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Interview with Mittie Dame Regarding Her Life (FA 154)

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Folklife Archives Project 154 – A Generation Remembers, 1900-1949

Interview with Mittie Dame (CT 26)

TAPE1, SIDE1

?: Today's date is February 7, 1999.

JH: This is Judi Hetrick and I am down in McLean County with Miss Mittie Dame and we are going to talk a little bit about her recollections for the Messenger Inquirer oral history project. Um, one of the things that I wanted to chat, ask you about, you were born, I think, in 1910?

MITTIE DAME: March 24th.

JH: So you would have just been coming to age and turning into a teenager when the so-called Roaring Twenties?

MD: Right.

JH: Were in. What do you remember about that time?

MD: Well, mostly, dancing, the Charleston 'n uh, getting out of the old time dancing into the modern dance at that time. And uh, getting away from some of our, having more ways to get to our activities than we did uh, earlier. 'Course back then it was buggy and horse, walk or wagon and team or anyway you could get there. And we did have a few automobiles at that time, Ford, you know, Model Ts. Few Buicks. I learned to drive on a Buick.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: And uh, we had uh, we had hall dances, and we, we had a place there in town where we would have dances, you know, for everybody. And, which was, of course, ?? the more frequently in the summertime to different places. Some places we had uh, dances where there'd be a sawdust floor. Old fashioned uh, ice cream suppers and they'd have string music and we would dance on a sawdust floor. But when the Charleston came in, that was a different story, that was something great to us, and uh, then it got from Charleston, we went from the Fox Trot to the Charleston, and always the Two Step 'n One Step n', we let the square dancing business go by then, that was, that was too old fashioned for us. {Chuckles}

JH: Were the new dances very hard to learn?

MD: No. If you had any rhythm at all, actually, if you could dance anything, you could learn to dance it.

JH: How did you learn? You didn't have like, television or American Bandstand.

MD: Oh, no, we didn't have any television or American Bandstands. We had uh, uh, nickelodeons, and we had player pianos.

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JH: Mm hm.

MD: And we had uh, a home band out from Calhoun, uh, made up of Calhoun boys, and they would play for us at the dances ?? dance, you know, on Saturday night.

JH: Well, how would a new dance get introduced in the community?

MD: I really don't know. Unless, so, one time I remember the first time the Charleston came out, we had a fellow that came home, that was a career man in the service, and uh, he had mastered that, and he helped a lot, when he was there, he had ??, I think he stayed home for about a month's leave, and boy, we were busy all the time.

JH: {Chuckles}

MD: Every night. I had a player piano, and uh, we just emptied everything out of one room 'n, just danced up a storm.

JH: You had mentioned when we talked before that your grandpa was sort of strict about

MD: He was, when, back when I first started going out, you know, but as I grew older, why he uh, he was uh, very understanding that, young people couldn't always be back in his day and age, you know.

JH: Yeah.

MD: Things had to, he wanted everything, why, we had, one of the first radios in, you know.

JH: Oh, you did.

MD: Mm hm. And that was back when uh, I don't remember what station it was then called, 'course, what the name of the station was, but it was from New Orleans, and uh, I think I mentioned it before, one of the songs was uh, "Eleven Cent Cotton" "Seven Cent 'n Eleven Cent Cotton." This old fellow sung and picked a banjo. My granddad would stand up there, we had it sitting on a old fashioned bureau, we called it, and it was home made. It was made from the ball of the tree that was cut 'n sawed 'n the lumber for the, everything was carved out on it. It had the prettiest knobs on it where they had carved them out, and it was sittin' on that, and he would stand up there with his elbows on top of that thing with his ear right to it. He couldn't hear very good right then at that time, and that was back in uh, around '24, I think, '24, '24 or '25. And when the refrigerators came out, the electric refrigerators, we were the first one that had a refrigerator in ?? . 'Cause he always wanted, we had an old fashioned icebox, and we would buy ice all the time, well, ?? cold ??, and I remember that refrigerator, I can just see that thing sittin' up on top of it now, and the racket it made more racket than that air conditioning is makin', but

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we had ways of doin' things, or how, I don't know exactly know how we got started on anything, but we mastered some way.

JH: When did those refrigerators come out? Do you remember?

MD: Uh, I think he bought that one in '26, '26 or '7. 'Course that would be, they were out so, for quite a while before we had one, but that was when we had uh, they were getting 'em at the local agencies for 'em. That came from uh, an old druggist there at Calhoun, Mr. Owens. Had the agency for refrigerators and uh, televisions or radios and uh, that was all at that time. I know uh, when we got our first radio after we married, we got it through him, and he was a great bird hunter, and my husband was too, and he had a bird dog that he wouldn't 've taken anything for, then he bought a puppy. That puppy was supposed to be a good bird dog, but that was the meanest pup I ever saw in my life, and he got to killin' my chickens, so the salesman from this Mr. Owens drug store came out to uh, see, to go bird hunting and uh, he liked the looks of that dog, and my husband was gone with the good bird dog. He had gone bird hunting, so he said, "Well, wonder what he'd take for that dog," and I said "You bring me a radio out here, and I'll trade the dog, trade it to you." He said, "Well, I'll do it." And he did. And my husband came in, the dog was gone and I had a radio.

JH: {Chuckles} What he'd say?

MD: Well, I almost got a divorce over it. {Both laugh} And that's what happened, but um, he got reconciled to the fact. He said, "Well, course the dog was gun-shy." He had tried him out, you know, a few times and he was gun-shy, and I said, "Well, he mayn't have made a good bird dog anyway. You said he was gun-shy." And he said, "You didn't tell him that he was gun-shy, did you?" I said, "No, I wanted to get rid of it. I wanted a radio." {Both laugh} So it kind of turned out to be a joke, you know. He wasn't too happy with me when he found out what I had done.

JH: How old were you when you got married?

MD: Pardon?

JH: How old were you

MD: Sixteen.

JH: Sixteen.

MD: Married in 1926.

JH: How'd you meet your husband?

MD: Pardon?

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JH: How'd you meet your husband?

MD: Well, that's a long story, too. My mother was a widow woman for seventeen years.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: I was seventeen years old. Seven, ?? Anyway, ?? mommy had been a widow all that time, and she married in '25. Well, that was the hardest thing I ever had to take in my life, I think. I thought at the time. And that fall, we came out here to Poplar Grove to church, mother and her husband, and I, and we was sittin' there in church and here come five or six young men in, you know, and I looked at that one, and I said, punched my step-dad and I said, "That's goin' be my man some of these days," and he looked at me funny, and said, "That's my nephew." I said, "I don't care if it's your granddad. I want an introduction to him." And that's, that's how me met. That very night. And he had

JH: Now, were you going to high school at that time?

MD: Yeah. I would have graduated uh, in May.

JH: But you quit school, to get married?

MD: I quit school to get married. I was smart enough. I didn't need to go to school any longer. {Chuckles} Isn't that terrible?

JH: Not necessarily.

MD: Yes it is. Didn't have no more sense than to quit school at that age, get married

JH: ??

MD: I never regretted the marriage, but, I wasn't old enough to get married. I would have hated to seen my daughter got married at that age.

JH: But things were a lot different then.

MD: Yeah, they were.

JH: ??

MD: And then I think one thing after mother married, see, I didn't think I had anything, left. Somebody else was taking my place. My mother ??

JH: Mm hm.

MD:

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JH: So you quit school and then you worked full time as a housewife?

MD: Yeah.

JH: What type of work, did you do around the house?

MD: Everything that there is to do, besides the yard, 'n the field 'n the garden and everything else.

JH: Will you describe that for me? What, what work was ?? refrigerators, right?

MD: Oh, yeah, we had no refrigerators. In fact of the business I didn't ?? for years we didn't even have an icebox, 'cause we didn't have any ice delivery out here.

JH: How'd you keep the things cold?

MD: We didn't. Other than keeping , hanging down in the well.

JH: Yeah.

MD: We'd hang milk there down the well of a morning, and after we would milk. To have it cool enough for the children's dinner, and evening meal, that was an every day ritual, in the summer time. 'Course in the winter time we kept it in the pantry, and uh, we had to put heat in there to keep it from freezing. {Chuckles} ?? cold, but I didn't, we didn't have a refrigerator until uh, first refrigerator I got was after the war in 19 and uh 4?, an electric refrigerator, and uh, I put an application in for a refrigerator when the war was over and they first started making, putting 'em out again, and I got mine in 19'n45, September the 15th. I was the first one on the list for a new refrigerator. And uh, all that time that uh, we just had a refrig-, icebox.

JH: And so when you were a young woman, what would your typical day around the house be like?

MD: Well, when you'd get up in the morning at four o'clock and uh, get your breakfast over with and your house cleaned up. In the wintertime, especially, you'd sit around the fire until it got daylight and then you'd get your needle out 'n then you'd either piece quilts, mend socks, patch overalls, patch clothes 'n, churn, cook dinner, go back to the same routine in the afternoon to provide for the evening meal.

JH: Did you make all of your own clothes?

MD: Made all our own clothes. I made all my clothes. All the children's clothes. And when we married the 1st day of May 19'n26 and the bank of Calhoun closed on the 7th day of May 19'n26. All the money that he had was in that bank over there and we never did get it, and that was the starting of a bad situation.

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JH: Now the bank closed in '26?

MD: First, 7th day of May, I think it was. We married the first day of May, on a Saturday, and that was the next Saturday, so that would have been the 7th.

JH: Was that, was that in some of the same

MD: 7th or 8th

JH: Was that some of the same troubles that were leading up to the Depression or was that something different?

MD: Yes, it was the start of it.

JH: Oh, yeah.

MD: O course the officials of that bank swindled some of that money sent some of them to prison over it and some of them got off.

JH: So you'd been married about a week and then

MD: We were married one week to the day when that

JH: ??

MD: And that didn't only affect uh, it affected everybody. Now my granddad uh, never carried very much money with him, uh, because he, we wrote checks for him. My granddad couldn't sign his own, oh, he may have signed his checks with an "X". But Momma or I one, well, Momma was dedicated, you know, authorized to sign checks for him and he make, make the "X" until I got a little larger, and then I had done that, had done that before I married, but anyway, he had uh, went to Owensboro and bought him a new suit for the 30th of May. He was a, a Civil War veteran and the 30th of May meant an awful lot to him, and he had gone to Owensboro and bought this suit at Anderson's, one of the largest stores there, and his suit came in the mail and he didn't have any money to pay for it. Couldn't write a check for ?? in the bank, and he didn't have enough on him to pay for it, and the postmaster, paid for that suit, to get it out 'cause they sent it C.O.D. And the uh, just a lot of people lived in that situation. 'Course they'd give to uh, people that had, quite a bit of money in the bank, they got a certain percentage of it, but we didn't have that much money to begin with. And then uh, 'course the Depression started, in 19, September 28 our oldest child was born, our son was born, and uh, we uh, had, had to wait to pay him until we sold the tobacco crop that year. In fact, it might have brought enough to pay for it. I don't know. The doctor didn't charge but 25 dollars. And then, three years and three months and one day later we had the little girl, ?? born right in the midst of the Depression, and it was rough. We had to make their clothes. All we had coming in, during the summer months, were between crop times, you know, was our chickens and eggs and we raised turkeys. Have

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that come in the fall. Around Thanksgiving, a little before, and we'd grow a lot of feed, and we made the men's shirts, out of the, dye the white feed sacks, and made the men's shirts out of it. Made their underwear out of it, out of it, BVDs, out of the white ones, and then when we began getting the colored ones, and the little, little girls dress, the little girl dresses out of the feed sacks. And we made our dresses, mother, my mother-in-law and I made our dresses out of 'em. Our everyday dresses. To try to keep what we did have, for church, or anywhere we had to go. We didn't go too much. We'd drive [the] car to town on Saturday. We had a Model T Ford. A '24 Ford. And we'd go to town on Saturday to take our eggs and cream. We got seven cents a dozen for our eggs and five cents a pound for our cream. Well, that would get us sugar and coffee. That's about all we had to buy. Baking powders and soda, something like that, because we raised our own, had our own flour, and our own meal, meal ground, and had our own chickens and our own hogs. We didn't, we didn't hurt for anything to eat. There's no use in people going hungry if they live on a farm. You can raise what you eat. But, you didn't have any money to buy anything. When the children started to school, they'd have ice cream suppers, you know, 'n little things the kids want to go do. I'd take an old hen to town or two sell to get those kids money. Take 'em to those ice cream suppers, so it was rough. No matter what anybody says. Children couldn't live through that now. ?? this day, the age that's coming on now, they can't realize what that was, 'cause, since then people have had practically anything they wanted. Well, my grandkids couldn't have no more lived through the Depression like we went through and lived for nothing. It'd be civil war everywhere.

JH: Did your kids help with the work back then, too?

MD: Oh, my son did, ?? very much. He started working out for people when he was about ten years old.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: See, he uh, he loved to farm, and when we went to Evansville, he stayed on the farm here with his grandmother and granddaddy and went to school, in the winter, and then worked out in the summer. He didn't move down there with us until uh, uh, '46, I guess. Stayed up here about five years, and then uh, my father-in-law got sick and they had to bring both of them to Evansville to live with us, and then Jimmy came, 'course came and stayed then. And he went into the service, went into the Navy when he was seventeen years old.

JH: How big was the farm, that you were?

MD: We had a hundred and twelve acres. It was uh, a family, farm divided between three sons, my father-in-law and my step-dad. My step-dad was my father-in-law's brother, but when you go figurin' it out, you wind up your own grandma. {Chuckles} But uh, there were three of the boys, and they had a hundred 'n twelve acre, two of 'em had hundred 'n twelve acres and the other one had hundred 'n sixteen because part of his was in uh, the ground wasn't as

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good. The ?? ran down through it. 'Course the river and he had uh, eight more acres, and the largest tract of the land, that's the way it surveyed out, for the three of 'em, and he got uh, ?? acres ?? But we managed. We came through it. And, uh, neighbors would get together through the summer. We had a big orchard, and we'd give neighbors, the fruit that they wanted, and they'd help us put ours up and then we'd go help them. In the winter time we'd have everybody come in 'n quilt. Sometimes we'd have three quilts in at a time. Neighbors would come in, quilt. We'd have big dinner. Be two of us fix dinner. The rest would be quilting. And uh, it was just, we just, we didn't know we was goin' though a Depression. We didn't have any money, but we were happy. Everybody loved everybody.

JH: Did the things that President Roosevelt was doin' with the WPA and all those, did that have an effect?

MD: That had uh, uh, we had several there in the neighborhoods, around the neighborhoods that uh, worked through the WPA.

JH: Uh huh.

MD: But, none of our family did.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: But we, there were some neighbor boys that did get in on that. It was a help. A big help.

JH: That was a time also that with the REA, lots of people did start to get their electricity.

MD: That's when we got our electricity. In 19'n40.

JH: What do you remember about electricity comin', for the first time?

MD: Well, I remember how proud we were when we got our house wired 'n could see.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: But we used just old fashioned lamps for so long, and when Aladdin lamps came out, well, we thought we was in hog heaven. Get to sit down 'n read. Put the lamp in the center of the table and sit around it 'n read, 'n study 'n whatever. But then when we got the house wired, we got electricity, it, it sounds unreasonable, but we got the seven room house wired for forty dollars and we thought we were livin' in New York. It was such uh, uh, ?? we hadn't dreamed of.

JH: And what was an Aladdin lamp?

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MD: Aladdin lamp. Well, that was a lamp that had a mantle on it, that uh, little mesh mantle like, uh, that fit down and that was your burner, and uh, you would slip that off just as easy as you possibly could.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: You let a match that mantle, it was gone, it'd just crumble. But then that flame would come up 'n light that mantle and it gave a, a wonderful white light.

JH: And did that burn oil?

MD: Yes.

JH: Yes?

MD: Uh huh. And I uh, when they first came out they were metal, they were brass or silver lookin', either. Uh, most of 'em were brass, when they first came out, and then they got to makin' them in silver-like, and then they got to makin' 'em glass. And uh, my father-in-law, my mother, mother-in-law's sister gave her she 'n dad one, well for Christmas, well it was just so nice, you know, well we sit by that mostly, and then we fixed the upstairs there, for our apartment, and moved up there to keep, well, they were getting' older 'n the kids were would bother them and they were goin' to school so we thought we'd leave them to themselves. And we fixed this apartment upstairs and ?? dad, my husband's dad bought me one, of green, glassware. Oh it was pretty, I ??, and it had a white, shade around it, that you know, you know that sit there on a brass ring, and it just gave wonderful light, when you had ?? Sometimes we'd have three lamps sittin' on a table at a time, and then we couldn't see what we were doing.

JH: And that was in the '30s that they would have gotten that new kind of, lamp?

MD: Pardon?

JH: That would have been in the '30s when you would have gotten that Aladdin?

MD: No, that was in uh, yeah, that was in the '30s.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: Oh, I think it was about '38, when we fixed that apartment up upstairs. And we had an outside entrance, steps came down on the outside so the children wouldn't have to go through the center entrance, the inside entrance, 'n bother their grandmother and granddaddy, because they did quite a bit of romping, and they was getting big enough then that they were romping, noisy the grandparents ?? they didn't think that we should scold them too much 'n make them study and they'd get off of track. We had to get, we had to get up on the roof to get away from 'em. {Chuckles}

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JH: Well, did electricity change things for you after you got the house wired?

MD: Yes, uh, we got our ?? eventually, floor lamps, you know, which we had never had. And I bought a toaster, which we had never had. Made our own light bread, and we put that light bread in that toaster and boy, we'd just thought we was, livin' high on the hog, you know, and then the next thing, wasn't electricity, I had that before we got electricity. My husband's uncle bought me a gas washer, with a ringer on back, you know.

JH: But it was gas?

MD: Yes, it had a gas motor on it.

JH: Huh.

MD: Uh huh. And uh, his mother and, and my mother-in-law's mother, well, we had to move her from Nashville to our house. She was sick, and uh, she had cancer, and I had a lot of warshing to do for them, and his wife stayed with us, ?? Aunt Sadie stayed with us to help, to help ?? take care of her, and I did all of the housework 'n take care of the kids. Well, you know I had a lot of warshing to do. Had to change grandma's bed every day, sometimes it'd be twice a day, and he bought me a gasoline washer, a wringer type, I don't remember the brand now, there at the hardware store that at Calhoun, thirty-five dollars, and uh, well, I thought I had something then, to get off of that warshboard. But I didn't get an electric washer until I moved to Evansville.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: But, we moved down there in '41, we didn't get the current for electricity until '40. But everything was, well it was so much different back then. Lot of people say, "I'd like to go back to the good ol' days," well, I don't think I'd want to go back to them. It'd be hard to give up your conveniences you have now, 'n go back to, the good ol' days. Warshboard 'n the ?? n' the

JH: The lamps.

MD: Lamps. Couldn't see. Have to take a flashlight, and maybe sometimes you'd have to strike a match to see if the light was burnin', then you'd get flashlight, or, at night you couldn't dare leave a lamp burning at night. Get knocked over, blow up, or go dry 'n you'd have something else, but one thing about those lamps, you sure had to keep your chimneys clean. Warshin' those lamp chimneys and shinin' them was uh, a everyday chore. ?? then you couldn't see.

JH: Smoked?

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MD: Wick trimmed just right. Once I had a ?? like this ?? side of this lamp chimney...
{ Chuckles } ??

JH: ??

MD: You get soot all over your hands. You'd take a rag and put on your hands, put it up in that lamp shade 'n then get all of that out. Sometimes you'd take a newspaper, and get it out if it was too black, then you'd put it in soap 'n water 'n wash it. Shine it. Makes it shine.

JH: And you talked about how nice it was to be able to sit around that other lamp and read.

MD: Oh yes.

JH: What, what types of things did people, read?

MD: Well, we read, uh, uh, anything we could get. A lot of that was, of course, she'd have everything read before it could ever be read, wrote. ?? She'd order from Sears 'n Roebuck. And uh, when she'd get through reading 'em, she'd let us have them, or if we ordered on, we'd swap with her, you know, and we, mother and I, would sit there and, and read that book, to the rest of 'em. ?? before the children got old enough to go to school. After they got old enough to go to school, we'd get their lessons first and we sat there and read. Sometimes 'til eight o'clock. That'd be bed time. And get up at four.

JH: Zane Grey was one of the real popular authors.

MD: Yes, he was. A great western author.

JH: And you got it from Sears?

MD: Sears 'n Roebuck. In fact, we got everything we got from Sears 'n Roebuck or Montgomery Ward. That was our shopping center.

JH: Catalog shop.

MD: Pardon?

JH: Catalog shop.

MD: Catalog shopping. That was our shopping center, and every spring when they'd run their white sale, that's when we would get our sheets, domestic to make our sheets, and pillowcases, 'n, when we'd get our pillowcases made. We'd get some bleach and make some fancy ones, you know, for Sunday wear, company. And we'd embroider 'em, crochet, 'n I never did crochet ?? but ?? mother would crochet lace to put on, but I did the embroidery. And uh, I never crocheted a stitch in, in my life and got it right, until the last two, two or three years. I

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took it up. Just decided that I would, everybody else could do it, I could, too. And uh, I made three or four outfits.

JH: Just ??

MD: Never a dull moment when you want to do anything. And I had more, I have enjoyed retirement more than, ?? seems like more than anybody, 'cause I've always had to work. I've always had sick folks to take care of and old people to take care of, and now

END TAPE1, SIDE1

TAPE1, SIDE2

MD: Uh, first year, two years, something like that. And then uh, I got someone take out the ??, but I worked there, and worked at a machine shop. Ran a drill press til war was over for a machine shop. And then I worked at Deaconess Hospital. I worked there. After my son died, why I went to work at a plating Works. I worked there eighteen years. I was retired from there, and I was a ??

JH: Well, would you tell me a little bit about your working life, you'd said earlier that you'd started working out when you were a young woman at a grocery store?

MD: Yeah, that was after we married. That was during the Depression. His granddad ran a store there in Rumsey and I worked for him on Fridays and Saturdays.

JH: What'd you do, clerk?

MD: Uh huh. A plain old country grocery store. And uh, then I had, the children were, came along. [I had] to decide where I was needed more and I stayed at home. And then uh, my husband got work with the State Hard- Highway Department, and that left me with, and his dad with all of the farm work to do. I had to take his place on the farm. And then he went to Evansville, and got a job with ?? we moved down there and worked at a defense plant, too. So, I, I retired from Evansville Plating Works. It was just three doors from where I lived. Where we lived. I went to work there. And uh, my husband, he retired before I did, and he came back up to the farm, and stayed up here ?? when I retired. He retired in '67 and I retired in '72.

JH: So you had work to do in' the fields and stuff then, too?

MD: Oh, I worked in the fields like mad.

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JH: Yeah.

MD: ?? back then, that I didn't do. Now, I couldn't go out here 'n, work in the tobacco patch, I wouldn't know how to work the tobacco any more. I can ?? a hog, raise hogs now, 'cause I couldn't carry slop to them and I wouldn't know what to do.

JH: Yeah. Well, did you see the change between people farmin' without tractors and then with tractors, and without insecticides and then with insecticides? Did you see all those changes?

MD: Well, yes. It was a big change there. It's not nearly as hard on 'em now.

JH: Yeah.

MD: It's just like the woman in the house, the housework's not as hard to do now as it back then, was back then. All we had then was a mop and a broom and a dust rag. They felt when they got a Fordson tractor that they were just, livin' in, a big world.

JH: Yeah. Do you remember when the tractor first came to your farm?

MD: Uh, I think that they got uh, the Fordson tractor down this place, with three boys worked together all the time, the three brothers, and they got one tractor for the whole, three hundred 'n acres, whatever it was, 'course it wasn't all tillable ground then, a lot in woods. I believe that they bought that back in the '20s, latter part of '25 or early part of '26. I think they raised part of the '25 crop with it and then part of the '30 ??, then they had it for the starting of '36??. I, I, I'm not positive on that date, but that's approximately the time they got it. And the rest of it was done with mules and horses. Uh, I went right into the field with a ?? bailer and two, two mules to?? and my husband had two horses pull. I couldn't handle the horses. One of them would run off. ?? And we had an old fashioned surrey that we used in the winter time. It wasn't the surrey with the fringe on top, it was just a surrey. You know what I'm talkin' about?

JH: It's like a buggy.

MD: Yeah, ?? two seat. Two seat there instead of one, and it had stirrups for you to get up on, and some of 'em had the fringe on top, but ours didn't have fringe on top. That was our transportation in the wintertime until the roads got too bad for that and we had to hook the four mules to the horses to the wagon to get to town. That was our way of getting around. And uh, you couldn't use a car out here in the wintertime. We didn't have an gravel roads 'til, well the men in the community graveled the road 138. ?? 138 down this way. {Coughs} ?? the county did that one. {Coughs} or state or county, I guess. But anyway, those people in the neighborhood ?? and hauled the gravel and worked on the road, and that was our first gravel road. This road wasn't blacktop until last year.

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Interview with Mittle Dame (CT 26)

JH: When did they do the gravel?

MD: Where did they get the gravel?

JH: No, when did they do?

MD: That's what I was tryin' to think. '27 or '28. When we got our first gravel on that road. About '28, I guess, and 'course we had this ?? far as our place and ?? grandmother had a little place up there ?? and she ?? had somebody over. And it was all gravel, and she let 'em dig gravel there, take gravel from there, and then they had a gravel ridge over by her on the home place back in there and they got some gravel back there. Gravel was donated and the work was donated, and ?? can't fix the road ?? {Coughs} Excuse me. In 19'n, '37 flood, after that, why they built that levee up, that you came out over and you turned left. 138 at the old barn?? They built that baby up, and graveled that, and it was blacktop then, and I don't know, ?? about ten years.

JH: Did the, did the Flood of '37 affect you all back here?

MD: Oh, ?? where our homeplace was, was on over about ¾ths of a mile on the gravel ridge and then dropped off in the bottoms. It was river back there, and it got up {Coughs} Excuse me.

JH: Sure.

MD: We had two rows of old maple trees in the front yard, and it got up to the, came across the road, ?? come up hill to do that ?? and you got up to that first row of trees, but it didn't uh, 'course we were surrounded. We couldn't get out

JH: Mm hm.

MD: 'N I was caught in Evansville in the 1937 Flood, uh, we moved down there in October '36 and stayed 'til October '37, and I was caught down there and my granddad died, ??, and we had, we had to move them out to the courthouse at Calhoun.

JH: Oh.

MD: And he died in the courthouse.

JH: During the flood?

MD: Fell out of his chair, had a heart attack during that flood. At that time you could run a boat right through the courthouse, right off the street and run it right through the courthouse, you know, a regular john boat but they moved out to the hills, our old homeplace ?? on a, pleasure boat or a little, used to be a mail boat. Raymond Bennett owned it and they moved granddad 'n his, 'n his casket??, and I was in Evansville and my stepdad was in Moline, Illinois.

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Momma and granddad and the three kids was in Calhoun courthouse. Then they moved them out to the hills, and they like to never got a hold of me, which I was worrin' myself to death. Both my kids was up here. They got caught up here. ?? was stayin' up here and ??, I was workin' 'n ?? was sick, Mother came down to take care of her 'til she got better 'n then she brought her home with her. And both our kids was up here, and I was, we were in Evansville and couldn't get to 'em. But the uh, Coast Guard brought me when my granddad died, ?? never ?? Coast Guard boat and never saw land but one time and that was at that was at ?? Hill and you couldn't see land then, all you could see then was cattle and hogs, horses, ?? on the water on that hill.

JH: How long did that flood last?

MD: Well, about three weeks, I think.

JH: Choo.

MD: From the time it started comin' up until it got down, it was longer than that before a lot of people could get out, but that was uh, that was the real crisis of it, approximately three weeks.

JH: So, traveling like that out in the middle of that flood must have been, almost an adventure ??

MD: Oh, it was uh, 'course I had made a trip from Rumsey to Evansville on a boat back when uh, Evansville, Old Evansville Packet, they called it, you know,

JH: ??

MD: Boat, well, that's where we got all of our supplies from Evansville then, was by river, and uh, it wasn't such a, thrill to me, as far as being on water when it was, it was something I, that would stick in my mind forever because you just go, from, well, from Evansville to Calhoun and not see anything but just tops of trees, you know, just, just the tops of 'em, and through the Shutt's Chapel neighborhood down here, on down 38 from where you turned off. Two story houses, all you could see would be about that much of the corner of 'em, you know, maybe two or three feet of the corner ?? and it just ruined that neighborhood. Most of those people moved out after that. It used to be very thickly settled ?? that road from now ?? So, it's been a lot of the improvements they built our road then, where it's been over since they did that, they built it higher than the 19and13 flood. 'Course by that time that was the, that was the culprit.

JH: Yeah.

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Interview with Mittle Dame (CT 26)

MD: And then they built the road up higher than that. They felt they were safe. That they would never have another '37.

JH: Mm.

MD: I hope they don't.

JH: Mm.

MD: A lot of destruction from that. Then, as we moved back to the farm, in 1972 I retired, we came back and started fixing the ol' house up and had our plans to, get us a motor home, to travel, and in 1973, he was stricken with throat, my husband was stricken with throat cancer, had two surgeries, came up there to the ??, died October the 24th, 1975.

JH: He was sick for quite a while then?

MD: My son had Hogkins disease and he was sick nineteen months. ?? diagnose ?? Back then there was no cure, no known cause, no known cure for that. We've come a long way since then. So since he passed away, I've lived ?? community service, office in Calhoun. ?? since then I haven't done anything but run, run, run.

JH: Play cards?

MD: Play cards, just right down the road there, I keep my suitcase packed, all the time. {Chuckles} I enjoy goin' to dances. I enjoy goin', playin' cards. I just enjoy being with people.

JH: Yeah. Yeah.

MD: As long as I'm able to go, that's what I am going to do.

JH: Well, it's ?? if you can do it, that's for sure.

MD: I just had uh, eye surgery back in April, ??

JH: Yes. ??

MD: I'm sorry.

JH: That's all right.

MD: ??

JH: You know, during the time you were coming up, was when lots of things were changing for women, between, ?? in the Twenties women just first got their hair bobbed

MD: Oh yeah.

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Interview with Mittle Dame (CT 26)

JH: Cut short, and they got the right to vote. Did any of that affect your life?

MD: No, because I never had long hair but one time in my life.

JH: Yeah?

MD: Uh, when I was uh, about nine years old, uh, ten maybe, grandad decided that momma ought to let my hair grow out, 'cause she always kept it up, uh, Buster Brown cut.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: ?? And uh, he told her said I was getting older now. We let it grow and she braided, she parted it in the middle, right in the middle here, had four braids. Of course it wasn't long enough to do much with by the time she got through with it, my forehead was pulled back. I looked like a walleyed cat

JH: {Chuckles}

MD: {Chuckles} And that went on for a while and then in the morning I'd get ready to go to school and it was a fight to get my hair fixed, well, I threw a tantrum, I got up early and was sleepy I guess, or it was in the fall of the year and flies were coming in. Back then we didn't have many screens, you know. Momma had fly papers, about that long and about so wide, that she would leave. A fly would get on it, and get that, get rid of it. I don't know what was on there but it was worse than garden molasses, I know. So she had one that she had laid right one off on the foot of the bed and I flopped over on the bed and laid down in it, and I had it all over my hair.

JH: Ew. {Chuckles}

MD: {Chuckles} It was a new one. It didn't have but a fly or two on it anyway. She had just gotten it out. It wouldn't have stuck so bad if it hadn't been. {Both laugh} Well, when I got up and it was time for me to go to school anyway, ?? other kids would come and we'd all go together ?? go by and pick each one up, you see, come to the house, and we'd all walk together, and I said "I'm not goin' to school," and momma said, "Yes, you are." So, she takes those braids down out of my hair an', ?? and uh, got her comb or a brush or somethin', 'course she couldn't do nothin' with it, so she didn't do a thing but go over to the lard can and get her some lard and put it on her hands like that, and she smeared it all over my hair, and then took a towel and wiped it good, you know, and tried to get it all out. 'Course I looked a greased monkey.

JH: {Chuckles}

MD: And made me go to school. Well, now that didn't suit me even a little bit, I just uh, I kept tryin' to figure out some way that I could leave and get home but I knew that if I played all

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sick that I'd go home, momma'd give me a dose of castor oil, and I didn't want that, and I toughed it out that day and I got home, from school, and momma had my water all hot and ready, you know, three or four cans of water sittin' on the stove. She washed my hair, got it all fixed up nice 'n I said, "Do I have to go through with this again?," and I started cryin', bawlin' like a tom cat.

JH: {Chuckles}

MD: Grandad said, "Cut that gal's hair off again. She wants to look like," I don't remember what he said now, somebody that I didn't even know, "but just go ahead and cut it off like she been wearin' it 'n let it go. Can't go through with this every day." I was never so glad to hear thing in my life. And I've never had long hair since.

JH: How old were you when that happened?

MD: I was about nine years old.

JH: About nine.

MD: Mm hm. Just the good age to really throw a tantrum.

JH: That's right.

MD: But I had really got paid [for] that tantrum, too. When I threw a tantrum, my mother threw one, too. I really got, it wasn't anything for me to get two or three whoopin's a day. I'd know when I'd do something, I knew that I was goin' get 'em, but Red Skelton says, "I'd do it anyway."

JH: That's right.

MD: I have had a lot of fun in my life, and I've had a lot of fortunes, but thank goodness, ?? trouble was not as bad as ?? trouble and that I haven't had to go through with but I've seen other people do it. It's hard to give up a loved one, but it's hard to be hurt by a loved one, too.

JH: That's true.

MD: Well, I'm just thankful that the Good Lord blessed me with, a good life. I don't have any regrets. Maybe I could've done a little better when I was a kid, but I wouldn't have had as much fun.

JH: That's right. I'm not sure that you wouldn't be any different.

MD: No, I don't think that if I had to go back through, that I'd change a thing. 'Course I didn't think I would. I don't ever say I want to go back to the good old days.

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JH: Yeah.

MD: But they weren't that

JH: Yeah.

MD: They were good in their way, but after living like we do now, we could not go back through that, ?? and live peacefully.

JH: Well, do you remember, were there any troubles in, in this county?

MD: Oh, we had troubles back then, honey. Times haven't changed in that respect.

JH: Yeah. Well, what types of things, I mean, were, were there bootleg troubles, or?

MD: ...bootleg troubles at one time in this neighborhood. You could just almost go through the neighborhood and every other house, would be makin' moonshine.

JH: Oh yeah? Huh.

MD: Why, my husband and I were lying in bed one night, looking out the upstairs window at our woods at the front of the house, and I said, "Why did you burn anything down in the woods today?," and he said "Why, I haven't been down in the woods," and I said "Well, come here and look at that light." Said, "Turn over and look at that light." I was lying next to the windows. He said, "Uh oh. There's somebody down there makin' whiskey, settin' up for it." And I said, "Well, if they ?? it's goin' to be too bad." He said, "I better go down there and tell 'em." I said, "You're not goin' down there tonight. If you have any idea who it is," I said, "You'd better, check with 'em tomorrow, but you're not goin' to go down there tonight, 'cause they might not know who you are or what you're doin' steppin' up there. He says, "I'm not goin' step," and I said, "You're not goin' period." He didn't, but uh, next morning he got up early, and walked down through there and they were there...bunch of guys... And he told 'em, he said, "Now, boys, I don't care what you do, but you better move this stuff off the place if dad ever catches you," said, "He'll turn me in. You know he will." Which he would have.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: 'Cause he was against the people ??, but that was the only they had to make any money,

JH: Yeah.

MD: And they tried it.

JH: Would that have been during the '30s, then?

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MD: That was uh, in the '30s.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: And uh, they were plowing on the back field over behind the house, on the fence row because, close, you know, getting up close to the fence row, and uh, they hit the end of a keg that they buried in that fence row.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: And they went a little further, and they hit another one, and they plowed up two ten-gallon kegs that was in that fence row that they had hid over there, so ?? go back through the fields,

JH: Yeah.

MD: You know, that's where ??, go back through the fields, and they thought they had it made. They'd come in there at night and get it and distribute it wherever their delivery was. So, the plow knocked a hole in those uh, two jugs, kegs, they didn't get much out of that. {Chuckles} ?? ran out in the field.

JH: Did the law ever, come, get those guys?

MD: Oh, we had to call the ?? Yeah, we had uh, in fact, the people that lived here, in this, was a big two story house here, eight, nine room house, and they had an old house sittin' out here in the field, had been at one time, a tenant house, and it was just, uh, you know, gone down there wasn't anybody living in it, and they made uh, moonshine in it. They got caught, and uh, he had to serve some time, and the people that lived behind us down closer to Pond River, the road down between the houses, ?? farm road ???. Two of them got caught, three of 'em, and they had to serve time. And uh, oh, they was a lot of it.

JH: Yeah.

MD: There wasn't any problem to get it. You see times back then, wasn't uh, any worse than they are now, they just have more ??, more ways and means of doing it now.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: Moonshine whiskey was just as bad as dope is now.

JH: Yeah.

MD: But you had to travel to get it, you know, and now why, you just walk, anywhere and get it. Get contact with it.

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JH: Yeah.

MD: It's, it's in the schools. It's everywhere, and it's pathetic.

JH: Was there any trouble around here with the people they called "Possum Hunters" or the "Tobacco Unionists", or, or any of those?

MD: No, I don't know of it because it was back earlier before I came here. See I came out to this neighborhood in 1926. Been here ever since. And now, we didn't have that problem. But way back then we had, killings, we had, we had fights, uh, you know, just like they do now. ?? probably not as many of 'em, 'course there wasn't as many people. But we had one man that was killed here in Rumsey that uh, was running a little, tavern or, after Prohibition came back, you know, was lifted, and uh, this boy came to get, beer, and that was all that they could sell. They couldn't sell whiskey, just beer license, and he couldn't sell 'em any because he already had all he needed, and went out and shot 'em. ?? and he died just a few ?? week or so ago, served I don't know how many years in the pen for it, but the world turned back then just same as we do now, we just, we ?? to do it.

JH: Yeah.

MD: But as far as the bootleggin' 'n ??, and I was before I married. There wasn't any trouble to get uh, ?? uh, moonshine whiskey and homebrew. Everybody made homebrew. Grand, my granddad made homebrew. ?? beer, beer a lot, because as long as the boats were running.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: The man that ran the grocery store there in Rumsey, was a good friend of his, and they had it brought go up on the boats for the grocery store, you know, and uh, 'course it wasn't legal but they did it anyway. And ?? bring a case of beer home, lot of times, ?? and then after homebrew came in it was uh, it was a common thing, I mean, it wasn't no secret or anything, you could make home, you could make homebrew.

JH: Were there any other types of troubles that particularly worried you, like particularly when you were a young mother, things that, that caused you?

MD: No, you know we didn't have too much uh, worry, back, well I, maybe it was there and I didn't see it or something. I don't know, but I don't know my children, I didn't have any worry about my children getting in, you know, mischief and stuff for meanness, I say meanness, not mischief.

JH: Yeah.

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MD: Because uh, they couldn't of, have gotten into any more than I did, 'course anything that came up, I was in to it for fun, you know, on Halloween. Why, we'd go, we'd always turn toilets over at school. Turn upside down and we'd, turn, people's uh, wagons and buggies and things, and we'd take the wheels off of 'em and lay 'em over on the side, or put 'em on their front porch. Things like that that uh, as far as, well, my kids never did anything like that, but we, they never went out on Halloween unless we were with 'em.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: It wasn't only the kids that did stuff like that. It'd be the whole neighborhood, you know, the old people, too.

JH: Mm hm.

MD: Now, my granddad had the whole, row of haystacks, and they took his buggy wheels and wagon wheels off and got a ladder and put 'em up on top of those haystacks. Ruined the haystacks, too. Made 'em lean. ?? hay bales to keep from ??

JH: Mm hm.

MD: But it was a prank, and he probably would have ?? and done the same thing in his day.

JH: Yeah.

MD: So I can't see the times have changed that much now, these, oh, kids, people are doin' the same thing now that they have always done. The only thing is just more of 'em and they have more means and more ways of doin' it.

JH: You mentioned both Memorial Day where your grandpa used to dress up for.

MD: Oh that was a big day.

JH: Uh huh. Would, would you tell me about that?

MD: Well, the old soldiers, we called them the old soldiers at that time, they would always have uh, services at ?? Park and uh, Mount Zion Church over in Daviess County. We'd have memorial services one place of the morning and one in the afternoon. Well, he attended those, and then after, later years, well he would go to Evansville. We'd always have one in uh, at the old cemetery in Evansville, and uh, I went with him down there. I don't know how many years. The last trip I made with him, I was, just before my daughter was born, so I was pregnant with her, and we went down there for the 30th of May, and uh, and he used to go to Glasgow a lot. They'd have a big uh, services up there, and it was a beautiful sight to see, those old people.

JH: Did they put on their uniforms?

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MD: Yeah, well, they would, they had their, well, granddaddy didn't have his uniform on but he had his hat, and his hat band, his uh, badge, we called it, and uh, his uh, stripes, you know, he had on his shoulder. But this GAR badge, Grand Army of the Republic badge, it was a beautiful thing. ?? got that. And uh, he had his uh, ?? on his neck, somewhere, kept that, but he couldn't have, he couldn't have worn his uniform,

JH: Mm hm.

MD: He was too big for it, ??, but uh, a lot of 'em did have their uniforms, ?? did. We had three neighbors. We had three neighbors that were servicemen??, and they never did outgrow their uniform. And granddad's sixty-sixth birthday, we had eleven of 'em still livin' in McLean County, and they were all, most of 'em were all from the same Company in the Army. Two or three of 'em wasn't. This was Company H, and there were some of 'em in Company K, and on his sixty-sixth birthday, we had them all out for him a surprise birthday dinner, and that was the last time they were all together.

JH: Huh.

MD: That was in 1914. ?? in Calhoun ?? We had four out there in our neighborhood, where we lived.

JH: What about World War I or World War II? Did that affect your family?

MD: Uh, World War I, yeah, my brother, oldest brother was in World War II, uh, World War I, it affected everybody, uh, there wasn't anybody in my immediate family but I had cousins that went. We had uh, I had four cousins that went. We all weren't close but

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