



Jean Starker Roth Oral History Interviews, September 17, 2007

Title

“Oregon Born”

Date

September 17, 2007

Location

Starker Roth residence, Corvallis, Oregon.

Summary

In interview 1, Starker Roth focuses on her upbringing in Corvallis. In doing so, she shares a variety of details about the make-up of the town and the community life that she experienced as a girl. She also discusses her parents' backgrounds and personalities, her father's career, trips that the entire family took during her childhood, and memories of holiday activities.

The session winds up with Starker Roth's recollections of her grade school and high school years, her participation in 4-H, the importance of religion to her family, and changes in Corvallis life that were ushered in by the Great Depression.

Interviewee

Jean Starker Roth

Interviewer

Maia Fischler

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/starkerj/>

Transcript

***Note: Interview recorded to audio only.**

Maia Fischler: This is Maia Fischler and I'm in the home of Jean Starker Roth in Corvallis. It's September 17, 2007 and we're going to be talking today, Jean and I, about the early days of her life here in Corvallis. So Jean, before we start talking about your personal life, I was hoping to ask you a few questions about Corvallis and try to set the stage a little bit, to get an idea of what Corvallis was like when you lived here as a girl. Could you describe how big Corvallis was when you lived here?

Jean Starker Roth: I really don't know the number, but I know that the hospital was way out in the country, and of course we all know that the hospital at that time was between Arnold Way and Harrison. The ambulances came in on what they called Short Street. I think Short Street is still there, it's kind of in behind the home, what do they call that now? [Samaritan Heart of the Valley] And I know that there was no paving. I think that the bus came up Van Buren Street and went around Short Street and turned around and came back down on Monroe Street. That's my recollection, it was just a loop. And it went downtown, and I think the bus stop was at Albright and Raw, if I remember correctly.

MF: So your house on 23rd Street -- was that more or less on the edge of town?

JSR: Oh very much out in the country. People would say, "Why did you build way out there in the country?" 23rd Street was not paved. And there was a dairy farm on the corner of what would be Harrison and 25th Street. So it was all farmland.

MF: Was the university the outer limit on that side of town?

JSR: The university was over on the south side of town.

MF: Was it the boundary of the south side of town? And the how far north did it go? Certainly Circle and Walnut were not there at that time.

JSR: No, in fact Harrison was not there either, because I used to walk down to the dairy farm and pay the milk bill for my mother, and that was at 25th and Harrison, north of what is now Harrison. But it was just a cow path.

MF: Could you walk to nearly everything in town?

JSR: Yes, or else ride my bicycle.

MF: How many elementary schools were there at that time?

JSR: Well, Harding was brand new, and I went to Harding for my first two years. I started Harding for my third year, and that's kind of an interesting story. You wouldn't dare do this in this day and age but when we went to school, I remember that morning there were four of us who were told that the boundary had been changed. The other children who were told that -- I was on 23rd Street and they were on Park Terrace. I don't know whether Park Terrace is still there or not, but it's the street that goes down to the new engineering building from Monroe Street. There was a little short street in there called Park Terrace. And there were three girls who lived in there: Pauline Maris, who was from the Maris family that composed the Oregon State song; Mary Margaret Torgeson, and I think Carl Berman was in that group too. We were all told that we were supposed to go to Franklin School. So we revolted and we went home. We weren't going to that Franklin School. As I remember, we were told to just walk down there to Franklin!

MF: Did you end up making the transition to Franklin?

JSR: Oh yes.

MF: The revolution didn't last too long.

JSR: No. But we were really at the edge of everything.

MF: And Franklin was the older school?

JSR: Yes, it was much older -- in fact it had a skating rink in the basement. We all skated at recess. There were pillars down there, and I remember we all skated around the pillars.

MF: So there were those two elementary schools, and were there any others?

JSR: There was a Roosevelt School -- it was involved with the Columbus Day storm. They lost all their fence in the Columbus Day storm. That was over on what is now the Philomath Highway. It was called Roosevelt School. It was probably on 14th, 15th, somewhere in there. I can't remember because I didn't go to that school. And I think Washington School must have been there. And that's now the Community College on Ninth Street.

MF: So there were four elementary schools. That makes it a pretty sizeable town.

JSR: Yes, but you see Camp Adair was what really changed Corvallis. There were two divisions of military that moved into this town -- well they moved actually into Independence and Monmouth. That's what really changed the town.

MF: Because a lot of those military men, did they stay around after their time there?

JSR: Many of them retired here. Especially the officers. It seemed to me that when we lived over on Jackson Street, at one time we had three retired Colonels on our block.

MF: So they came here and learned to love it.

JSR: Yes, in spite of the poison oak that they all contracted.

MF: Was all the shopping centered downtown? There was nothing along Monroe?

JSR: Well, there was the El, the Electric Lunch, but we called it the El. That was I think the only store that I remember along Monroe. That was where the students gathered. It was right across from the engineering building on Monroe.

MF: But 9th Street wasn't developed?

JSR: No, not at all.

MF: Did it feel like an exciting town to live in?

JSR: Well, I don't think it was very exciting, I think it was pretty dull. We had a movie house, the Whiteside Theatre, and we had a hardware store, that was Whiteside Hardware Store too. And we had Albright and Raw, we had Nolan's which was the dry goods store, and I can't remember, I think we had Sunnybrook then. Those were the stores that I remember.

MF: How about Robnetts? Or did they take over Nolan's?

JSR: You know, I don't know, because as a youngster, I didn't pay any attention to hardware stores.

MF: So you were born in Portland. What were your parents doing there?

JSR: Well my grandparents lived at 22nd and Alameda in Portland, and my parents—and I never knew exactly why – but they lived across the street and up a little bit, I don't know what that address was. But when my parents were first married, my maternal grandparents lived on Broadway, I remember that. And then they moved to Salem, because that grandfather was the first interstate commerce commissioner of Oregon.

MF: Your mother's father?

JSR: Yes. And I know I was born in that house that was across the street from 22nd and Alameda, up from them a little bit. Because my mother almost died from that flu – I don't remember what year that was.

MF: 1918? Was it before you were born?

JSR: Yes.

MF: So what was your dad doing in Portland at that time?

JSR: I think that's when he worked for the Western Pine Company. And I know that during WWI, he cruised. When my mother and father were first married, they lived in a railroad car in Sumpter Oregon, and I have pictures of my mother. She wore boots, buttoned up with pointed toes. And I remember her telling stories about living there. And she taught school over there too. But my dad was cruising timber, because they used – I think maybe it tells in there what kind [referring to book: *Starker Forests: The Legacy of T.J. Starker*, by Jim Fisher]. I think it was pine. I'm not sure. It was some kind of a light wood that they used in airplanes during World War I.

MF: So that was his contribution to that war effort?

JSR: Yes, he was cruising timber, marking it, and I remember they lived in this railroad car, and my mother said she forgot to empty the washbasin one time and she was so mad because there was water all over the floor.

MF: So they weren't necessarily in Portland during that time?

JSR: I think they moved to Sumpter and then somehow they moved back to Portland.

MF: And they were there for a couple years after you were born?

JSR: Yes, and then they moved to Corvallis because President – no it was Dean Peavy then. I think it may be misspelled in there [referring to book]. PEAVY. So he asked my father to come down, cause he was working for this pine company, I think. They asked him to come down to teach. Cause he'd gone to school with Dean Peavy.

JSR: The first two years, they lived in the Reed Apartments down on 12th Street. Reed, the son of those people, became a very well-known wrestler, an Olympic wrestler I think. And there's a lot of information over at the university about that Reed guy. He was very well thought of. He was the son of the people who built those apartments on 12th Street. And then my father built this house which everybody said was way out in the country. He always did that way out in the country business.

MF: Was it a big house? How many bedrooms did it have?

JSR: It had one, two, and a huge closet which was my bedroom. So there were three. And then when we got older, they made bedrooms up in the third story, which was really kind of an attic, and we had little stairs that dropped down and we climbed those. I had the back half of that – I had to go through my brother's bedroom to get to mine.

MF: Was it always just the four of you in that house? You didn't have any grandparents or anyone living with you?

JSR: No. However during the war, my parents did take in a girl who was going to school next door, from the Alpha Xi Delta house. She lived with us for a while. I think that's when we got moved upstairs.

MF: Was your mother a homemaker the whole time you were growing up? She didn't ever work outside the house after she was married?

JSR: Not after she was married. You know in those days, you could teach school right out of high school. Portland was – I don't know how many high schools there were in Oregon at that time, but I know that when my father came to Corvallis, he only had to go two years because he'd been to high school. And my mother taught school right out of high school. And they sat behind each other in the Portland High School.

MF: Do you think there was only one Portland high school?

JSR: That's what I remember.

MF: So she was always home when you got back from school? The heart of the household?

JSR: Oh yes.

MF: When you picture her during those early days, what is she doing?

JSR: She was always ironing when I came home from school. And you know, I think that was kind of smart. Cause she could accomplish something, but she was always there to listen about our day. Looking back on it, she was either ironing or cooking. Something that would allow her to hear what we had to say when we got home.

MF: Did she always have a snack waiting for you when you got home?

JSR: Oh yes. And I have fond memories of the lady who had the dairy farm. I think that was later, when we were coming home from junior high. Her mother had maple bars for us. I've always loved maple bars.

MF: Did she have a life beyond the family? Did she have things she did outside the house?

JSR: Oh yes, she was one of the first presidents of the college Folk Club.

MF: So she did quite a bit of volunteer work through the university?

JSR: Yes she did. And she and Mrs. Ed. Woodcock started the auxiliary for the hospital. They gave the tea that started off that group.

MF: Did she ever work at the hospital or do volunteer work there?

JSR: I don't remember that she ever did. She did a lot of needlework, she made beautiful embroidered napkins that have satin stitch --- I still have them. She put S on them, embroidered all of them with satin stitch. She did beautiful work.

MF: Did she make your clothes?

JSR: Well sort of. In those days, we didn't buy readymade things. A woman used to come to our house, I think twice a year as I remember, and she would live with us, and she would sew our clothes. She made my coat. I don't think I ever had a boughten coat till I went to college.

MF: So she'd come and stay for a week?

JSR: Yes, a week or so. And I think she got things pretty much finished and then my mother finished them, is what I remember.

MF: Would she sew for your father and brother too?

JSR: No, not for the boys, but for my mother and I.

MF: And where would the boys get their clothes?

JSR: Well they must have gone to Portland for them. I don't remember if we had a Penney's in this town or not. We used to have a Penney's for a long long time. But I just don't know where my brother got his clothes. But I remember she made my coats.

MF: And your mother would do the finish work, like hemming them?

JSR: Yes, she'd do the fitting and getting all that done, and I think my mother finished everything up. Then when I was growing up, I made most of my clothes.

MF: From what age?

JSR: I suppose maybe junior high.

MF: You had a sewing machine there at home?

JSR: Uh huh.

MF: Is that what all the other girls did too?

JSR: I suppose they did because there was not much readymade. Nolan's sold yard goods --that's where we bought the material. I remember other families had seamstresses come in and help.

MF: It's interesting that they would come to your house instead of you going to them. Maybe that was a factor of Corvallis being such a small town, they had to move around. So was your mother a wonderful cook?

JSR: Oh yes.

MF: What were some of her specialties?

JSR: Well she always made chicken and dumplings for Sunday dinner. And in those days you bought a laying hen. Often times we would find eggs in the cavity of the chicken. You know, they were tough cause they were laying hens. And she would brown those. I don't remember how she really cooked the chickens, but I remember the cream sauce that she would put in there and lots of time there would be little eggs in the cream sauce and then she would put the dumplings in the top. And that was good, it was delicious. As I remember, it was very tender, but I think she probably cooked them for a long time.

MF: Was meat a regular part of your dinner?

JSR: Oh yes, and we made lots of stews. I don't think she ever cooked a prime rib or anything like that – it was either hamburgers or stew meat.

MF: Using a smaller quantity of meat.

JSR: Yes. But she was a wonderful cook, and had quite a reputation for being a good cook. And she made—when my aunt and uncle would come for football games, we always had baked beans and brown bread. And she made the brown bread from scratch, steamed it. She had different kinds of flours that she'd use in it. Not rye, but it must have been some sort of whole wheat, very fine cause it was something of the texture of B&M brown bread that you buy in a can. But she made hers from scratch. It was great. I think that she had that because we never knew exactly when my aunt and uncle would be coming, so she could just have that ready anytime anyone appeared.

MF: Did you learn your cooking skills from her?

JSR: I think a lot, because she taught me how to cook, we made doughnuts, we made cookies, and we made cake. I don't ever remember that she made too many pies, I don't remember making pies. Because I remember telling my husband when I married him, "You know, I don't make pie." Well his mother taught me how to make pie. She made them that way where you take a handful of flour and you take a scoop of lard...

MF: No such thing as a recipe, huh?

JSR: No, she did it by feel.

MF: But that was probably your start in learning -- watching your mother making dinner and that kind of thing?

JSR: Oh yes. And then she did the dishes – my brother never seemed to do anything in the kitchen, but she did the dishes and then I had to dry them. Because we didn't have dishwashers. And I remember I would tap dance while I was drying the dishes -- I drove her nuts. Cause I can remember her saying, "Jean, just stand still." "Well I have to practice my tap dancing!"

MF: Do you think of yourself as being like your mother in some ways?

JSR: Yes, I think so, because I like to do embroidery and sewing and cooking...yes I think I'm a good deal like she was.

MF: How about in terms of character. What was her general character like?

JSR: Well I suppose I'm the same way, because she volunteered a lot and I volunteer a lot, so I suppose that came naturally to me.

MF: Sounds like she was a pretty upbeat person?

JSR: Oh yes, and a very loving person. She was very caring, I think.

MF: When you think about your mom, are there some very important things that you learned from her?

JSR: Well I think probably if I had any problems, I went to my mother, I never went to my father. I guess just the things that we discussed, like cooking and sewing. And she was always good about helping with homework, too -- she was the one who did that. But you know she never drove, so she was always home.

MF: Although it sounds like she did find ways to get out into the community and do a lot of community work. Did she ride a bicycle?

JSR: No, she didn't ride a bicycle. She must have walked a lot. You were talking about what was on Monroe Street. Up between 25th and 27th, along Monroe Street, there was a grocery store and a meat market, a sanitary meat market. And I can remember when my mother paid the meat bill, they would give her sweetbreads, because nobody ate sweetbreads. And I still like sweetbreads. I just love sweetbreads.

MF: She knew how to prepare them.

JSR: Oh yes, she surely did. And then there was what we called Stile's stamp store. I don't remember the real name of it, but it was a book store, and the college kids got books there. But we always kidded him because we thought he sold more stamps than he did books, so we called it Stile's stamp store. And he eventually became mayor of Corvallis, that man. He was very good friends with my folks. They had no children and they were an older couple. I don't remember what he had done before he started the store, but I think it was more of a retirement job than it was something to make him any money, because as I said eventually he became the major of Corvallis. And my parents and they were very close friends. The Whitesides and the Stiles and the Starkers always did things together. Holidays and that sort of thing.

And my mother was kind of – I think she was very good at entertaining. And you know in those days, the college professors, when there were new people, they didn't have a Folk Club like they do now, they would call on each other. Every lady had a little silver tray at her door, and when the people would come, they would leave their calling card. My mother did a lot of that, she would call on people.

MF: Did the ladies have something they did during the day when the children were in school, like a bridge club or something?

JSR: Well she never played bridge. But what I remember about her and the college Folk Club is she used to stand behind a wing chair in the living room, practicing her speech. She'd have this speech laying on the back of the chair, and she would stand and practice giving whatever she was going to say.

MF: So your dad's job was as a professor during these days. Did he do research too, or did he only teach?

JSR: Yes, he did. He had a post farm. And I think that the research was to find – they had a lot of trouble with fences, so he was doing research to see what could be done, what was the best wood, and how it was best to handle it. So he had what he called his post farm. He did that research, I think that's probably mentioned in there [referring to book].

MF: Was he ever at home during the day?

JSR: No, he was gone all day, because he not only was a college professor, but my father always wanted to make money to buy timber. So this was kind of the beginning of – what do you call it when you buy things on time? Anyway, Earl Heckert was a man downtown who ran a store that sold refrigerators and other equipment. That was a new thing to have, a

refrigerator, you know, we always had had ice boxes. People wanted to buy refrigerators, but they didn't always have the money gathered up, so they would buy it on time. I can remember that man coming to our house, and on the dining room table they would lay out all these papers...Heckert had sold the refrigerators to people, but he didn't have the finances to carry the paper on it, so my father would carry that paper for him. So he did that, but almost every day he would leave school, I don't know, I suppose at 5:00, and he would head to town, and he'd do business downtown. And he wouldn't come home till 6, 6:30, 7 maybe, when we had dinner. He always went downtown and had some business. Lion's Club business -- he was a great Lion, he was probably in the Lion's Club for over 50 years, in fact he had a 50-year pin. And he was one of the leaders of the group of Lions that established Avery Park. Because he thought that timberland there at the edge of the city was going to be a valuable asset. So he got the Lions behind it. He was the mover and shaker about that.

MF: Did you get to spend a lot of time with him? Were there any special things you'd do with him?

JSR: No, I don't think I spent a lot of time with my dad. I think he was always busy. Every Sunday, we made a trip to the woods. And as a teenager, I wasn't very fond of spending my Sundays going into the woods, but that's what we did as a family. Sometimes we picnicked, but most of the time it was just taking a ride.

MF: Do you remember a time your family didn't have a car?

JSR: Well I think probably when they lived down on 12th Street they didn't have a car, because I remember the first car he brought, and he came down the gravel road in front of the house on 23rd Street, and we all ran out to see the new car. And he'd gotten a ticket on the way home, cause he was going 25 miles an hour. Isn't that funny what kids remember? I suppose the fact that he got a ticket was very shocking to me. But I remember him saying he was going 25 miles an hour, uphill.

MF: What kind of car was that, do you remember?

JSR: No, I was a girl, I wasn't impressed with what kind of car. But he always drove a Plymouth because Charlie Whiteside had the Plymouth agency. And he never took a car out of the garage till he had a steel pan soldered on or whatever you do. So if he took it to the woods, he didn't take the underpinnings out of the car if he drove over a stump.

MF: At that time in Corvallis, were there still horses in town, or had automobiles replaced them?

JSR: I don't remember any horses. Maybe there were, I don't know.

MF: Even though you didn't spend a lot of time with him, were there things he taught you in his way, indirectly?

JSR: Well he tried to teach me typing and how to be a secretary. And I hated every minute of it!

MF: He tried to teach you himself? Did he type?

JSR: Oh yes he did, he was a hunt and pecker. But if I made a mistake, boy he told me about it and I had to do it over. And he really wanted me to take secretarial science in college. He didn't see any use for home economics. You know a lot of men, even now, don't feel like home economics is a real career. They don't understand that women are raising the children and there's a lot to it. But anyway, he wanted me to take secretarial science. And every time I would go to ask for my check to go to school, he would say, "Now you know this is a lot of money." \$25 to go to school each term! He just didn't want to part with that \$25.

MF: Well it sounds like between your two parents, they did give you a good legacy of charitable works.

JSR: Oh yes, and you know my mother was the one who said I should do what I wanted. She was the go-between. My father would not have sent me to college, there was no sense in a girl going to college. My mother was the one who intervened. When she put her foot down, she didn't put it down very often, but when she did, he knew it was down.

MF: Do you think there are ways you are like your father? Are there parts of your personality that you connect with him?

JSR: Well I probably am a little stubborn like he was. Yes, I think I have some traits of my father that probably aren't too admirable.

MF: But you're also a very good businesswoman.

JSR: Well I got a lot of my business training I think by osmosis, you know, just hearing what he had to say. I think I got a lot of training that way, not necessarily sitting down and talking about it, but just by being around when he was communicating with people.

MF: I wanted to ask you about your relationship with Bruce and the kind of things you did when you were children together.

JSR: I didn't ever do much with my brother, he always had his nose in a book. Looking back on it, I was a very good child, cause I didn't get into any trouble, I didn't dare. My father was downtown, he was on the school board, he was this and that. But my brother, he read the encyclopedia and the dictionary for fun. I wanted to go out with my girlfriends, I wanted to go to movies, I wanted to go on bicycle rides with my friends, I wanted to go to their house and play. Bruce never did that much. He had one friend, Fred McMillan, and as I said in that other thing, they used to sit on the back porch, but they would be talking boy talk, and they would talk it in pig Latin so I couldn't understand what they were saying. They used to just tease me. But in later years we were very good friends.

MF: But even when you were very young, and you were living out on the edge of the woods, you didn't play together?

JSR: Well when we were at Spirit Lake or at Crescent Lake, we played together. But mostly he read. He read an awful lot. And I wasn't a reader. I wanted to get out and do things.

MF: What was the neighborhood like? Did you have other kids around so you could go out and play after school?

JSR: Oh yes, and I had four or five really good friends that were through grade school and high school. They lived further up beyond 23rd Street. One of them lived on Arnold Way and one, Betty Ann, lived on 30th, and Genevieve lived on 31st, or vice versa I guess it was. Anyway Karkerlines lived across from the Pi Phi house there on 23rd, Fred McMillan, Bruce's friend lived across on 30th Street, they built that house, Foxes lived...they were all in that area. They would ride their bicycles down to 23rd Street and they would stand at the top. I came from the middle of the block on 23rd up to VanBuren, cause they'd whistle up there, and we'd know they'd arrived, and then we'd all ride our bicycles down to Franklin School. We always rode together on our bicycles.

MF: Were there regular neighborhood games like hide and seek?

JSR: Oh yes we played lots of hide and seek and kick the can and what else did we play? Olly olly oxen free is what we played, and we played a lot of hopscotch.

MF: Did you have sidewalks for hopscotch?

JSR: I think by that time we might have, I guess – no there wasn't any cement back there. Well we played it out in front of the house and there must have been a little sidewalk or something. There must have been a sidewalk down to the Alpha Xi Delta house. We roller-skated a lot. And we roller-skated out at that rink that's outside of town. That's where we went when the whole class would go. And you know like Halloween or something, we'd have a party out there, that was kind of a social event.

MF: That must have been way out of town!

JSR: Oh yes, it would be like going to Monmouth in this day and age.

MF: Were there different chores that you did and that Bruce did around the house?

JSR: I don't think he ever had a chore. I don't remember him doing anything around the kitchen. My job was to take the scraps down to the chickens after dinner, but I don't remember Bruce doing much in the way of chores. He stayed out of

trouble, so he wasn't around. They had to keep me busy! Parents, if you're out of sight, out of mind, if you're not doing anything to irritate them, they leave you alone!

MF: Sounds like you didn't have any very difficult chores either. Was your main chore helping your mom in the kitchen?

JSR: Yes, I dried the dishes, like I said, and carried the scraps down to the chickens. And to this day I hate anything that flies around my head. The chickens roosted in the trees, and then when I'd take the scraps down, they'd fly down, and I can remember just throwing down the scraps and then running like crazy back to the house. There were wires around the area, but I don't think they had a coop -- they just stayed in the trees. I suppose -- they laid eggs, and I think that's where my mother got -- cause I can remember my dad chopping the chickens' heads off and they would be flopping.

MF: Did you have any other animals?

JSR: No, no animals, no pets. And to this day, I do not like dogs. We never had any pets. And nowadays if you don't have a dog in the house, you think you're underprivileged!

MF: You mentioned your trips to the lakes, but did you have any other vacations?

JSR: Well my father was a Forestry prof, but in those days they didn't work in the summertime, it was kind of a nine months job. So he would get a job as a forester, a ranger, in the Forest Service, because the Forest Service just hired people during the fire season. So we went three summers to Spirit Lake and one summer to Crescent Lake. Then my dad started building houses in the summer, and that's when he built all those houses down there around 23rd Street. That's when I was older.

MF: So when you went to those lakes, would you go for the whole summer?

JSR: Yes. There was a cabin for the ranger, but the only thing up there then was a Boy Scout camp and a YMCA camp. And as I said in that other interview, that's when I kind of learned about humor and how people laughed at jokes, because the kids would come over very deadpan: "We've been told to borrow a wrench to turn off the spring," or "We've been sent over for red, white and blue paint." And then my brother and I used to swipe the hardtack out of the forest ranger's fire kits. We loved hard tack! That's where I learned to walk logs across a crick and those kind of things.

MF: Did it feel like a treat to you, or were you kind of isolated?

JSR: I don't remember that it was a treat, because they took us away from our friends in the summertime. And I think it was more just something we had to do. But my mother would can huckleberries, it was before freezing. And as I said, the few people who lived up there would say, "Why would you want to do that? The government will take care of you." It was just the beginning of government subsidies, it used to make my mother so mad. Cause she thought they ought to work and do their own canning.

MF: Did she have a full kitchen out there with an electrical range?

JSR: She must have had a wood stove to cook on. I don't think we had any electricity up there.

MF: That must have been pretty challenging for her, to put out three meals a day all summer.

JSR: Well she was up to the challenge -- as I remember, we ate pretty well. We had the wild things to eat and...but I remember the road up to Spirit Lake was very iffy, and sometimes there were culverts with no drainage, and when we'd come down we'd just hope and pray that we'd get across a crick. And I remember one year we came down for my aunt's wedding, and we didn't know if we were going to make it or not, cause there had been a rain right before. And my mother was very worried, I remember that, that we weren't going to make it down for the wedding. Cause you couldn't get across the cricks, there was no road up there, really.

MF: Did she take a lot of food in with you?

JSR: I don't remember, but we must have taken it in with us.

MF: Was your dad a hunter?

JSR: I think there was somebody who went to town once a week or something to get produce, now that I think about it. And I knew that Harry Truman that was up there, who died. He chewed snooze, he had brown lines dribbling down. I think he was probably older than my parents because I remember him being a pretty old man even then.

MF: Did your family ever take any vacations outside of the northwest?

JSR: Oh never. My father didn't want to be outside the view of Marys Peak. I can only remember them taking one trip, and that was to Alaska. And they did go up there, but I think the only reason my dad wanted to go was that some young man that he had as a student became the governor of Alaska, or somebody of note in the political life of Alaska. And he wrote Pop and told him he wanted him to come up and see what they were doing in Alaska with the forests. My mother, I remember, was so excited. They went on a ship. And when they got up there, they were met with a limousine -- that impressed them no end. But that's the only trip, I think. My mother would have loved to have traveled, but Pop never wanted to do that.

MF: And that trip to Alaska, was that after you were grown?

JSR: Yes. I think I was just through college. And my father resigned being a professor the year that I graduated, because my mother said she would go to the poorhouse with him but she wasn't going to take the kids. So she insisted that I get through school before he quit. And of course he became very wealthy eventually.

MF: How about your extended family? Did you see a lot of them?

JSR: My father's sister, my aunt, was 10 years younger than he, and I think he was quite fond of her. And she was very fond of her big brother. And she was the instigator of getting the family together. So we always went to Portland for Thanksgiving, and I can't remember if we ever went to my mother's family -- they died when I was real little. My grandmother Ostrander died when I was very little. He [grandfather] was the first interstate commerce commissioner, and he went east for a meeting, and she ate oysters and they poisoned her, and she died. And then my grandfather lost his political job, cause it was an elected job, about the same time, and I remember that was quite a blow for him. And he lived with my folks for the rest of his life. He died there in that house on 23rd -- not the one we lived in but another one. We were living in that house while we were building the house out here on 38th. The last house out on Harrison.

MF: Had you graduated from high school then?

JSR: No, I was in high school through when he lived with us. He would live with us part of the time and then he would go to San Francisco and live with my mother's oldest brother. And then he would go to Seattle and live with the next one -- she was one of five, and he would visit around two or three months at a time and then move on.

MF: What was the name of your aunt who you visited in Portland?

JSR: Molly. Molly Starker. Molly Starker was my father's mother, and his name was Otto.

MF: Molly's husband?

JSR: He was my grandfather. And my aunt Caroline was his sister.

MF: Did Caroline have children?

JSR: No she married quite late.

MF: So you didn't have a crew of cousins to play with at holidays?

JSR: No, and none of my mother's . . . Well, his sister was quite a bit younger, and she had two children. We were never very close with them, except that she would leave those children with my mother every once in a while, and I can remember sitting out in the yard and peeling apples for those kids when they were visiting. I was more a babysitter.

MF: Some of your holidays you spent with friends, the Whitesides and such?

JSR: Well, not those holidays. We would spend Fourth of July and Labor Day and Memorial Day with them. And we'd always take something and go to the woods. But the holidays were spent – I don't ever remember going to Grandmother Ostrander's house, but we went to Grandmother Starker's house for Christmas. And it was a 5-hour drive from Corvallis to Portland in those days! And my mother would - there were no heaters in cars, and my mother would heat bricks in the oven, and then she would wrap them in blankets so that we could put our feet on them and keep warm in the car. I remember sometimes it would be foggy and she would lean her head out the window and say, "Go left, Thurman, you're getting too close to the edge!" It was a bad, bad drive to Portland, and we didn't do it too often. I can remember when they put in the Dayton cutoff. You know there was no I-5, it was 99W. And when they put in the Dayton cutoff, I remember, that was a big deal, it cut off about 15 minutes or so.

MF: What were your holidays like?

JSR: My Grandmother Starker was a great cook, and she cooked on a wood stove. Even when she had an electric stove, she'd always cooked on a woodstove, and she liked that. She used to do big Christmas dinners, like maybe 30 people. She would borrow tables and chairs from the church, and they gathered in all the Starker clan that was in Portland, and had them all there for dinner. There were big doings.

MF: Was turkey the traditional Christmas meal back then too?

JSR: Yes it was.

MF: Were there a lot of presents?

JSR: No, there were never many presents. The only presents I remember getting really were those bicycles. Bruce and I got bicycles for Christmas. He knew how to ride a bicycle -- I suppose some friend of his had one -- but I didn't know. And I can remember my grandfather running alongside of me and teaching me how to ride a bicycle.

MF: How old do you suppose you were when you got that?

JSR: Maybe 10 or 12.

MF: When did kids generally start school – did you go to kindergarten?

JSR: No I don't think so. We started in first grade.

MF: So you started at Harding and then went to Franklin.

JSR: And then the new Corvallis High School. Which was the old one. In fact it was the old, old one. Because the old one burned down, it was in Central Park. And then we had to build a new one. And my dad was on the school board, and people thought they were crazy. Why would you build a school way out in the country? Well the same thing happened when we built Crescent Valley. People said, "Why are you building it way out in the country?" Well you know how it's getting built up. So I heard the same routine, and when people tell me that, I'd say, "I've heard that before!"

MF: About how many teachers do you think they had at that time, either at Harding or over at Franklin?

JSR: I think they had one for each grade. The Griffey's – he was the principal over at Franklin and she was a history teacher. Oh, we made so much fun of the history teacher. She always carried a handkerchief – it reminds me of Pavarotti. She was the history teacher and he was the principal.

MF: Was there one particular teacher who was especially important to you?

JSR: No not in those years. In high school there was. In Franklin, I just remember those two. They lived down there on Grant, out in the country.

MF: What grade did Franklin go through?

JSR: Well, we had – I don't know, when the building burned down there, there was a junior high and a high school. I can't remember whether there was a junior high or whether – cause I think I went four years to the high school. So I think maybe they put some of the junior high into the grade schools – I think maybe they didn't have a junior high for a little while. I can't quite remember about that, because, see, I went all the way through the then-new Corvallis High School, and I think that was four years.

MF: And do you think you were in Franklin before that?

JSR: I think so. That's what I remember, anyway.

MF: Were you a good student?

JSR: Not particularly. I didn't like school. And I about flunked out of the first two years of college, cause we had to take chemistry and that kind of thing. We had to take chemistry with all the pre-med students, and it was hard, and I hated it. Didn't understand it and didn't care if I did. But when I got to taking home ec subjects, then I was a good student.

MF: You were starting to talk about 4-H. Let's get back to that.

JSR: I was a 4-Her from probably – I don't remember when I started doing 4-H, but there was Harry Seymour who was head of the state 4-H, and then there was Doc Allen, who was his assistant, and then there was Helen Cowgill, who was the home ec part of 4-H, and they were the three state people, there were just three. Helen Seymour, who was the daughter of Harry Seymour, was my 4-H leader, and there were probably six or eight girls who did that. And in those days, we did gathered aprons, we had ties that went around and then gathers across the front, and they were about this long. We made those, and we made hot pads, and we made just very elementary things. But she was a good teacher. And then I went on and I did a lot of 4-H, probably several years of 4-H. That's why I knew what it was all about when I got through college and I was in charge of 4-H as an extension agent.

MF: When you were in it, were boys and girls always separated out?

JSR: Yes, there were no boys in our 4-H group.

MF: And the girls did homemaking kind of things -- they didn't do animals?

JSR: I think that probably some of them did, but I was never an animal lover, so I didn't have anything to do with that. But my mother was very good friends with Mrs. Seymour and Mrs. Allen. And Helen Cowgill was kind of a different lady, but she was probably really something to have an administrative job as a woman in those days.

MF: Did your mother help with the 4-H group?

JSR: Well she probably helped me with my sewing and told me how to do it, but mostly we had the meetings and we worked on our projects at the meetings.

MF: Where were those meetings?

JSR: Well I think they were at the Seymour house.

MF: Are any of your grandchildren involved in 4-H now?

JSR: No. My two boys were involved in Scouting. They were both Eagle Scouts. But the girls -- now I take that back. They were in 4-H, of course they were, because they both made dresses. They both had a blue ribbon from the county fair. I still have a dress back there that my daughter made, and I can't bear to give it away!

MF: Is that what you did with the projects you made in 4-H – send them to the county fair?

JSR: Uh huh. And I think the girls, because they were blue ribbon winners here, they went to the state fair. And I don't know if they got too far there.

MF: So they had the Benton County Fair here in town back when you were in 4-H. Was it held out at the fairgrounds where it is today?

JSR: Well it might have been there but not as big. I can't remember it being any place else.

MF: Was your family involved in that whole county fair business?

JSR: My nephew Barte is on the board of the Fair Board.

MF: At that time you were growing up, was your dad involved in it?

JSR: Oh, he was probably involved, cause he was involved in everything, so he probably was. But Barte is on the Fair Board now. And when my dad was alive, he went to church down on the river. He and Jack Brandis Sr. moved that church from down on the river, and it sits out on the fairgrounds now. But I understand they're going to move that because it doesn't have any foundation, it has no restrooms, and it's deteriorating cause they haven't kept it up. And the only thing really worth salvaging out there is the stain glass window. And so Barte was in not so long ago asking me if I had any real feelings about that church. And I said, "No, but I wish they'd keep the stained glass." And he said they planned to do that. They'll put it someplace, but I don't know where they're going to put it. I might tell them to investigate that because it would be nice if they would put it in one of the windows out there at the new Historical Society building.

MF: How important was the church in your family when you were growing up with your mom and dad?

JSR: Well my father was always more involved in the administrative part of the church than the religious side of the church. He was always a trustee or something. My mother belonged to the ladies groups. My dad was always more of the business side of the church.

MF: Were you and Bruce encouraged to participate and do some service activities through the church?

JSR: We went to Sunday school, and I sang in the choir during my high school days. We had quite a group of girls, and we were at the stage when we had just gotten our driver's license, and we loved to go and sing in the choir because we got to take the car. The church was down where it is now, that's where I went to church, the Presbyterian Church. It was at night, and I remember one time, I think it was one of the McHenry girls -- we drove the car right up the railway tracks.

MF: Just for the thrill?

JSR: That was pretty devilish!

MF: Did your parents ever find out?

JSR: Not that I know of!

MF: But the church wasn't really a center of your community?

JSR: No, it was just a Sunday thing.

MF: So your dad was teaching during the Depression years. Did you have a sense of that in Corvallis -- did you feel like those were hard times here?

JSR: Yes, there were hard times, yes there were. I can remember we took a girl in from the Alpha Xi Delta house, cause she couldn't afford to live in the house. I guess my mother felt sorry for her, so I remember she lived in our house. And I remember to this day, that girl had one coat, one skirt and blouse, but that was all. But she was very clever. She had on a nice long black coat. And then she had a cape that kind of went around about down to here, and it had a little bit of fur, not much, but a little dipple dabble of fur around the bottom of it. It hooked on, so she wore the coat to school, and then some days she put the cape on to look special. She just had no clothes, probably one pair of shoes, and that was all.

MF: Did you feel like your family always had everything you needed?

JSR: Yes, I never felt that...I think that sometimes I wanted more fabric to sew than my mother would allow me to have. I remember one time, I was so mad, I wanted to make a plaid skirt, and we went down to Nolan's and we found this beautiful fabric. And she said, "Oh no, Jean, we can't do that." Well what happened was it was around Christmas time, and that's what I got for Christmas. I was real excited about that.

MF: Did you know other people in Corvallis who really felt the impact of that Depression era?

JSR: Yes, and they had what they called warrants. People were paid in warrants, and that's a promise to pay when they could. But you didn't have the money to spend. So I think people were quite poor. But I don't remember that the government really subsidized people in those days. I don't know what people lived on. I think a lot of it was -- we are really lucky to live in the Northwest, because people canned a lot in those days. Tomatoes and prunes and apples and all those things.

MF: Did your family have a garden?

JSR: Oh yes, we always had a garden. And my mother canned a lot. And then when the chickens were laying, we put the eggs down in what they called water glass. It was not a cement crock, though it looked like cement -- was it granite? And she'd put water glass down, and she'd put the eggs in that, and that preserved them.

MF: So the glass held the eggs down underneath the water?

JSR: Well it was called water glass, but it was kind of a grey gelatinous material that you put in the crock. And then to get the eggs out, you had to put your hand down in there, into this gooey stuff, to pick the eggs out. And it was always my job to run to the basement to pick the eggs out.

MF: So it was an alternative to refrigeration?

JSR: We didn't have refrigeration -- we had coolers in the house. There was a cupboard that had -- the outside of the cooler had a screen. We had a pantry that was screened. It was outside and in the summertime when it was hot, my mother would put a wet towel over that screen so that when the wind blew, it was cooling. And that's where you put your butter, your eggs, anything that we would put in the refrigerator.

MF: But did it have an ice block in it too?

JSR: No, we had an icebox too, but this was for things that just needed to be cool, not cold. And everybody had a cooler, that was part of what you built into your house was that screened-in area. Now see, that just pops right out now!