of not having a vocation and so I did major in public school music. I graduated and went to Mayville to teach. I had met the man I was going to marry a couple years before that and I hated to go away, but there were no opportunities in Madison at the time and so I went to Mayville. I had the position of teaching voice to all of the grades, all of the high school, and I had the orchestra. I had no free periods in my day. It was a good thing I was young. It was a difficult task. I was very young when I started. I was twenty years old. Some of the boys were eighteen and would come down and talk to me and tease me and wanted to drive my Ford and that sort of thing. It was a good experience and I stayed there for a year and a half.

I would have stayed the whole year, but I was married the second year. When it was discovered that I was married, I was not able to keep my job and so I came back and I worked in the cafeteria. I had a baby sixteen months after I was married, so then my family started.

Those were the days when one not only couldn't work and be married but certainly couldn't be pregnant and teach. Tell us about your husband now. He was involved with State Street and the oral history project is interested in State Street. Tell us a little bit about that. When were you married, Ruth? And I know you have a family. Let's get that in, too. Did you ever give your husband's name? I don't think so.

My husband was Melvin Dykman. I met him my last two years of university and we were married the year after I graduated, in 1937. He was still in school and he was in school for a couple of years, the first two years, while we were married, and then afterwards. Oh, I met him, actually, when he was working at the cafeteria. But he also was in the same sociology class that I was in and so we used to walk to class together, and then he would be coming up to work. But I never knew his name. I said to my father, "Now, what is the name of that man?" And Daddy would ask him. Then I'd say to Daddy at night, "Did you ask him?" He said "Yes, but I forgot. I'll do it again." So he asked him two or three times. By that time Mel thought that he was going to be fired, because he had been asked so many times.

While I was away at school, he lived at my father's and mother's house; they were getting older and they wanted to have someone to take care of the lawn and the driveway and so forth. When we were married, we took the third floor that was not finished and made an apartment up

there for us. It was quite a novel arrangement and we enjoyed it. Chuck was born and we still lived up there. We had five roomers at the same time. My mother had five roomers downstairs. It was a big house with eleven people in it in our early years.

Well, he had been working at the restaurant. After he graduated from the University, he went to work for the Pipers. He became assistant manager of the cafeteria and also worked into the Belmont Hotel. We were operating the dining room then, too, and so he also became a very fine chef and understood foods very well and cooking. When we realized that there wasn't the opportunity there for advancement, he was asked to take over Weber's. That's where he first went into business for himself – actually it wasn't for himself, but working for someone other than for the Pipers.

And where was Weber's?

Weber's was in the third block. It was near the Orpheum Theater, on State Street. He remained there for about two years. And then Martin's Restaurant, which was up in the first block, 107 State... Mr. Martin was getting older and he was going to sell. We took over Martin's restaurant, but not as such. It was necessary to completely gut it and start over again.

Mel had a lot of unusual ideas and he developed a microphone system which was one of the first microphones in Madison, so that orders were not given in through the little opening into the kitchen but over the microphone. Waitresses had to learn how to use microphones and some of them were quite frightened of that new idea. It was when downtown Madison was booming and businesses were located down there, insurance companies, everything was located downtown. People came downtown to shop, if you remember. It was a very busy, booming place. The first few years of our business were just unbelievable. It was staggering.

Well, I think Mel had some of the same ideas that my father had. He couldn't start one thing without deciding he wanted to branch out again. He decided to have a bakery on East Washington Avenue. It was near the Sears store out there. He had several bakers. He used to hire them through correspondence with a man who formerly lived in Germany. This man would find master bakers and he would bring them over, and we had a series of master bakers. They really did some unusual baking, you know, the napoleons and the various types of food. The Dobash torte.

Excuse me. Was that called the Dykman Bakery?

Yes. And he also supplied the store on Monroe, which was Fauerbach's, with bakery at that time. That was very successful. Actually it provided the baking supplies for our restaurant uptown. Formerly we just had a small bakery down in the basement of the building. So then, of course, Mel couldn't leave things just alone and he had to branch out again. He went over to Main Street and started a little restaurant there on the corner of Main and... what is that street that goes down the hill? It's on the corner.

That's South Hamilton that angles, because North Hamilton is across the Square.

Yes, it probably is. But the entrance was on Main Street. That was 106 Main Street. That also proved to be a very busy place. We were open until twelve o'clock at night. Parents were real eager to have children go there because we didn't sell liquor and it was a nice place to go. He also opened up a little dining room in the basement there and remodeled.

But he had another innovation there that was written up in various restaurant magazines. All of these things at various times were, because he established a lot of new ideas in Madison. This was the conveyor belt. We had the microphones and the conveyor belt, so our service was very,

very rapid. He was able to serve a lot of people very rapidly. Mel was always going from one place to another. He did much of the actual work. He started work at six in the morning and he would come home late at night, at nine o'clock, and that was his day.

In order to be with him, we used to take the children up and have dinner at the restaurants, which was very nice for me. But it would have been nicer if he had had some time. He did come home in the morning and spend time with me. I wasn't teaching at the time. It was a busy, busy time and he never could get away. He was very much like my father.

And happy?

And happy, that's right. Business was his life.

That's what he wanted.

Then he decided to take over the Belmont Hotel dining room, so we had three businesses and not only that, the Piper's Garden Cafeteria. The Piper's Garden Cafeteria had been losing money and it needed a lot of work. It also did not attract many people. There were lots of other restaurants and people started going to other places because there were so many of them, too, up on the Square. We never felt that the cafeteria was successful. The dining room of the hotel was.

Well, Mel never could leave anything alone. He decided that what he really would like would be to take over the hotel. Of course, we never had the huge amounts of money. Our capital was... we were under-capitalized, but he had good credit and we were able to get the controlling...