Interview with Marilla Jacobs

Interviewed by Lynn Prom for the Heritage Education Commission

Interviewed on March 19, 1985

Marilla Jacobs - MJ

Lynn Prom - LP

LP: The time is ten o'clock in the morning on Tuesday, March 19, 1985. The place is the audio studio in the MSU Livingston Lord Library. The oral history agreement form giving ownership of this tape to the Northwest Minnesota Historical Center has been signed by the interviewee and the interviewer. The length of the interview will probably be about 90 minutes.

Now to complete this introductory record, Marilla, will you give us your full name, your address, your position, your family, and what you are doing now.

MJ: Marilla Jacobs, Marilla Dodds Jacobs, 1333 5th Avenue South, Moorhead, Minnesota. I'm a housewife, a retired schoolteacher. I married Clarence Jacobs in 1938. We had three children-- Alice, who has a doctorate in microbiology; our son, Clarence, Jr., who has a doctorate in physics; and a daughter, Beth, who gained a husband instead of a doctorate. She lives in California, and Cap lives in Oregon. My husband was an accountant, but he's retired, too. We have a good life.

LP: When did your family arrive in Moorhead, Marilla?

MJ: I came up to go to school in 1926. I began teaching in Moorhead in 1927, and it's the only place I've ever taught.

LP: You told me you were from Wadena, is that right? Were your parents born and raised there, too? And your family?

MJ: My mother and dad had a confectionery store. Mother was from New Hampshire, and Dad's father was a minister, so he was a lot of places. I had two brothers who are now gone.

LP: And so you came to Moorhead, alone. Your family stayed in Wadena, is that right? You came here to go to school, and went to Moorhead State? Was that one of the two-year programs?

MJ: Yes, it was, and I took one year in the teacher training department at Wadena and taught a year in the country and then came up here so only had one year.

LP: You went to Moorhead State and got the second year there. You began teaching in Moorhead, then, in 1927. Were you in one building the whole time in Moorhead?

MJ: Yes, I was in Park School. May I tell you a little bit about getting hired? We took the streetcar out to Dilworth and started a spring primary class out there. Mr. Reinertsen, who was the superintendent in Moorhead, and Miss Lommen came out to observe. I rode back with Miss Lommen to sign a contract. When Mr. Reinertsen had interviewed me a few days before, he said, "What would you come to teach for?" I said, "A hundred dollars a month." Isn't that different than today? When I went to sign the day that they observed, I said one-hundred five. He said, "You said a hundred." I said, "Miss Lommen said I was worth more than that."

LP: What was the class in Dilworth?

MJ: That was a spring primary--six weeks.

LP: Like a kindergarten or preschool?

MJ: We did more than that. At least, I thought we did. It was a six-weeks' spring program for children who would be entering first grade the next year.

LP: Was that part of the Moorhead School District at that time?

MJ: No, that was part of the college.

LP: Was it kind of a like a student-teaching experience?

MJ: It was my student teaching.

LP: So you began teaching in 1927 with Mr. Reinertsen as the superintendent and you taught at Park School. Was that a new building then?

MJ: Yes, I taught there for eleven years. No, it wasn't a new building.

LP: You taught what grade?

MJ: First grade. I took Ethel Gosslee's place in first grade. She went to second, and I went in first. It was a nicer room. That's why I liked it. [Laughter]

LP: So you had that first-grade room in Park School for eleven years. Tell me a little bit about your background before you went into that classroom. When did you think about becoming a teacher?

MJ: All my life I wanted to be a teacher. I think my mother did, too, but she got married instead.

LP: In those days you had a choice--one or the other. In your first position as a teacher at Park School, where did you live?

MJ: I lived with T. I. Lewis on 7th Street, in a home.

LP: You had like room and board?

MJ: No, not board. Everybody ate at the Bluebird. Not breakfast, but the evening meal and at noon. I had a car, so we would whiz down.

LP: Oh, you had a car that very first year you were teaching?

MJ: Yes, I had a car before that.

LP: Do you remember what it was? That is interesting--1927! Did you have a little Ford or something?

MJ: Verna Peterson and Orga [phoentic] would have to get out and push it sometimes to get it started.

LP: Were you the only one that had a car?

MJ: I was the only one that had a car. So I was always broke. [Laughter]

LP: You said you got this job through Miss Lommen, who recommended you.

MJ: Right. The superintendent came over to the college and interviewed students.

LP: It was interesting that he asked you how much money you would want in order to teach. So you set the contract?

MJ: Oh, no. The rest of the teachers were getting the same amount.

LP: Did you get that $105, by the way?

MJ: Yes, I did. And if we got $5 a month raise, we thought we were lucky.

LP: Did you get a raise every year? Do you remember? Did you have to negotiate that?

MJ: Yes, $5.00. We just got it.

LP: Took what you could get--what they offered you. Was that $100 a month for nine months or for twelve months?

MJ: Nine months.

LP: Your first job, then, was around $900 a year. Do you remember what it cost you for room?

MJ: I remember $15 a month, I think it was.

LP: Do you remember your very first day on the job, Marilla?

MJ: I'm sure I was frightened, but young people aren't afraid, are they? I loved it. I really did.

LP: You said you liked your room. I've been to Park School. It's still a charming school.

MJ: We had swings between the doorways at the entrance to the cloak hall. We had a huge dollhouse.

LP: What do you mean about the swings between the doorways?

MJ: There are openings, doorways, to get to the cloak hall. I put swings up in each of them. And then we had a huge dollhouse with a sand table. We had a library corner. We had animals--a bird that we used to have to put in the hall when Margaret Newton came to sing. [Laughter] It was an interesting room, all right.

LP: What other kinds of equipment did you have to teach with? What equipment did you have?

MJ: We had the most marvelous reading series--Keystone View--where first the teacher would give the children--can I talk first about the entrance date?

The entrance date when I first began teaching was April 1. I remember a little boy named Jerry Munn who took a nap every afternoon. That was pretty young--six by April 1. Then it changed finally to January 1. We only had school for half a day the first week because there were no kindergartens. There was a kindergarten at the campus school, but you had to enter your child's name the day he was born or you never would get in. [Laughter] But anyway, we usually had 35 to 40 pupils. Once I had 52, and I wasn't the only one that had that many. But that year, half a day I had a helper, Lorraine Lerberg [phonetic].

LP: Lorraine Lerberg [phonetic] was a helper. Was she a teacher or a?

MJ: She was a teacher that didn't have a job.

LP: Oh, I see. There were those then in those days, too? Tell us now about that reading series. I saw those plates, and it intrigues me.

MJ: First you would give the children these stereoscopes with this stereograph picture in it, and they would love to see that. There was a big screen in the front that you could pull down over the blackboard that you would flash this same picture onto, and then you would try to make up the story that you were going to teach. With this series came a story about each picture and you would read that, too, afterwards.

LP: It was a combination of experience stories made up by the children plus a written story already within kind of a limited vocabulary, I suppose, in that book.

MJ: In the story that the children would read. But the story that came with the series was just an interesting story about the picture. You would put up this big white screen and the picture would flash onto the blackboard and you would write with yellow chalk all the objects in the picture.

LP: The children would tell you what they were looking at and they would say the word and you would write that word on the board.

MJ: On the picture until they had most of the story right there. Then there was a workbook.

LP: They didn't teach phonics then?

MJ: Oh, yes, we had a marvelous course in phonics.

LP: But that was separate from the Keystone series.

MJ: Yes, I did anyway. It was Cordts [phonetic]. They don't have that series anymore either, and that was a marvelous series. The first day of school I began with the hearing lessons that came with this series. Then there were sight ones where there were puzzles, and then you finally got to the charts. It was a marvelous series.

LP: You didn't have any nonreaders at the end of the year?

MJ: No, you didn't have any. And if you did, you kept them. You didn't pass them.

LP: Is that right? They stayed in first grade another year. Did you group at all, then, in reading?

MJ: Oh, yes, I had three groups. Everybody saw the Keystone story at the same time, then we'd group after that. It was marvelous, just marvelous. There weren't any that didn't learn--.

LP: How many years did you use Keystone? All those eleven years?

MJ: No, not all the eleven years. I think we started out with The Little Red Hen. Nellie Hopkins is the one that really knew how to teach from The Little Red Hen. I loved to get her children. I didn't love to get some of the others, but I liked to get hers because they could read.

LP: Why didn’t they keep using Keystone since it seemed to be so successful?

MJ: I don't know. Some good book salesman came along, I suppose.

LP: You still have that set, don't you?

MJ: Yes, when I went back to teach the second time, Mr. Reinertsen went in all the storage rooms and tried to salvage this series because I liked it so well. Then I used it again.

LP: And nobody else was using it, I'm sure, in those days.

MJ: No one else was using it. You didn't have to teach all the first grades the same series at that time.

LP: What did you call that instrument the children used?

MJ: A stereoscope.

LP: How many did you have of those in the room?

MJ: I had two. I'd start them at each end.

LP: The children would just pass it down. They could also look at the same picture up on the board. Wow! Was there anything else with materials and equipment that you had that worked for you that we don't see any more today? Can you think of any?

MJ: We taught cursive writing in first grade. We always took the first, second, and third prize in primary writing down at the fair. We always had to send things to the fair. Do they yet?

LP: I haven't heard. I don't know. Perhaps there are some.

MJ: We enjoyed getting things. We just saved things, but we always took first, second, and third prize in writing.

LP: Wonderful! I see you've brought some samples of some writing today now that are quite old--writing from children. Now that's third grade, but it still is beautiful writing and I like some of the remarks that the children wrote in here. Maybe you could just quote some of the things that the children said about what they felt about school way back then.

MJ: They said, "I didn't hate everything, because when we had to do it, you always made it fun."

LP: Isn't that a nice thing to hear!

MJ: Another one said, "You've been nice to all of us." I liked that because I tried never to show favoritism. And one said, "I like you because you aren't crabby." And one said, "Teaching us to read and to help others."

LP: That's a beautiful thing to write. Yes, I like those, and it's interesting that you kept those things, Marilla.

MJ: Oh, I did. I kept loads of letters from parents saying how much they appreciated the work.

LP: That's where the rewards come in, right?

MJ: At that time we went to every family, I think. We were invited for dinner--I remember one mother saying her little boy had to learn to eat mashed potatoes before they could have the teacher over.

LP: You know, that's something that I wish could come back again, don't you? I think it's a really good thing when there was more cooperation and communication between the home and the school. That's missing today, I think.

MJ: I think in those days the school was the center of the family's life.

LP: What other special duties did you have to perform, do you remember, in school besides just teaching those 32 children?

MJ: One I didn't like was playing out on the playground.

LP: During noon hour? Or recess?

MJ: No, not during noon hour. Children didn't eat lunch at school then. They had to go home. The playing outside was at recess.

LP: Did they have morning recess and afternoon recess?

MJ: Afternoon recess.

LP: Like fifteen minutes or something like that. Did you have any other special duties that you remember when you first started?

MJ: I don't remember anything except teaching.

LP: You did not have the experience that many people your age had, where they were in a country school where they had to be the janitor and start the fire and make the soup and all that.

MJ: I taught one year in the country, with that teacher education program so I did teach that one year in the country.

LP: Where was that?

MJ: By Wadena, south of Wadena. I had never built a fire in my life and I had to build one of these fires and bank it for night, so they said. I banked it so well that all the crayons were one bunch the next morning, the thermometer had broken. It's a wonder we didn't have a fire, but I kept it warm.

LP: [Laughter] Was that like a six-week student teaching experience when you were there?

MJ: No, it was a whole year. I don't think they called it student teaching. It was just a job.

LP: Did you get paid?

MJ: $80 a month. Then Vivian Mirrow [phonetic] taught in Wadena, first grade. She got scarlet fever, I think it was, and I was hired to take her job.

LP: Vivian Mirrow was a long-time teacher and principal in Fargo, isn't that right? Let's talk about that little experience you had, then, as a teacher in Wadena. That was a country school?

MJ: The one in Wadena wasn't.

LP: I mean when you were out in the country. That must have been quite different from the experience that you had as a youngster growing up in school.

MJ: It was. My mother got me a big shepherd dog because she didn't want me to be alone out in the country.

LP: Did you live out there?

MJ: No, I drove back and forth.

LP: You had the dog with you at school?

MJ: Yes, he'd go out and play with the youngsters, and I'd call him at night.

LP: Was that non-graded or many grades?

MJ: Eight grades.

LP: You had children in every grade. Were you supervised? Who came to check and see how you were doing?

MJ: The county superintendent came once a year.

LP: Did the children have to pass an examination?

MJ: Yes, they took state exams. The eighth graders did.

LP: But you just taught there one year. You decided you'd rather be in town where you only had to teach one grade.

MJ: I don't think I decided it. I took it for granted.

LP: I mean you could have taught there another year, I'm sure, but instead you came to Moorhead. Then you stayed in town, which was much easier, right, teaching one grade than teaching in the country?

MJ: It was fun.

LP: Which was fun? In the country? Both? They were quite different.

MJ: Getting back to Moorhead, they had a lyceum course for ten cents that all the children would join. We would walk two by two from Park School to the old senior high. They came from every school in Moorhead to this lyceum course number.

LP: It was a special event. How many of those did they have a year?

MJ: I think there were about six.

LP: And ten cents each time?

MJ: Right. Then Margaret Newton--have you heard of her?

LP: I think I feel most people in Moorhead know that name.

MJ: She would have a Christmas program of all the children in all the schools, and we would walk two by two from Park over to the old senior high to practice.

LP: Did she go to the schools and teach?

MJ: Yes, she did.

LP: She went from building to building and taught music. That's really remarkable when you think about it that you had music taught by a music teacher way back then.

MJ: Lucy Sheffield came, too.

LP: That's right. I remember her name, too. And so then you had music taught. Do you remember how many days a week you had it?

MJ: She just came once a week.

LP: She would stay in the school all day and teach once a week.

MJ: I don't think she stayed all day. She just stayed until she'd been in all the grades. The children loved her--the birds sang to the high heavens.

LP: You would have this one, big extravaganza Christmas program. There was a mass choir--all the children, kindergarten--no, first grade through sixth grade.

MJ: Right, first through sixth.

LP: How many years did she do that, I wonder?

MJ: She did it all the years I was there.

LP: Can you think of anything else special that happened while you were still at Park School?

MJ: We had a nurse, Marie Jorgensen, who came and weighed and took the height and filled out cards that we put in with the report card. Do they still do that?

LP: Yes, they still do that. They check eyesight, hearing, and she would do that. Pretty good way back in 1927 that you had that kind of care.

MJ: I remember I had a cold one year, and she wanted me to go home and Mr. Reinertsen looked at her and said, "You can send pupils home, but you can't send my teachers home." [Laughter]

LP: Did you have physical education taught by somebody else? You taught your own, or you didn't really teach it, evidently?

MJ: We had to play games.

LP: Kick ball and things like that?

MJ: Oh, everything.

LP: Out on the playground, then. Did you have a gym there?

MJ: Yes, we had a gym with a low ceiling. We had fire drills in those days, too, and one time we were told the police were coming for a fire drill, so be prepared. But we were all downstairs in that gym and we never practiced getting out of the building from all of us down in the gym, but we did it satisfactorily, I guess.

LP: Did you have a principal for those eleven years at that school? Who was the principal?

MJ: We had Emma Meilicke all the years I was there.

LP: Did you have much getting together with other schools? Did you have teacher meetings with other buildings?

MJ: No, that came later.

LP: Each building was pretty much an entity in itself. The superintendent would come around once in a while, I expect.

MJ: One time he brought Art Diercks, who was the principal of the high school, over to see my room, and I had everything down. I didn't take it down and put it up the same day. I took it down one day and put everything up the next day. There was not a thing in the room.

LP: And you were embarrassed?

MJ: I was embarrassed. [Laughter]

LP: But I'm sure your principal told Mr. Diercks what kind of a room you have.

MJ: We used to have a program every--they still have programs for the mothers--but I think ours was a little different, because we always had lunch. They do, too, but they don't have it room by room, do they? We did, and we always had a program, coffee, and cookies for the mothers.

LP: In the spring?

MJ: Yes, and I remember one election day one mother sent donkey and elephant cookies.

LP: At least she remembered each side there, didn't she?

MJ: My room in Park School was where they voted, too, so one year I got three days off while they were counting.

LP: Imagine that. It took them that long. You didn't have to make it up?

MJ: No, we didn't make it up.

LP: Marilla, what was the public attitude toward education? You already said you were invited to homes, so they evidently respected teachers.

MJ: They did respect, and they thought teachers were elevated to something that most people weren't. Even yesterday I saw a great big, tall man and he said, "I had you in first grade," and they still remember teachers. Maybe they do today, but they certainly--.

LP: They do, but I think the attitude--the public attitude--probably has changed somewhat from when you first began, right?

MJ: They loved the school.

LP: What about students wanting to learn?

MJ: They just did. They expected to. They came to school to learn, and they did.

LP: Did you have things like behavior problems way back then, too?

MJ: No, we didn't have any behavior problems, I don't think. I can't remember any. Children came to school to obey. Anyway, we made things fun so they wanted to do them. I don't think we had behavior problems, although there was one little boy--thank goodness Mr. Reinertsen was there the day I dismissed--and he didn't go home and he didn't go home. They couldn't find him for three days, and the Fairmont whistle blew every hour, telling people to keep looking. He was retarded, but no one had told me that. It was the first day of school, so I hadn't had them long enough to realize that he needed special help. But they finally found him in a corn field--Donald Marsh--I don't think I'll ever forget that name. Because I felt guilty for having let him go home--just sending him home with the rest of the children.

LP: But you didn't have special education children so much then as we do today. They were not mingled with the other children like we see around now.

MJ: I don't think so.

LP: Did you have any social relationships teacher to teacher? Did you see each other outside of school?

MJ: Yes, we did.

LP: You were single, and most women teachers were single, right?

MJ: They had to be single. They couldn't be married. You were out as soon as you were married.

LP: You taught for eleven years and then you were married?

MJ: And then I was married.

LP: You stayed right here in Moorhead, and you raised your children from 1938 until--

MJ: Right, until 1958.

LP: So twenty years you stayed home. Is that right? Did you do any substituting during that time?

MJ: No, not until toward the end when they kept calling me to come in and help when some teacher was in trouble. I thought, "If I'm only going to be a troubleshooter, I may as well start my own," so then I began.

LP: So, in 1958 you went back into teaching. What school did you go to?

MJ: Sharp.

LP: You were at Sharp School until--

MJ: Until I retired in 1971.

LP: So you taught from '58 until '71 at the Sharp School. The Sharp School closed down in--what year was that?

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

MJ: It wasn't more than three years ago, I don't believe--'81 probably.

LP: There was school there about ten years after. What changes did you see when you came back? You had been gone for twenty years.

MJ: The thing that I disliked was that they wanted everybody, like the two first grades, to do the same things. I liked to be a little bit original. In Park I was the only first grade teacher and I could just do things the way I wanted them done.

LP: In what ways did you mean you had to do things just alike?

MJ: We should teach the same kind of reading. They still do that today--all the first grades teach the same thing.

LP: You had to be about in the same place using the same textbook. And there was one other first-grade teacher?

MJ: Yes, Eunice Twetten--I liked her very, very much. She was very lovely. The grades weren't so large when I came back as they had been.

LP: You found it easier, perhaps, in some ways, with fewer children?

MJ: No, not easier, because I always took care of my family before I started doing school work.

LP: You had fewer children, but still taught first grade. Did you teach first grade the whole time, or most of the time?

MJ: I taught third grade for five years. I liked first grade.

LP: You could really see the progress, couldn't you, of a child? They came in not knowing how to read, leaving your room knowing how to read. That probably was the gratification you got, seeing the progress. Sometimes teachers who teach another grade don't see that.

You were teaching during the depression. Can you remember what it was like?

MJ: I don't think it was any different. Mr. Reinertsen was still a teacher when I got married, and he didn't deprive the children of a thing. He told me once I got the blue ribbon for asking for things. But I would try to find things that would be good for the children, and he gave everything that was good for the children, but no teachers' salaries.

One interesting thing that we did in our first grade was we always had one afternoon, no, a whole day, I believe it was, when the children that would be beginning school the next year came to visit. I not only had my own 30 or 40, but I had all those children, too.

LP: You had them for the full day? What did you do with them?

MJ: But children in those days--oh, and another thing we did was--I don't think I'd dare to do it today; but in those days we always had our picnic at the end of the year down by the river.

LP: Right near there--right near where Park School is.

MJ: Yes.

LP: What did you do with all those children during the day? You started to say, "Children in those days." What did you mean?

MJ: They sat with their friends. They were so good. They tried to do everything that they should. I don't think there were any naughty ones.

LP: You didn't feel, then, during these times like in the '30s that--you started in '27 and went through '38--that's all during the depression time. You didn't notice that times were hard? Times were hard for everyone, I guess.

MJ: One mother, I remember, her little girl wore the same dress the entire year. She would wash it and iron it every night. So it was probably--and one family's husband, the father, he was an engineer or something out at NDSU. He would walk from by Park School out there every day, and he earned $300 a year.

LP: What did he do? He walked back and forth from NDSU?

MJ: He was a custodian of some kind out at NDSU. Every day back and forth, and made just $300. The mother did all the sewing. But were they appreciative of everything anybody did.

There was no tenure in those days. You had to prove that you were good or you were out.

LP: The depression days you don't think of as being sad days?

MJ: No, they weren't sad days. They were fun days. Subs in those days got three dollars a day. I remember I took one day off and went to Duluth to get a car, a new car. I had to pay the sub three dollars. What do they make today?

LP: Fifty dollars a day, I think.

MJ: Think of the difference. Another thing we did that was interesting. Moorhead had their fiftieth anniversary, and I have a picture of that. We made a big birthday cake where the children wore candles. We made cardboard candles, from all different colors--and we had this two-layer cake. I remember one little boy--the children were the candles, the sixth graders were the second tier and the first graders were the first one, and then we had a big fifty on top, and all Park School children paraded behind it. On Memorial Day we had a parade, too, but they don't do that anymore.

LP: Now, when was this fiftieth anniversary?

MJ: On the back of the picture, it says '31. I don't remember. They didn't give prizes, or we should have gotten one. [Laughter]

LP: Moorhead was fifty years old around that time. It was just taking part in a parade. The children made up like a birthday cake, like part of a cake and the candles. The candles weren't lit, just cardboard candles.

You were not teaching during World War II. You were home during that time. You didn't see the changes during that period of time--what it was like to have children's fathers go off to service and that sort of thing.

When you came back you saw changes, some good and some not so good, right? You came back to a bigger school, to Sharp with more teachers, but not as big a class size as you had before.

MJ: I enjoyed teaching. There were just five schools in Moorhead when I came--Park, Sharp, Lincoln, and Hopkins, and then Campus.

LP: Was the junior and senior high together then? In the old building?

MJ: No, they were in Central Junior High.

LP: Oh, that's right. Central Junior High and then the high school. That lasted for a long time before they started building more schools.

Do you remember when you first started teaching, women never wore slacks? Do you remember that?

MJ: They never wore slacks.

LP: Can you remember when that changed? You were teaching when they started to wear pantsuits, weren't you?

MJ: I don't remember when they started to wear slacks.

LP: I don't either, but it hasn't been that long ago that we were told that women can now wear slacks, but it must be a suit. You could wear it with a jacket or something. I remember that myself so it hasn't been that long ago. But you dressed up, you know, quite well, didn't you? Teachers, it seems like, were always well dressed. You wore heels and all that, didn't you?

MJ: They were well dressed. I think I bought a new dress every month. I always went home broke anyway. [Laughter]

LP: You had your car so you could drive home and visit your parents until you were married.

Do you remember any time when the school expanded its role and began teaching things other than reading, writing, and arithmetic, so to speak--when more was added to the curriculum? Do you remember that? Like sex education--did you ever teach that?

MJ: Not until the second time I went back.

LP: But then you had to teach that plus some other things. They kept adding more things to the curriculum.

MJ: Social studies. Course, they just called it by a different name sometimes. They called it social studies, and it was language arts, wasn't it?

LP: Language arts was the English and the reading.

MJ: And the writing. School was fun. I loved it.

LP: You really have no bad memories at all, it seems like, Marilla. Did you ever have any kinds of problems with the system or with the parents or anything you can recall that made you wish you'd never gone into teaching?

MJ: Never.

LP: Aren't you fortunate? Do you remember when education got involved with federal programs?

MJ: That isn't good, I don’t think.

LP: Suddenly we're having mandated programs and so on. Do you have any thoughts on that? What do you think about that? You just said, "It isn't good." Why do you feel that way?

MJ: Because you see these things once on television--I mean, this television program, for instance--and you can't play it back to reinforce certain ideas that you want to get across.

LP: What about like mandated programs for the handicapped and the special services that we have today? There are a lot of those.

MJ: I think they're good.

LP: I'm sure there were many children who were not served by the school district when you were first teaching.

MJ: That was so long ago I can't remember. Anyway, we took what we got.

LP: Can you think of any other particular memories when you were first starting out, Marilla, that might be of interest to us?

MJ: No.

LP: Getting back to that first experience you had in the country school. There was, I suppose, no running water. Do you remember that?

MJ: I think all children love their teacher and they try to do what you want and she tries to do the best she can.

LP: But do you remember those early days, though, when there was no water and you had to run out and get water?

MJ: Right, to the pump.

LP: To the pump. And you taught there the whole year.

MJ: Yes, eight months.

LP: It must have been really tough in the wintertime.

MJ: It wasn't. Oh, I know, but then we did have practice teachers from this teacher training department that came out for six weeks, I suppose it was. Her father had a sleigh and a horse, so he would drive us out with the sleigh and the horse.

LP: You never missed school because of snow?

MJ: No, and they came in and gave me a birthday party in the summer.

LP: Is that right? In the summer. You mean there was no school. Who's they? The children?

MJ: Yes.

LP: Into Wadena? Do you remember how old you were? You must have been pretty young.

MJ: I was twenty, I think. We had a field day in those days. We had lots of fun. I think when you're young, you can have lots of fun.

LP: But it seems to me that you think that's true about all your teaching experiences. You have nothing but good things to say about teaching. If that's true, then you probably would recommend teaching for, maybe, some of your grandchildren.

MJ: I think you must love children if you want to be a teacher.

LP: If you had a young person that came to you today and said, "I'm thinking about going into teaching," what would you say to that person?

MJ: I don't know enough about teaching today. I know I could say that it would be a good profession if the parents cooperated like they used to years ago.

LP: Suppose they didn't--make it a little bit tough--would you go back into teaching again?

MJ: I think if you did a good job and loved all the children, maybe the parents would like you.

LP: You know, we're having difficult times right now getting people to go into education today.

MJ: Are you?

LP: It's not easy. They're not seeing it as a profession that they want to consider.

MJ: My son went into teaching, and he's a born teacher. He really is, but he can make so much more in business than he can make in teaching. But I told him to go into business now when he's young and to go into teaching when he's older.

LP: One of the things we're seeing is that people are going into teaching when they are young and then leaving the field and going into other things when they get older, and that's maybe another option. In fact, I heard not too long ago that someone was saying that that's going to be the coming times--we're going to see teaching as a career that's only going to last for awhile and then go into other things.

Which leads me to the next question, and that is "You don't believe that teaching is just for the young?"

MJ: No, I think after you have a family, you have a different feeling toward the children. It's a good feeling, but you're more understanding, I think, if you've had a family of your own.

LP: But I know people have said that maybe teaching is for the young and then there's a point where you're getting to be too old to teach and you'd better get into something else, but probably young in spirit.

MJ: Young in spirit, that's what it is.

LP: If you had it to do over again, Marilla, you'd do it again?

MJ: I would be a teacher, I should say I would.

LP: You would advise young people to go into it if they felt that that's what they wanted?

MJ: But they had to love children.

LP: What did you find the most fulfilling?

MJ: The love the children gave back. Children still come to the house, and they are so big and so tall. I can't remember all of them. One boy came--he was going to the University of Colorado--and he said, "If I ever got to Moorhead, I was going to look you up." I had at that time pictures that I had taken of classes, so I got out these pictures--"There I am," he said. Then I knew who he was. But I've had so many people stop in.

LP: Can you tell us about any other people in Moorhead today who are grown up now and in the business world and are former students?

MJ: They're all grandpas and grandmas. Rod McLarnan is one, Charles Melberg is another, Jerry Munn--oh, there are just innumerable ones.

LP: I imagine if they see you, they always recognize you.

MJ: They do. I don't see how they remember me when I can't remember them.

LP: You know, they changed. You don't seem to change, Marilla. You look the same as when I first met you when I started teaching here in Moorhead. How do you feel about your present status of being a retired teacher?

MJ: I love it. I love it because I'm too old to teach because my hearing isn't alert enough and my sight isn't. I enjoyed teaching while I was teaching, but I shouldn't be teaching any more. It was time to retire.

LP: What are some of the things that you are doing now as a retired person?

MJ: I should be doing more, but I'm not. All I do is call the people to take Meals on Wheels for the church and work at Eventide once a month and embroider and play bridge.

LP: Of course, you with your husband also--you're fortunate that you and your husband can do things together.

MJ: Yes, I have a husband to take care of.

LP: He can take care of you, and vice versa, right?

MJ: Right. [Laughter]

LP: Are you involved at all in any educational or professional organizations right now?

MJ: No.

LP: You're not doing anything with volunteer work or part-time. You did, I know, for awhile, and now you're--

MJ: Yes, but the older we get the slower we get. It takes all my time to take care of my husband and me.

LP: And your home. Do you see anything in education today that you aren't happy about, that you would like to see changed?

MJ: I think the attitude of the people. The teachers, I don't think, have the respect that they did years ago, and that should be returned.

LP: You were here when we had the strike in Moorhead. What feelings did you have about that?

MJ: I didn't like it. I shouldn't say because I don't know the teachers that well. I don't know the work that they are doing, but I think teachers have to earn respect and a strike isn't one way to do it.

LP: You said earn respect. How do you think that that can happen?

MJ: By doing a good job teaching. I think parents feel if their children are gaining, they're glad.

LP: Do you believe that parents still are interested in education and still want their children to learn?

MJ: I think they do.

LP: Do you see any other changes that you'd like in education as far as what's happening in the school day or the busy, busy schedule that we have, and that sort of thing? Do you see any changes that you'd like?

MJ: I don't know that much about it anymore.

LP: You haven't been to the schools lately to really know what's going on.

MJ: I know my grandchildren have very nice schools to go to and are learning.

LP: One of the things that we are doing now is having a foreign language in the elementary schools. Did you have any foreign language taught at all in the elementary when you were first teaching?

MJ: That's good, but no, we really did work on reading, writing, and arithmetic, spelling.

LP: The basic fundamentals. There's nothing wrong with that, is there? It's giving them a real good foundation.

MJ: Especially in the primary grades--they have to have.

LP: Now, you said every child learned to read. If they didn't, did you ever retain children?

MJ: Yes, I retained children. If they couldn't read well enough, they stayed.

LP: Did you have them again the second year? How did you help them so they wouldn't feel, so it wouldn't hurt their little psyches there? So they'd feel good about themselves? You know, being retained, sometimes they wouldn't feel very good about themselves.

MJ: Yes, I would have them. They didn't mind. They knew if they couldn't read, and they wanted to.

LP: Then they succeeded the second time.

By the same token did you ever accelerate--did a child skip a grade?

MJ: I had one little boy, Frederick Kowalski was his name, he went up to the sixth grade and he took their book and he just read it to them.

LP: He was in first grade at the time? But you kept him along with the grade, then, at the time.

MJ: He was in first grade. Debbie Harstad, too; Putty [phonetic] Anderson tested her one day because she was such a good little reader and Putty said, "The test I had went to fifth grade and she did that like a lick," so she couldn't tell what her status in reading was because she didn't test her.

LP: What did you do with those children that were brighter than the others?

MJ: Kept them busy. We did lots of interesting things. We had rabbits at Easter time. We always had animals of some kind.

LP: It sounds like you worked really hard, too. How long was your school day?

MJ: From 8:30, maybe before, but I wasn't one to get their early; you know that. But from 8:30--I worked until six many a time, almost always until five. You go downtown today and you see teachers at 3:30.

LP: [Laughter] You always prepared for the next day?

MJ: Always. Always took something special to make that day interesting.

LP: Did you work during the summer? What did you do in the summer?

MJ: I taught summer school. I had two children in college.

LP: During the time they were in college, you were teaching summer school. But what did you do before you were married? You didn't teach summer school then. There wasn't summer school.

MJ: No, I earned enough money to come back to teach.

LP: Did you go home to Wadena?

MJ: I went to Wadena and worked in mother and dad's store.

LP: You were not married young, either, if you taught eleven years.

MJ: No, I wasn't.

LP: Can you describe for us a memorable encounter you've had with a child, a student, either during the day when he was a youngster--any special event that you remember with a child that you feel good about or that you certainly remember? Can you think of some?

MJ: I think of one little girl whose home I was being entertained at, who said to her mother, "Where's my reading book?" Her mother said, "I hid it under the pillow on the davenport." She had to hide her book to keep her from reading it.

LP: She liked to read so much, she was reading it. I'm sure the mother was pleased that was happening. Can you think of any other special encounters that you've had with children over the years?

MJ: I was mighty glad when they were toilet trained by the time they got to school. Sometimes they came and weren't.

LP: Because you had them from starting age five or six. That's quite young. Any other special encounters you have had with children? I know sometimes it's hard to think about them--there have been a lot, I am sure.

MJ: I just loved every youngster.

LP: I guess that's maybe what you have people remember you for, right, Marilla?

MJ: I guess.

LP: Marilla Jacobs--she loved every youngster.

MJ: I wasn't crabby [laughter] according to that little youngster.

LP: I'm sure not. This has been really enjoyable interviewing you, Marilla. Thank you very much.

MJ: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]