

MEMORIES OF GROWING UP
BERNADINE LEMBKE DOW AND PERNILLA LEMBKE

recorded January 1991

transcribed by Liz (Dow) Kekahbah

Bernadine would have been 77 and Pernilla would have been turning 76

Model School

BERNADINE: I can't remember anything past [before] grade school. What was the name of that school?

PERNILLA: Model school.

BERNADINE: We went to this little one room school called Model School. The teachers would come and study there. My class was the biggest class; there were seven people. How many were there in yours, Pernilla?

PERNILLA: Three.

BERNADINE: Then I went right from there in the eighth grade to this great big school. No wonder it ruined me for life! And I was so shy.

LIZ: When you moved to Minneapolis?

BERNADINE: Ja.

PERNILLA: Roosevelt High School had hundreds of students.

PERNILLA: Model School was a teachers' college. It was the teachers training part of the college. And we were a model school, demonstration school, were they practiced teaching.

LIZ: Did you get a better education?

PERNILLA: Oh ja.

BERNADINE: Not in music. We sang, but...

Oil Company and House on Vernon Avenue in Fergus Falls

LIZ: What did Grandpa do?

BERNADINE: He had his own oil company. He had a good job but then the war shut him out. He had to give it up.

PERNILLA: Bulk Oil Co., I think.

BERNADINE: But I remember going on a train when I was little. This man picked me up. Oh, he brought things for me, took me around the train..

PERNILLA: She was gorgeous! Big brown eyes and curly blonde hair.

BERNADINE: I didn't have brown eyes.

LIZ: She has hazel eyes. Where did you go?

PERNILLA: Probably Albert Lea.

BERNADINE: I don't remember. Anyway, our folks had a fair amount of money in the first years of my life.

LIZ: What was the oil [Bulk Oil Co.] for?

PERNILLA: Winton would be able to tell you that.

BERNADINE: It was at that house, sitting on the porch, that one of us was bitten by a dog. That's why I was so afraid of dogs for a while. Yeah, it was me.

PERNILLA: Was it on the Vernon Ave. house?

BERNADINE: Yeah, I think so because we were sitting on the steps.

BERNADINE: I remember we had a live-in girl, Ethel, and her sister from the farm, for a while. And Rose. And they just really took care of us. Pernilla was a baby then, she wasn't feeling well ...

PERNILLA: I was sick!

BERNADINE: ... and she needed care. So I had Rose to me.

PERNILLA: Rose just loved you and took care of you. She had like a substitute mother. Because her mother was busy, and sick from producing this baby too soon. When I was born that Rose was very important to you [Bernadine].

BERNADINE: That was on Vernon Ave.

The Farm at Fergus Falls

LIZ: Did you have horses?

PERNILLA: Not in town.

LIZ: So on the farm you had horses for transportation.

PERNILLA: We had a car too. But the car never worked in the winter. They put the car up on blocks. And then they'd take the fences down between town and us, so that people could [travel to town] as the crow flies. Do you remember when he had the box cutter and two horses and we'd be under the blankets to go to town, to go to church?

LIZ: What kind of farm was it?

BERNADINE: Just a farm farm. I remember the nice play room we had. We spent hours up there.

LIZ: Was that while he had the oil business?

BERNADINE: After. He was raised on a farm, you know.

PERNILLA: Mama was too. They had chicken, cows, some pig business, they tried turkeys. They had horses; he did his work with horses.

Bernadine's Run-ins with Barbed Wire and a Crochet Hook

PERNILLA: Tell about when you got cut under your eyes.

BERNADINE: Well we were playing as if we had a car, and throwing dust ahead of you for the smoke.

PERNILLA: See, all the roads were gravel.

BERNADINE: And I was running and I got some of the sand in my eye and I couldn't see, so

PERNILLA: They didn't have power mowers, so they liked to have the horses eat the grass. So they put up a fence, barbed wire, single strand I think, around the house. So the horses would be out eating up to the house. And the kids would throw this gravelly sand stuff to pretend they were cars and look back to see the dust. And run. And it must have gotten into her eyes and she ran right into the barbed wire so that the barbed wire hit just below her beautiful eyes. That greatly impressed me. There was blood, there were tears. Mama was very upset, Papa Jumped and ran to the kitchen and washed her off. In those days you didn't run to the nearest clinic. She had scars here [under her eyes] that healed and when she grew, they moved.

BERNADINE: But then I ran into the crochet hook in Albert Lea. I was crocheting and somehow I bumped myself and the crochet hook went right through my lip.

PERNILLA: It wouldn't come out!

LIZ: A crochet hook wouldn't!

PERNILLA: You were sitting with your arm on the [chair] and the arm slipped. So in those days the doctor came. You didn't have a car and you didn't jump in the car and run downtown. And the family doctor came. My memory was that they put [pain] deadening medicine in the lip and worked it out.

BERNADINE: They cut the crochet hook. They should have cut it out like you do with a fish hook. If you get a fish hook in, you cut one end.

LIZ: Where was that?

PERNILLA: Albert Lea. We were visiting Aunt Clara, our favorite aunt.

The Tornado in Fergus Falls

LIZ: Tell me about that time there was a tornado in Fergus Falls.

PERNILLA: Cyclone, we didn't call them tornadoes.

BERNADINE: We were in the country then, on the farm, so we just got the tail end. I remember the chickens were all upset.

PERNILLA: Ja. They flew around. Mama ran out.

BERNADINE: But then our dad went into town the next day with his horses because everything was all over. Things blew blocks away, or miles away, I guess. And then they went to help. But we weren't, people weren't, allowed in as I remember.

LIZ: You told about that house where the front of it was blown off.

PERNILLA: We got pictures. It shows the bedroom and the clothes hanging up.

LIZ: You said it was Just like a doll house?

BERNADINE: Well that was the Pastor's I think. And she was so embarrassed because she never made the bed or anything and here the whole front of the Pastor's house came off and it showed that his pants were lying on the floor and bed wasn't made.

LIZ: It just took the front of the house off and it didn't mess the inside up at all?

BERNADINE: No! But the house that we had used to live in (Vernon Ave.), that one turned completely around because they were eating dinner, and when they started they where faced one way and when it [the tornado] finished going by they were turned right around looking at a different view.

LIZ: They were still sitting there eating?!

BERNADINE: Ja.

PERNILLA: I don't think they were eating.

Little Girls Clothes

LIZ: What kind of clothes did you wear in the wintertime? What did you wear on your feet?

BERNADINE: We wore moccasins. And when we were at Model school, we wore moccasins. Those were nice! We wore wool socks in between and then the leather moccasins.

PERNILLA: In those days they had buckle overshoes; they hadn't moved into zippers. They were cloth with a rubber sole.

BERNADINE: I remember the shoes we wore; patent leather, shiney, beautiful, with buttons up. For nice.

PERNILLA: They were in the pictures. Button hooks too.

LIZ: What did you wear all the time?

PERNILLA: We wore sandals in the summer.

BERNADINE: But Pernilla, we didn't wear pants like the girls do now.

PERNILLA: Mama put us in black coveralls when we were crawling. There are some pictures of black, homemade coverall type things. Then when we got older I have pictures of coveralls; they were one-piece, long sleeves, button up. And she'd buy them sometimes. They were boys' though.

BERNADINE: Is that when you wanted to be a boy? She went through a period where she wanted to be a boy so bad.

PERNILLA: Here's a button hook. That's an antique.

LIZ: So you'd reach [with the button hook] through the hole and grab the shank of the button, or

the thread?

PERNILLA: Yeah. I don't know. All I know is you needed one.

BERNADINE: And we wore long underwear, which we hated. They were bulky and you couldn't get them smooth around the leg and everyone knew you had long underwear on.

LIZ: What were you wearing them under?

BERNADINE: Stockings. So they'd show.

LIZ: Nylon stockings?

PERNILLA: Cotton and/or wool, or a mixture. You'd pull them [long underwear] down and you'd pull them over [fold over excess at the ankle], this was a kid doing this, and it wouldn't work. And you'd do it and you'd do it. And then you put shoes and they'd lace to here. Remember those high shoes? Well that kind of covered them [long underwear] up. But to get dressed in the morning, just your feet, was a production.

LIZ: How did you keep your stockings up?

PERNILLA: Garters. But you didn't put garters on like that [elastic garters around the thigh]; Mama wouldn't let us wear garters like that because that ruined your circulation. She'd make a kind of vest thing of elastic and the garters hung down.

LIZ: Oh, kind of a garter belt but from the shoulders.

PERNILLA: Yeah, for little kids. They were homemade. So that was another production. They were comfortable because they gave; they were made with elastic.

LIZ: Did you curl your hair when you were little?

PERNILLA: We'd wear rags. At night we'd sleep on the rags.

BERNADINE: Wrap the hair around the rags.

LIZ: Did you tie them?

BERNADINE: Ja.

PERNILLA: And kid curlers. The kid curlers, we didn't have too many of them, they'd roll them up and then turn them over. They had wires inside.

Cold Bedrooms and Crowded Beds

BERNADINE: Another thing we did at the Court Street house [Fergus Falls, after the farm], our dad had lost most of his money by then, it would be so cold in our bedrooms that there would be ice on the windows, and we'd run downstairs to the round stove that was in the living room.

PERNILLA: It was a pipeless furnace with one radiator. But we'd run to the kitchen, Bernadine. We'd run to the kitchen by the oven stove.

BERNADINE: But we'd also run there [living room stove], I remember standing there. We'd go down there to dress.

PERNILLA: You'd bring all your clothes and struggle with all that.

BERNADINE: We'd go to sleep at night and no heat in the bedrooms. So there'd be frost on your face, around your mouth.

PERNILLA: Bernadine would make us laugh. Well, it was cold. So she [Bernadine], one day she was going to be warm. We went up there to that cold bedroom. She put a rag rug on [the bed], she put shoes on, she put toys on, books on, and she got in under all that. And we laughed and laughed; and the more we laughed the more she piled it on.

LIZ: Did you stay warm?

BERNADINE: I can't remember that.

LIZ: Did you all sleep in one room?

BERNADINE: The girls did at one time. But Winton was an only boy, we were jealous because he had his own room.

LIZ: You didn't have to sleep in the same bed?

BERNADINE: Oh yes!

PERNILLA: Everybody did. You didn't even think of single beds unless you had too many people. And if you had company you had three in one bed. When Grandma died, a whole bunch of us went out to Aunt Alice and Uncle Olaf's to sleep. Mama had the whole bunch down here on Como and then some of us went with Olaf because Alice had gone to the funeral. And it was Nadine and I and one other. And I got to sleep in the same bed, three of us. Then when I was up here at age eight, I went over to the Halls, that was Grandpa's sister. At home then they had two kids, Ruby and Fern, and they were hefty teenagers. I think Fern was dating, so she must have been 16 and Ruby was probably 14 or 13. And I was eight, and guess where I slept. Between them! All in one bed! When I came back to Aunt Gertie's, I slept with Irene. She was the only girl. She had just graduated from high school and I was a skinny eight year old. "You've got such sharp elbows!" she'd [Bernadine] say to me. Imagine a scrawny (I always thought I was ugly) eight year old coming in and sleeping a whole month with the only daughter that had always had her own bed!

BERNADINE: Pernilla had to go for some health reasons to the University of Minnesota, that's why she was there. I never had to go out and sleep with anybody.

PERNILLA: Irene was really nice though.

BERNADINE: I had to sleep with Shirley.

PERNILLA: You slept with Carmen, because you and Carmen got along fine and Shirley and I got along fine. Then there was a period where I slept on a cot.

When Grandpa was a Traveling Salesman

PERNILLA: Grandpa sold different things. One summer when he was lonesome, he took Wint for two weeks, and then he took the two of us for two weeks.

BERNADINE: We stayed in hotels.

PERNILLA: Ate in restaurants.

PERNILLA: He drove a car and he had his samples in the back. He always drove an open touring car, an Overland.

BERNADINE: Overland was his favorite. Later he made a house car; you could let down the sides and sleep in them.

PERNILLA: The house car was for work and then he took everybody with him for the whole summer. We rented the house. Father and Mother slept inside and the beds let down.

BERNADINE: I remember when he worked on that.

Dog Fights and Lightning Bolts in Fergus Falls

Bernadine: I was afraid of dogs; I was bitten by a dog. I was very sensitive to any dog that came along, ours particularly. We had a dog that was part wolf. And he'd fight at the drop of a hat and he'd always bring his fights home. A man with two German Shepherds would ride up on horseback and sic his dogs on our dog. So I had two things to work with when I grew up; my fear of dog fights and my fear of thunderstorms because I got hit by lightning. [When I got hit by lightning] I was standing up about 4 steps [outside]. Although the sky didn't look bad, about 3 prongs of lightning came and knocked me unconscious and knocked me into a barrel of rain water. My hands were clenched so tightly that my palms were bleeding. I was a wreck after that. I didn't dare go upstairs after that; I don't know why, something was behind me. I suppose that nowadays they would've taken me to talk to someone about it, but in those days we worked it out ourselves. Those were two traumatic things in my youth. It's funny I have any guts about me at all.

And I didn't want any of you kids to be afraid of thunder, and you aren't either. I didn't want them to carry my fear. So I learned to not..., I could sleep all night. After that happened, I could hear thunder so far away that no one else heard it. I would hear it and wake up and just lie there shivering until the storm was over. No one else saw me get hit by the lightning.

PERNILLA: The house probably was hit by lightning at the same time because a month later the house burned and they thought the insulation had been burned off the wires in the crawlspace (we didn't have an attic).

BERNADINE: I was leaning against the rain barrel and I suppose it conducted the lightning. It knocked me down the steps.

PERNILLA: Guttered the bathroom and down into the kitchen, and smoke damage.

LIZ: Which house was that?

BERNADINE: Court Street house, Fergus. See I might not remember your name but I can remember the street I lived on fifty years ago.

PERNILLA: They said the same time that she had fell into the rain barrel [because struck by lightning] that it had done something up there [in the attic crawlspace]. And a month later it smoldered away and burned away. And we couldn't live at our house for a whole summer.

BERNADINE: We lived at the teacher's house.

Having Fun in Fergus

BERNADINE: And when we went skating in Fergus.. we'd got down to the ice, sit in the snow on the side and put our skates on. The lake was on the edge [of town]

PERNILLA: They were clamp on skates. They fell off, frequently. One blade.

BERNADINE: They didn't have a warming house then, there.

PERNILLA: I didn't ever do that, I just went along.

LIZ: Did you ever go ice fishing?

BERNADINE: No.

BERNADINE: Something the folks did for us... We lived right next to Park Region College. A seminary student suggested to our folks that we sing in the choir. He would drive us with this old car; he would take us to practice.

PERNILLA: Not every time, because we walked.

BERNADINE: You and I and Shirley. That was a wonderful experience. We sang in concerts and we really got to know a lot of songs that still run through my head, like that I sang to Winton yesterday [in the Hospice]. It was a community choir.

PERNILLA: It was a church choir, not our church.

BERNADINE: We really had some nice things in our youth, for all that we were poor as church mice. Although my dad wasn't for a while. It was after the war that he was so poor.

PERNILLA: That was the big Depression.

BERNADINE: But we have some beautiful pictures with the children, all of us lined up, all curled and everything. We have some beautiful pictures, like the bath tub ["Bathtub Lecture"] picture. They had those taken.

LIZ: Professional!?

PERNILLA: They'd come to the house and take pictures.

LIZ: You didn't have your own camera?

PERNILLA: Ja. And they even developed their own pictures.

BERNADINE: People made beautiful pictures, better than now sometimes even, years ago.

PERNILLA: Do you remember the day we went looking for Hoarhound candy?

BERNADINE: No.

PERNILLA: She likes Hoarhound candy. So we went down to this candy store with our money and all I could think of, and she could think of was "cowhorn". Cowhorn candy.

LIZ: How old were you?

PERNILLA: Well we moved when I was ten, so we were under ten and 11.

LIZ: In Fergus Falls.

Special Foods and Grandmas

LIZ: How do you make ice cream?

BERNADINE: Churn it.

LIZ: But what's the salt for? You don't put salt in the ice cream do you?

PERNILLA: The salt made it colder. You'd follow a recipe.

BERNADINE: It should have cream, but it wasn't always. Strawberries.

PERNILLA: Condensed milk.

BERNADINE: You'd have to turn it about half an hour.

PERNILLA: I just sold my ice cream maker at a yard sale.

LIZ: So you remember your Grandma Sophia?

BERNADINE: Not really. We only visited them once or twice.

LIZ: Did she live with you for a short time?

BERNADINE: No, that was the other grandma; you're talking about the paternal grandma.

PERNILLA: The German grandma was Sophia. The Norwegian grandma is the one who lived with us and we saw her oftener.

LIZ: What was her name?

PERNILLA: Ingeborg.

BERNADINE: I think the difference between the grandparents that I remember is that they cooked differently. Grandma Lembke cooked more potatoes and bacon and I can remember smelling those good things.

LIZ: How did the Norwegian Grandma cook?

BERNADINE: I really can't remember anything special. I must have liked that taste [of German food] better.

LIZ: You used to have clam soup?

BERNADINE: No, we had oysters. My dad just loved those and in those days they were imported. Nowadays they're a luxury; if someone eats oysters you think they're really sophisticated.

LIZ: How did you get them?

BERNADINE: They came from the coast, and they'd come in big barrels.

LIZ: Were the barrels full of ice?

BERNADINE: I don't remember.

PERNILLA: Do you remember eating oysters when you were a kid, Bernadine?

BERNADINE: Not particularly. But I also remember Blu Pulsa (blood bologna). That was Norwegian.

LIZ: Was it made from blood?

PERNILLA: It was! Fresh. My mother made the casings.

LIZ: From intestines?

PERNILLA: No, from cloth.

BERNADINE: You boil the blood, and then you put raisins in it. [Raisins go in before it is boiled.]

PERNILLA: And flour.

BERNADINE: People still eat it.

LIZ: How do you eat it?

PERNILLA: Cold or hot.

BERNADINE: Slice it cold.

LIZ: You put it on bread and eat it like bologna?

PERNILLA: Ja. And she'd make creamed potatoes and eat it hot. It's excellent. I've got the recipe.

BERNADINE: It's still made, at Christmas.

LIZ: Now tell me about Lutefisk.

BERNADINE & PERNILLA: Laughing

BERNADINE: The thing that's good about Lutefisk is all the butter on it.

LIZ: It's a white fish?

PERNILLA: Ja. In those days, not now, they'd get it dry and soak it for a couple days or overnight.

The fish is cured in lye. But my memory of it is that it was kind of brown and dry and hard.

Now you go to the meat market and it's white and soft, but they've already soaked it.

They do it for you; but when they buy it it's dry and hard too. A cod fish. You cook it in a cloth. Tie it up and immerse it in hot, boiling salted water until it flaked just right.

LIZ: Does it taste salty? What's so different about it?

BERNADINE: There isn't much taste to it.

PERNILLA: Oh no! Mashed potatoes, beautifully mashed white potatoes, and all that melted butter. Fish here, potatoes here and you pour quantities of butter over it and salt it if you want to. And it's kind of a soupy, mushy mess and it's delicious; if you like it. If you don't like it, it's horrible.

LIZ: Was it a special treat?

BERNADINE: Oh sure. There're all kinds of jokes about it too.

LIZ: Winton never liked it. Papa loved it, and he was German.

BERNADINE: People started having two things; they'd always have meatballs and Lutefisk.

PERNILLA: And the same mashed potatoes. And lefse.

Grandma Styve

LIZ: What do you remember about Ingeborg?

BERNADINE: Well she was very much a lady. I mean, she just walked that way, she had a beautiful face, and very sweet. We didn't live near her, I don't really remember.

LIZ: Where did they live?

BERNADINE: Albert Lea. And we were born in Fergus Falls. And then she died.

PERNILLA: She was small. They were both small. Our grandmothers were both small, not the grandfathers.

BERNADINE: She was a very sweet lady. She took to her bed after, who was born?

PERNILLA: Mama [Isabel].

BERNADINE: And she was in bed for a number of years and who knows why. It might have had something to do with the birth, or what? But our mother just worshipped her, we could just tell.

PERNILLA: She always thought she wasn't as good a mother as her mother was.

BERNADINE: Well, I don't remember that.

Latchkey Kids During the Depression, in Fergus and Minneapolis

BERNADINE: We played school a lot.

PERNILLA: Yeah. You taught Shirley to read.

BERNADINE: Well, I don't know if I did. And we really worked at it. The people that had any music, playing the piano, had to practice half an hour a day.

PERNILLA: Winton didn't though. She [Bernadine] was an organizer, like she is. It was a good thing. Group activity. But too soon, you [Bernadine] had too much responsibility, and you carried it very well.

BERNADINE: Well Grandma had to go to work and I was the oldest girl so that's why I never did get along very well with Carmen. I was the "mother" and she didn't like me.

PERNILLA: Well how could she? We didn't know how to raise her. We locked her in the closet when she was four, 'cause she was naughty. And we'd say "Will you be good? Then we'll let you out. Yeah." You let her out, she'd be bad, so we put her back.

LIZ: Where did you get that idea?

PERNILLA: Nobody ever locked us in a closet. We didn't lock her; we'd put her in and hold the door. It was dark! We didn't know what to do.

LIZ: Was that in Fergus Falls?

BERNADINE: In the Cities. While our aunt lived there we had to do a lot of things. But then Grandma had to go to work.

PERNILLA: It was the Depression. Fathers and Mothers worked and kids took care of themselves.

BERNADINE: I remember baking cookies one time. What did I do wrong with them?

PERNILLA: You put in left over, cooked oatmeal instead of dry, raw oatmeal, into the oatmeal cookies. Guess what happened? They never got done. They kept being soft.

BERNADINE: And we didn't have any money at all. And so I remember, I went out and buried it, hoping Grandma wouldn't see it.

PERNILLA: Dug a hole in the garden and never told her. Because we wasted the butter and sugar and eggs. Alright, how about when you made the chocolate cake, you brave thing.

BERNADINE: I don't remember.

PERNILLA: Oh, she was brave. It was during the Depression, the same period, the same house up on Cedar Ave. And she was head of the house and Mama wasn't there. And you said "We're going to make a chocolate cake and we're going to put chocolate frosting on it." I was 13 months younger and I thought "How do you dare?" No permission, and that's a frivolity and it took at least one egg, some sugar... She did it!. She made half a cake. Turned out gorgeous. It was a big treat. That was real courageous to do.

BERNADINE: And I was so cross at my family, these girls. See I was the oldest of four [girls]. I tell you, they didn't pick up anything, see. We had one rocker in our bedroom. And that rocker would be so covered with clothes, they'd just throw them on the rocker, until it was so full that it would just roll over backwards.

PERNILLA: There were a lot of us, all "scroozed" into one closet. And you'd hang things up and they'd fall right down. So in many ways it was better for the clothes if you'd drape them one on top of the other.

BERNADINE: I'm sure we didn't think of doing it for the good of the clothes.

Getting Scared at Night

BERNADINE: I remember all the girls were sleeping in the attic one time, and our aunt was with us, she had had stroke and was pretty bad and Grandma took her in. So one night we

were up in the attic, the four girls, and all of a sudden I looked and here was an arm lying. It was Winton! He was scaring us. He had sneaked up the steps and just laid his bare arm there on the bed. Oh I was scared. I think my hair absolutely stood on end. I thought that was mean. He was the only boy and he [slept in] the porch down on the first floor.

PERNILLA: Do you want to let me tell one? From the same time, the same house where we were all crowded together. And we were up in the attic. And I had to get up to go potty. And so I got up, and went down to the landing with a window, and down some more steps. And on the way down, I apparently must have touched the shade [on the window] and it went bzzzzzt! The next thing I knew I had flown down those stairs, through the hall and I was standing by Mama's bed. Mama, Papa and the baby Carmen. I didn't say a word. I just turned around and went back up, I figured it out. But the way I flew!

Bathtub Lectures

LIZ: What kind of a bathroom did you have?

PERNILLA: That was a nice modern bathroom.

BERNADINE: It [the bathtub] stood on legs of course. We had running water but it would be heated once a week and we took turns taking a bath.

PERNILLA: Papa would go down and light it. When we lived on the farm we had a chemical toilet.

BERNADINE: I used to give all my younger [sisters] bathtub lectures from all that I'd read, to raise them right. And you'd listen.

PERNILLA: She had a captive audience in the bathroom. Taking baths and she'd go on and on.

"You should take typing, then you have a skill. Learn to type. That way you can always earn money."

LIZ: Did you take her advice?

PERNILLA: I think most of us did.

BERNADINE: And "Brush your teeth."

PERNILLA: She didn't give bathtub lectures to Winton; he didn't come in the bathroom with us.

We were a modest family. Some of her ideas were real good. She was a missionary.

BERNADINE: Another thing we did when we were young was play school. We did that until it was coming out our ears. I was the teacher because I was the older one.

LIZ: So you guys had to go to school twice, first the real one and then again at home with Mom.

BERNADINE: That's why they made such good grades because they got tutored at home.

BERNADINE: I can't remember what Winton did all the time.

PERNILLA: He had a paper route.

BERNADINE: He was the older one of five. We were envious of him in a way, because he got the one bedroom, he got the skates, and the bicycle. I learned on a boy's bicycle; about killed myself.

PERNILLA: But you then got a Silver King [bicycle] which then ended up at your house. Joanie rode it; I rode it.

Adjusting to Life in the Big City

LIZ: You had leather boots that you laced up?

PERNILLA: Lace-up shoes. They were not boots, they were shoes. People wore them to church and everything. And they were cheap. So when we came to the city, we were very poor, that was the Depression time. That's one reason we came, there wasn't anything in small towns for work. Nobody, I don't think one soul at Roosevelt wore high shoes. They were

old-fashioned, good leather, expensive in their day; they were selling them out. So you and I had each a pair of those shoes. You'd wear socks, and you'd roll the socks down so they didn't look like such high shoes. And she was a cute girl and she was at the age in high school to be conscious of her clothes. She was older, she moved into her teens. I was still grade school, sixth grade; it didn't bother me, although I remember I was the only one [wearing high top shoes].

BERNADINE: I wanted to quit school there for a while.

LIZ: Because of your clothes?

BERNADINE: Well everything. We were so poor and I thought I could quit school and work.

PERNILLA: She wanted to quit because she looked like a grown woman and she was embarrassed. She was going to quit school and get some stupid dime store job and bring the bacon home. They [parents] wouldn't let you. They had you in for tests and you were always top.

BERNADINE: Ja. I had good teachers.

PERNILLA: Mama would go over and come back and tell us how well you did. "You should not quit school. It's very important that Bernadine stay in school." See, I never wanted to quit. It would have been a tragedy [for Bernadine to quit school].

LIZ: How long were your skirts?

PERNILLA: They weren't very long. They certainly weren't up here [mid thigh].

BERNADINE: I wonder why I felt so about myself [embarrassed about growing up] because I had friends and I had little boyfriends when I was young.

PERNILLA: Ja, but when you came to the city there was a break off. You went to the big school. It's a wonder you survived. That was a major or change.

BERNADINE: Think of changes these kids from Viet Nam have to put up with!

LIZ: Tell me about when you moved to Minneapolis and someone asked you to play popular songs on the piano.

BERNADINE: We really didn't have art and music at this [Model] school [in Fergus Falls], but otherwise we must have had a good foundation. Someone said "Can you play any popular music?" And I said I know one: Marching Through Georgia. That was my modern (popular) music. We didn't know any of that stuff.

LIZ: What did they want?

BERNADINE: Yes, We Have No Bananas; we did know that I think.

PERNILLA: And "Barny Google, with his goo goo googly eyes". We had a babysitter sometimes. And there was some lady, and she had music, and she played on the piano sometimes | Kiss You Sad Adieu. That was a WWI vintage popular song. And Tipperary and some of those old WWI songs. She brought it in sheet music with pictures of people on the front. It wasn't too well received [by our parents]. She wasn't one that was hired to come and babysit us a lot.

Mother Tongues

LIZ: Did you guys ever learn to speak German or Norwegian?

BERNADINE: Well I took Norwegian in high school and German in ..[college].

PERNILLA: We heard Mama talking Norwegian on the phone a lot, but we didn't learn it.

BERNADINE: See she was Norwegian and our Dad was German.

PERNILLA: So they never talked either language at home. We didn't have any relatives in Fergus. Here we did but they saw each other mostly by telephone. If Grandma Styve had lived longer with us maybe we would have learned. But she spoke excellent English. Papa

wouldn't have understood, it wouldn't have been polite [to speak Norwegian].
LIZ: Did you feel during the wars that you wouldn't want to speak a foreign language?
PERNILLA: We didn't have a choice because we didn't know how.
BERNADINE: We didn't even think about it. The war didn't mean that much to us.
PERNILLA: We were little during that war. What was that 1914?

Music

BERNADINE: We had fun in that Court Street house [Fergus Falls] though. Grandma inherited the piano didn't she? So we had a piano.
PERNILLA: And you played. Mama didn't. Papa plunked on it. He played on the violin. You played the cornet. Papa played the bass viol at dances when he was young, before he got married.
BERNADINE: He was the youngest of a big family.
PERNILLA: He could play the cornet. You know, he could play a little of everything. And then you started on the cornet. You were playing the cornet when you were in the band at Roosevelt.
BERNADINE: I think we started that so we could be in the band.

Teenage Entertainment

LIZ: What did you do for entertainment during your teenage years? Did you go to movies? Were you allowed to date?
BERNADINE: We did all sorts of things.
PERNILLA: You did all sorts of things.
BERNADINE: When we were fairly young, we didn't have a car. Oh, how I wished we had a car then, we'd watch them go by on Cedar Ave. We'd walk down, we were very close. We'd go and spend the day at Lake Nokomis. Our mother would let us go and we'd take our suits and lunch along. I was probably 14 then.
PERNILLA: Our bathing suits were wool, tight.
LIZ: Were they full length like Grandma's?
BERNADINE: Oh no, we were modern. They just covered the torso.
LIZ: Did they cover your legs?
BERNADINE: Oh no, we aren't that old. We'd bring our lunch along and swim all day. The kids were with us, of course we were babysitting them, we took good care of them. So that was a wonderful experience. We lived close enough that we could walk over there, pulling the wagon. And I remember another thing I did on Sundays, I did artwork.
PERNILLA: Bernadine went tobogganing in Minneapolis. We were in Hope Church. The young people in Hope Church would go.
BERNADINE: We went to Powderhorn Park.
PERNILLA: You did things with other 17 & 18 year olds that I didn't do. You sang in the choir and they had toboggan parties sometimes. And you may have gone out to Columbia Heights, on the golf course there too.
LIZ: Did you go to the movie theaters when you were teenagers?
BERNADINE: We'd go down once in a while, but not a lot. I can't remember much going... I remember the piano playing.
LIZ: They didn't have sound, so someone would sit there and play the piano?
PERNILLA: Ja. Do you remember the first sound movie you went to? It didn't have very much,

mostly sound effects, not speech.

BERNADINE: I remember when we walked downtown, where we walked. I remember where we walked to the library; that was a long walk.

Bernadine and the Flasher

LIZ: Tell the story about when you were going door-to-door and that man saw you.

BERNADINE: That's when I was in college. I worked at Egekvist's Bakery. I went over on the bus and came back again. They're still in existence I think. So they gave us a tray with samples on. I was to go door-to-door to give out samples. And so here I came up to this door... there was a man in the backyard and I saw him go to the back door. I rang the doorbell and here he stood, as naked as a jaybird. And grinning at me! The first time I had ever seen the "family Jewels". And so, I thought I'm not going to run. I was mad at him too. I turned around and walked down the steps and then I went to the office, told them what happened and I said I'm never going to deliver those again. And I had a date with John that night and I was mad at all men, so I wouldn't go out with him.

LIZ: Poor Daddy. Did you tell him what happened?

BERNADINE: Not for a while. I was kind of embarrassed about it. [I thought it was] my fault, when all I did was go up and ring the doorbell. And my hair absolutely stood on end. That's happened to me another time and I can't remember what was the other time. I could feel it go up. I probably told all my young brothers and sisters so they'd know not to go up and ring doorbells. I had to warn my young daughters.

A Practical Joke

PERNILLA: Bernadine, do you remember the time we went on a picnic with the Norbergs who lived near the Cedar Avenue house? We went in two cars. And you were in the first car and I came in the second car. And we got there [back from the picnic], you guys were all upset and you said the house was broken into and look what they did. They got in [through] the basement and on the table was a dishtowel and the silver was dumped out. The first carful went ahead and did that, make the house look like it had been broken into. And then the men got mad and they were going to call the police and report it, and then the kids told: "We did it."

BERNADINE: I don't remember that. I was thinking of when we came home from a picnic on the Fourth of July and our house had caught fire.

LIZ: Which house was that?

PERNILLA: Where a month before she was struck by lightning [in Fergus].

A Car Accident

BERNADINE: Winton was the worst driver, he really was. And he had a cute small car. He drove like a bat out of Hell, excuse me. [We were] coming down University Ave and another car coming this other way. He tried to get out the way but he couldn't and they hit us broadside. And the door flew open and I flew down the street on my rear end about from here over to there [pointing across the room]. I was really hurt after that but in those days you didn't go to the doctor.

LIZ: Is that how you hurt your back?

BERNADINE: Yeah. But anyway, we got up. Winton's glasses were broken but he was able to crawl out, and I was able to crawl up. And we looked over, and it was just like in the fair. The car was full of blacks and one after the other came out, just like in the movies. We couldn't believe it, even when we were shaken up and hurt. Just one after another came out. It was just awful; you wonder how they ever got in there. In those days you didn't have to have insurance. Winton took it [the accident case] somewhere and they said he [the other driver] was surely in the wrong. The man, a young black, said "I haven't anything; you can have one of my dogs".

LIZ: Did he take it?

BERNADINE: No, we didn't want it.

LIZ: You didn't have seatbelts in the car?

BERNADINE: Oh no! And I did hurt my back on that. It was Oh! stiff for so long. It's funny how I could have five children and not get into more trouble. But all of a sudden it hit me like that. So then I had surgery for it and it healed.

Learning to Drive

LIZ: When did you learn how to drive?

PERNILLA: You could learn when you were sixteen.

BERNADINE: My dad, and he wasn't a very good driver either. My cousins, our relatives from Albert Lea wanted to drive up north. My dad said "Bernadine will drive you." Here it was a big car, they were clearly wealthy farmers; we didn't have a big car. They sat in the back seat, I sat in the front of this huge car. And I remember we carried our lunch and they wanted to stop at a schoolhouse so we could eat. So I turned in and it was such a big car I couldn't get that wheel turned. I did get it turned but I fought with it. They didn't have power steering in those days. But we got home safely. I was about sixteen.

LIZ: Did they have turn signals on those cars?

PERNILLA: No, you stuck your hand out. Or you opened the door! They began to have wind-down windows, but if you had the window up you could open the door and that would show [indicate the turn] too.

LIZ: So the driver would open the door but it wouldn't show which way. You'd just have to watch out?

PERNILLA: And Papa made on that housecar, you'd pull a string and an arm went up. That worked fine.

PERNILLA: How about flat tires! Now the people change the whole tire [the whole wheel]. Then they would take it off, and you might have three [flat tires] in an afternoon, and they'd patch right by the side of the road.

LIZ: You'd have a piece of rubber and glue?

PERNILLA: You'd have that special stuff. And you'd pump it back up.

LIZ: Like fixing a bicycle tire?

PERNILLA: Ja. And everybody would get out and watch.

Dating and Boyfriends

PERNILLA: She [Bernadine] dated and I didn't. I remember she'd be beautifully dressed; she paid a lot of attention, she learned to sew. She went through a period where she was like a nun. She'd wear her hair down like this, white collar, she'd wear browns and grays,

subdued colors, and she just acted like a lady. And she'd work and she'd go to church. And we had a triple mirror, we shared a bedroom. And she'd say to me "I don't understand you. You never get excited, you don't want to go out." And I was sick, I was always sick! And to me clothes were just anathema. So if she had something and she got sick of it, then I'd like it, I'd often wear her clothes.

BERNADINE: I was sewing all the time. If I made something and hated it the minute I saw it, I'd give it to her.

PERNILLA: And often I'd like it if it weren't scratchy. She would wear wool right next to her [skin]. If it looked good she'd wear it

BERNADINE: If it bothered me I'd wear it anyway if I liked the way it looked.

LIZ: That's Mom!

PERNILLA: And then she belonged to a girl's club. And people were getting married out of the girl's club at church. And you'd [Bernadine] go in there and you'd really liven up the meeting. I went a couple of times.

BERNADINE: When I got married, the group that I was president of then, they [gave me] a silver pitcher for a wedding present. I still have it.

PERNILLA: But she'd come in and shock them. She'd come in and roll her eyes.

BERNADINE: Ja, I was terrible. And I teased my boyfriends, crazy. It was fun.

PERNILLA: I didn't do that.

BERNADINE: I remember going through a stage, probably in high school, and I wore pearls, a string of pearls, around my neck day and night. I'd take a bath and put them on again. And my mother would say "I don't think it's good taste to wear jewels all the time". That was the way I wanted to look.

LIZ: Elegant! You do.

BERNADINE: So I put my jewels on. From the dime store.

PERNILLA: Do you want to hear about when she met John?

BERNADINE: I was a pickup. I was at the University and I was standing where we got the books out [library] and he came up and asked if we could have a date.

LIZ: A stranger? Did you say yes?

BERNADINE: No. I was off men at that time; I didn't like men at all. Maybe it was just after I had seen the "family jewels". Or my "nun" stage. Anyway I didn't want to go out for a while. We'd see each other in the library. Really, I felt that I knew him all my life when I first met him. Funny feeling. I felt completely at home with him. And I went to a ball way out on Lake Minnetonka a couple of months after I met him, and I accepted a date with a medical student. The doctors have a big ball out there. So I had a couple of shocks that year, because we walked in the door and here one of the girls was sitting at the table and just completely exposed, her breasts and everything.

PERNILLA: Where was she?!

BERNADINE: At the party. Sitting kind of in the corner. Beautiful girl. And people were kind of rough in those days too, you know. I was so shocked.

PERNILLA: Do you remember when you had your first drink?

BERNADINE: Yeah, with a seminary student. We were underneath the river [Mississippi River bank] here where they had dug caves. And they opened it to night clubs, sort of. And so a bunch of seminary students from over here [Luther Theological Seminary on Como Ave.] invited some of us to go with them. That's when I had my first beer.

LIZ: Was that during prohibition?

BERNADINE: Just after. It had just been repealed.