

Mattie Lee Herning (Mrs. Carl), on her experiences at U of A, taken from her 10 November 2000 interview at 512 Herning Rd.

M:so I wrote three letters, three applications, one to Univ. of Alaska, and I didn't know where that was, had to get the book out, it was in College, Alaska. And then I wrote another letter to Hawaii, I was gonna get way off, and then I wrote the US government for a military job. Well, the first one that came through was the military and they wanted me to be at a certain period in San Francisco on a certain day. Well, that was just before Okinawa and all that war. Mother and Dad just absolutely threw a fit.

B: So this would have been (*just after*) World War II?

M: Yeah, 1950. And I gave that up, sent 'em a thing and told 'em I wasn't going to be able to make that. And then I got a letter from a Dean Duckering. And he wanted to know if I would teach in Fairbanks and could I come the second semester? So I wrote right back and accepted that. And he sent me this letter, telling me what I was going to make and the whole bit--and then he died. I never met him. And then I had to leave in January down there in Amarillo. We went to town and bought the heaviest duty clothes you could buy in Texas and they weren't half big enough, wide enough and warm enough. Then after I got home from here after teaching a half a year, January to May, I got a letter from Hawaii and they'd offered me that job. So those three letter, I got three job offers.

I had to go back to school down there and resign from this little (*school*)..... Portales, New Mexico, was where it was that year. And I'd only been there half a year..... They didn't care whether I was there or not..... Just a plain old teacher in the high school. And I enjoyed Portales, but then I'd taught three years before that in this little country school.

B: You were teaching general subjects, then?

M: No, I was in the high school, commercial stuff, bookkeeping, shorthand, typing. Then we had to do the war stuff, they had the teachers do all these extra jobs and they'd come around and they wanted these books—what were they, now? Some kind of books that you could buy tires, and buy sugar....

B: Ration books?

M: Ration books, yeah. So we had to do that and these families would come in with ten kids and they'd bring all ten of 'em and we had it at the school so we had to go back to school on Saturday and Sunday and do those things. And then this woman would say she had ten kids, well, they had 'em all listed or they'd stand there and you could count 'em and then they'd get ten ration books. That was a lot. And they had all kinds of sugar and everything else that the rest the people didn't have.....

C: Tell us about the first day you went to the University. I remember you describing it once and you talked about the leaky pipes in the room you went to.....

M: Well, Minnie Wells came over and introduced herself and she was smokin' a cigarette in a big ol' cigarette holder, and she had on pants and I was from schools where women didn't wear 'em. They had to wear dresses and nobody smoked. Here she was, smokin' up a storm..... They had a room for me at Hess Hall and they had opened up a vent and they'd closed it all up except nobody remembered to close the vent way up in the top. From the vent down, clear to the floor was a stream of ice. The women were all on the second and third floors at Hess Hall and the men teachers were down in the basement.

So when I got off the plane , I had to find out—they brought me clear into Fairbanks in this bus, this old yellow school bus, had a heater in the back end with a stove pipe stickin' out the back and it was somewhat warm in there and there were two of us that wanted to go to Fairbanks. All the rest of the whole crew were soldiers comin' back from Christmas. And I'd never been on a plane before and I didn't realize if you washed your hands, you didn't have any water, they had the water all turned off on the plane so here I was with soap all over my hands. I couldn't get it off, so I was glad to get off that plane. Then when I got to Fairbanks, Greimann's son was driven' the bus. They unloaded us at Ladd Field, which was still two or three miles yet from Fairbanks. And when we got off the plane, soldiers were standing out there holding these flourescent lights. They didn't have any lights on on the field, so I wondered how it landed. Everything was off, they'd had a real snow storm.....

C: So were the soldiers lining the landing strip holding flourescent lights so the plane knew where to land?

M: Yeah. And, it was funny, I'd never ridden a plane and, of course, I'd gotten into Seattle in the middle of the night (Dad and Mother drove me to Seattle), and we went down to this place where they were selling tickets and the farther you got the cheaper the tickets were, in Seattle. We didn't even have a ticket to get up here. And at that point, no one said anything about buying tickets in advance. Nobody did. Anyway when we got to the end table, it was Pan American and it was about a \$75 ticket from Seattle to Fairbanks. We got the ticket and I got on the plane with my boots and everything on and I thought, "Gee, that's gonna be hot," but when I got on the plane it was not hot. It was a cold plane, cold ride.....

All the soldiers were excited about coming back to Fairbanks. Most of them had been up the year before and had just gone home for Christmas. When they let us off the plane out there at Fort Wainwright, here these soldiers were all standing around in these funny looking clothes, with nothing much showing but eyes, and holding up these big flourescent lamps. They had two or three bulbs in 'em and they were holdin' 'em. And that's what the plane landed with.

They had just a little ten by twelve house sittin' there that they used as a ticket agent and they said if you're going to the university, first you gotta go to Fairbanks. And I didn't start out with that much cash in the first place. I thought well, I had a bank account.

C: What time of day was this?

M: It was in the middle of ---well, I guess it would have been in the middle of the night, no matter what time it was. It was all black. And this kid in the bus, he must have been a high school kid, and it was Greimann's son and he got everyone on that was goin' to Fairbanks and he wanted \$4, I think, and I only had about two five dollar bills by the time I'd paid this and

that and the other to get that far. There were only about four of us that went to town on the bus. The rest of them got on other buses and went to Eielson and all these strange names. And I didn't know what Eielson was but they all looked out of the plane and saw the lights on Eielson. They had a lot more lights than Fairbanks had.

And then when we got to Fairbanks, I never saw such a road in my life. It was jump, jump, jump, hittin' the tops of the—he was going just normal speed or real slow, I think, with this school bus, and it was a terrible road and he said, "Oh, well, they've had a fire. The Co-op Drug just burned down," and these hoses were all over the street and frozen solid. It was about thirty below. Rough? And that was Cushman and Second Street, I think. So I went up to the hotel manager or whatever he was, his name was Ninedro (?). I found out because I taught the kids after that. And since then his daughter became a teacher, but at that time I guess she was in the high school as a student. So he said, "We don't have any rooms here. All the miners are in town and their not going to move until mining season opens up again and that's in the middle of June."

C: Which hotel was this?

M: Nordale. It had not burned yet but the Co-op Drug had burned and it was somewhere on the block. And that's why the street was so rough, all those hoses strung all out and frozen and he was takin' this bus over the whole thing just like that. Really a rough ride. Then the guy in the hotel said they didn't have a room, there was no room in the whole town and if I was goin' work at the University, here was the phone, call out there.

I think about that time it was two in the morning. He hunted up the number, I think they had only two phones out there, and I got Dr.—who was the president? Can't think of his name..... (*Terris Moore*) And so he said "Well, come on out here, I'll call Miss Fish." And I thought what a strange name.....I never did know anybody by the name, just Fish. So he said, "I'll call Miss Fish and I'll have her meet you at the door. You take a cab out here and go to Hess Hall, that's where everybody lives. And that's where we've got a room for you." The first thing he said was, "Are you still in Texas?" so he knew I was coming.

And then there was a guy here, Washburn, flying around the mountain and the next day he took Moore—was that his name?—out to the mountain and I didn't see Moore, either. He didn't show up anymore. Until later. And then I found out that the head of my department was in the hospital in Seattle with an operation so I wouldn't see him either so Minnie Wells found out I didn't have anyone to tell me anything, so she comes over and tells me who she is and introduces me to everybody on the first floor but in the meantime..... He said take a cab and come out to the University. Well, I didn't know where there was a cab, either, and this guy (*at the hotel*) says there's a kid here's got a car and he can drive you out to the University. And he went out to this little ol' Chevrolet, just like one I left at home, I think it had four doors.

He put me in the front seat 'cause he couldn't open the second door. I had two suitcases and I'd already sent a trunk of stuff up here. So he said, "I can take you out to the University. I think I know where it is. I haven't been out there, but I can get you there." So I got in the front seat with him and he piled the two suitcases in the back. And there was not a light anywhere, but finally we drove around and saw one 60w bulb up on top of a—it looked like a water tower, but it was all cased in—and it was on top of the old gym..... And he said, "If

there's a hall named Hess I don't know where it is, so I'll just have to drive around and find it." So we drove two or three blocks around and he said, "There's Hess Hall."

So we got out on the side. There's a front door, but he went to the side. So we went downstairs—the taxi driver helped me get my junk out of the car—and we went downstairs because the other one didn't go up. The main floor just went down. And we were walkin' around, bangin' those suitcases on all the doors and every one of the doors had a man's name on it. He said, "I thought you was goin' live in the girls' dorm." And I said, "Well, that's what I thought." And then I saw all those signs that'd say AC, then the next would say DC, next one would say AC and DC, all over the place, which meant nothing to me. Then she (*Miss Fish*) came down, she heard us rummaging down there. She said, "I'll take you back upstairs. Your room'll be on the main floor."

They had two or three teachers up there, then the girls were on the second and—there must have been another floor up there. It was a concrete building, kinda drab looking, not real fancy paint, everything had just been painted over. So anyway, with all these men's names, I wasn't sure where I was goin' to go. We got up there and she said,it was between semesters and the girls had brought their sheets down there and washed them in the old Maytag washers, there were about six of 'em, just an old antique...wringer washer..... She said, "They've got 'em hangin' on these lines....." and about ever six inches there were lines all across the basement. And she said, "We gotta' crawl under 'em." So we bent down and crawled under those old wet sheets. At two o'clock in the morning.

She knew right where I was goin' and took me to the room and there was my trunk. And I saw that stream of ice, clear to the bottom. I opened up the trunk, there was my heated—it wasn't a fuzzy blanket—but a sheet that had wires in it..... wham, bang and all the lights flew out when I plugged it in and I thought well, I wonder what AC and DC mean. I found out right quick. I plugged it into a DC one and it was supposed to be AC. So that was the end of the blanket.

But it got hot in there, really hot. You wouldn't dare open a window 'cause you couldn't close it back 'cause of that stream of ice clear to the bottom. They had a radiator in there and it was a nice warm room. Then the next morning, over comes Minnie Wells. What a name that was. Minnie. Wells. With that cigarette holder, smokin' up that thing, and pants on and a man's shirt. So she says, "Well, get your clothes on and I'll take you over to where you're gonna teach. Tomorrow you have to be there."

Tomorrow would be Monday..... So we went into this old building...we walked across...and snow was piled up five feet everywhere, just a trail. So we got to this building, it was an old, old building and she said, "Now you'll be having an axe to be in charge of." An ax. "And if the thing catches afire, why, you can....." And here's a bucket of water sittin in the hall, two or three buckets, down the way, and it didn't make sense to me. I couldn't imagine heftin' up a pail of water and throwin' it. And the floors were all these oiled floors, they were dark brown. Boy, it'd been there a long time. And there was a certain bucket I was supposed to man. And she said, "I think this is the room you're gonna be in." It was a huge room. It had ten typewriters here, it had ten desks for secretaries here, it had ten other desks for bookkeeping and all in the same room..... And she didn't know which stuff I was gonna' teach or what I

was gonna' teach and she knew that was the room and she said, "I guess these are the books" and I recognized all the books and everything else. It was the same old stuff I'd had.

Anyway, I got to see where I was gonna' teach and what I was gonna' teach and the head of my department was in Seattle having an operation and Dr. Moore was taking an airplane—and it was parked right out there by the window—and he was gonna go get this Washburn.....

B: Brad Washburn?

M: Yeah. And they were gonna go do something on Mr. McKinley. And so I didn't have anyone there—the head of the department was in Seattle, Dr. Moore was gone with Brad whatever-his name was to fly to Mt. McKinley and there just wasn't anybody there that knew anything at all, so when school started the next day, I had ten girls, that was a whole bunch, that was all the girls in that school.

C: All the girls that were at the University?

M: There were only ten. And they were all taking typing and bookkeeping, so I had 'em both, had 'em all in two classes. And I think one class met at about 10 in the morning for an hour and then along about 2 in the afternoon, the other one met and that was it. And I thought there surely oughta be more than this, just two classes every day. Wasn't every day, it was Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday.

And when they all got back from this vacation—Christmas was still goin' on—but at that point they only gave the kids four days because they got out early so they could go headin' down for Mt. McKinley and get those jobs before the kids all came up were from the states. So they only had three or four days for Christmas..... And they were a nice bunch of kids. Everyone of 'em were real nice girls and since they were the only girls there were, they hadn't had too much Christmas and they all lived right here in Fairbanks. There was no bus system here so they all—mothers and dads had to come and get 'em every day. It was really kind of primitive place and all these boys were there from the army. They'd started back...

C: They were taking university classes?

M: Uh huh. There were only two hundred altogether. Students. With ten of them being girls.

C: Wow. What odds!

B: So these girls were all from Fairbanks? They didn't live on campus?

M: Some of 'em did, that lived in Hess Hall but they all weren't there. Didn't live there. There was a PE teacher, now, what was her name. Bonnie? Billie? Finally she went crazy. She went into the public school system after retiring, I think. Billie. Anyway, she married one of the students there and they kinda frowned about that. She lived downstairs where I did, too. In another room. What was her name? I know you'd know her. She taught out there a long time. I played at her wedding. She got married at the Episcopal Church.

A: Did I hear the name Miss Fish?..... She was the school nurse. Practically ran the place.

M: Yeah, she did.... She got me started, knew where I was supposed to be and what I was supposed to do lot better than Minnie Wells did. And she was never over in that old, old building, it was such a big old thing. And it was all greasy from all that floor sweep.

B: Was this a military building? *(surplussed)*

M: No, it was Old Main.

C: Is that the one the Museum ended up in at first?

M: Yeah. No, no....

A: That was Eielson, on the top floor. *(end of Tape one, side A)*

A:And that was boarded over so you didn't realize..... *(referring to the water tower attached to the end of the gymnasium)*

M: Uh huh. And it had one 60w light bulb, that was it for the whole campus. The kids ate in a military building down behind..... They tore that down, too.....

C: How long did you teach at the University?

M: Three years. Three and a half.

A: You must have been there when the guy flew his plane into the side of the building. *(A/ is referring to a fatal accident, but Mattie is still on Washburn)*

M: I think so..... Was it Bradford? Washburn? OK, he's the one, Moore was taking him to the mountain. And it was already January, yeah is was January 20th when I got here, and there was nobody here. Who'd I say hired me in that letter?..... Oh, Duckering, he's the one that hired me. Before I got up he'd died and they'd already buried him.

B: So it was up to you to just decide what to teach.....?

M:and how and how many and who was comin'. They didn't give you a list of anybody. When the girls showed up they knew where they were goin' and what they were takin'.

C: Did you live in Hess Hall the three years that you taught up there?

M: I taught up there two years before I married Carl and then I moved out here.

Then, of course, out at that University they had this and that and the other thing, a dance, then a bonfire, and all that activity stuff goin' All these boys, all these boys, oh yeah, they thought I was pretty neat. They all wanted to date and I thought, "I'd better not start that."

A: She (*Minnie Wells*) thought the papers of Dr. Bunnell reflected poorly on Dr. Bunnell and therefore should be destroyed and proceeded to do it.

M: And she threw 'em all away?

A: Yep.

M: Well, Bunnell had already retired, but he would eat—I was eating in the regular thing (*the dining room*) so I knew him.

A: When I first saw Bunnell's papers, it was four drawer cabinet, and when I finally got around to realizing I'd better get some of this stuff down on paper, because it's affecting the lands of the University, I went back and there was half a file drawer left.¹ I spent hours searching around the University any place these things could be hid out and Everybody referred me to Minnie Wells—"She has 'em, she knows where they are."

B: Did she ever 'fess up?

A: Not really.

C: What did you say the papers were regarding?

A: Basically, all the University, but when you see how the federal government made you apply for land, the University had two acts of Congress that gave it land and the process was known as a "clear list" and the clear lists consisted of about eight different federal forms that had to be filled out and sworn to and the Board of Regents had to have a meeting and have minutes of the board meeting that passed the thing and the verbiage of the act that was passed, just went on and on and on.... And there were nine of these things.... Clear lists....

B: Remember who some of the other teachers were, instructors, when you were out there?

M: The Home Ec teacher was Lola Tilley, she was there alright but they had another one. There were two Home Ec teachers. Must have been a pretty big deal. Only ten girls.

B: What else was offered for the girls. Commercial studies and Home Ec—were there other things.

M: Yeah, I think they had a speech teacher out there. They put on a play, I was in the play, and they were takin' pictures, and they had a yearbook, but I never, ever saw the yearbook.....

¹ Al was in charge of managing the University's lands, at that time.

B: What did they put on?

M: It was a play written by somebody right out there talking about the war and the University, too. It was kind of a home-made thing.....

A: Who lived in the big log cabin?

B: It became the Dean's..... Remember who the Dean was? He followed Duckering.....

M: They didn't have anybody there. I don't know who took Duckering's place. If anybody did, I don't know it.

B: Hawsler? Hosley.....

A: Hosley.

N: The log cabin that's the Nordic House now?

B: I think so.

A: Hosley was a graduate forester. He got into administration, somehow.

M: He was a nice guy. I liked him.....

B: I remember going to that house, must have been in Mrs. Patty's day, for some kind of a tea. And it was one of the nicer houses on campus. And of course you had to wear hat and gloves and heels.

A: There were several social events that happened and Mrs. Tilly's Tea was one, and the President's Tea was another and this is where Neil Davis, when he wrote the book, had the chapter on Mrs. Patty thrown out, because they threatened to sue.

C: Oh, was there a libelous statement in there?

A: No, it was the truth.....

C: What was the truth?

B: Well, Mrs. Patty came up (*from Seattle*) intending to civilize the campus and these teas were part of it, dressing up and whatnot and.....Neil apparently disparaged this idea a little bit, is what I think happened, and Stan Patty, the son, saw it and said, something to the effect of "You take that out or I'll take you to court."

A: And if you want to see what the chapter looks like, go take it out—if the librarians will release it to you—from the archives.....

M: I don't remember some of the buildings at all..... I know Old Main was a scream with these buckets sittin' there full of water, axes hangin' around.....