

Hildegarde Kraus
Narrator

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Interviewer

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JD: This interview is with Hildegarde Usselman Kraus. The taping is being produced in the MSU [Moorhead State University] recording studio November 20, 1987. The interviewer is June Dobervich, representing the Heritage Education Commission.

Hildegarde, you've been introduced to audiences in this area for many years as our own incomparable Hildegarde. Fargo-Moorhead claims you as our own. And you are now called the Dean of Local Organists. But you have not always lived here. Where did you come from?

HK: Well, of course, when I was a little girl, why, we lived in Fort Rice, North Dakota. And hmmm, then we lived in Mandan [North Dakota]. And of course the...when we lived in Fort Rice, why, my parents wanted me to have music, and there was nobody there to teach me music, so they sent me to Bismarck to the Sister school there.

JD: Tell me, how did they know? How did your parents know that you were going to be a musician?

HK: Well, my father, of course, he could play any musical instrument. He'd never had a lesson. He was just a natural. He could pick up any instrument and play it.

JD: How wonderful!

HK: And my mother was a musician, too, but she had to study.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: But she was really, at one time, very good. But they...the talent, I think, mostly from my father. Because when he would hear a tune, why, he could very...well, play it pretty well, and then he'd kind of show me how to do it. And we both got so we played by ear.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And so that's...I think that...

JD: That came in handy a few times, I'll bet!

HK: Yes, it did. [Chuckles] Oh, yes.

JD: Now you say they sent you to a school. You want to tell me about that?

HK: Yes, in Bismarck, a Sister school, because, you know, they wanted me to be protected. Where, you know, it was strict and everything.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And I took lessons there until about the eighth grade. And then my folks...ah, one thing I forgot to tell you maybe a long time ago, was that I was in eighth grade in Winter Garden, Florida with my great-grandmother.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: My father wanted to buy an orange grove down there. And so he went down first, and then he sent my mother and I down there, and so I was in eighth grade there.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: But my mother got malaria fever, and so we came back and we lived in...he had a grocery store in Mandan.

JD: But this training in music from first to seventh grade then, well, you were away from home, just like a boarding school?

HK: Well, I had to practice and...

JD: Sure.

HK: You know, it was a...

JD: Yeah.

HK: And so many hours a day. And, hmmm...which I wasn't very good at. [Chuckles] I did a lot of faking, and the teacher didn't like that very well. But...hmmm...

JD: No. But then your father was in business in Mandan.

HK: Yes. Uh huh.

JD: So you went to high school in Mandan?

HK: Yes. And I graduated from high school in Mandan.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And I took lessons from somebody there that...ah...you know, different teachers that taught.

JD: When did your musical career really take off? When did you start? What...what were your first performances?

HK: Well, I played for silent pictures in Mandan.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: We had a theatre there. And they only had them on Friday and Saturday, so I could go to school, and then I'd play these pictures, these silent pictures. Because there was nobody in Mandan that could do that.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: I don't know that I could do it, but I...I could fake it. And...

JD: Sure. Oh...

HK: And I...that's where I learned to kind of cue, what they call cue a picture.

JD: Sure.

HK: And hmmm, so I had that position at Friday and Saturday, and I think I...I'm not quite sure, but I think I made twenty-five cents a night.

JD: [Laughing] Oh, that's an interesting little note.

HK: Yes, or maybe fifty cents. But I know it wasn't over that.

JD: Wasn't more. Well, I guess musicians...

HK: And so no wonder they wanted me to play! [Laughs]

JD: [Laughs] Musicians wages...

HK: [Laughing] Right!

JD: ...have improved since then. Well, tell me, when did you come to Fargo? When did you...?

HK: Well, if you want to know dates, you know...

JD: No...

HK: I told you that I can't tell you dates. [Chuckles] But I graduated from high school. And then I wanted to come to Fargo and take an expert accountant course.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And, hmmm, I had a friend here, a lady friend that I stayed with. And I...I hadn't enrolled in...in the school, and then I got started to go over to the Stone Piano Company. And I met a lot of musicians over there, and would-be musicians, and friends, and I got interested again in music, and then I started to take lessons.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: Because there was a Conservatory upstairs from the Stone Piano Company.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: Which is now...

JD: Daveau's?

HK: Yes.

JD: Now. Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: That's right. Sure.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And so then I still didn't go in for the other thing that I was going to do, and they were looking for somebody to cue a picture over at the Orpheum Theatre (which has now been removed).

JD: Yes.

HK: And there were several people who tried out. They had a score with that. But it was just...you couldn't read it, really, it was one line, and then a suggested piece for the score. And this was such a...and such that the music was above the ledger line, that I would defy anybody to read it. In fact, I still have the score that came with it.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: But anyway, I just had enough ingenuity, I guess is what you'd call it, to fake it. [Chuckles] And they hired me after having a *lot* of very good musicians try out for them. And it wasn't because I was that good, but it was because I could cue the picture.

JD: You could improvise?

HK: [Laughing] That's right, improvise.

JD: Yeah. Right. Well, tell me now, some people who might listen to this tape might wonder, what was the Orpheum Theatre? That was a long time ago.

HK: Oh, yes. That was a long time...

JD: What...what did the Orpheum Theatre do?

HK: Well, the Orpheum Theatre had quite a few celebrities...the personal appearances of celebrities, and, hmmm, then the silent pictures at weekends. And then we had...there was an orchestra some of the time, and maybe some people would even remember Norman Ostvie[sp?] that had the...played the violin. And...and hmmm...there was a man from Moorhead, [Unclear], that played the flute.

JD: Oh....

HK: Maybe you remember that name.

JD: Well...Dr. [Unclear] who taught at Concordia? Or maybe one of his sons?

HK: I think probably one of his sons.

JD: Sons.

HK: I'm pretty sure that's it.

JD: Sure.

HK: And the drummer, and myself, and...and a violinist, and we played for silent pictures. And then when we didn't have them, I played along for them. And from there, I went over to the State Theatre, which was just atmospheric. Beautiful theatre.

JD: The State Theatre is gone, too, now.

HK: Yes.

JD: So tell our listeners here what that was like.

HK: Oh...that was such a *beautiful* theatre. It was called an atmospheric theatre. And it had the clouds moving, and the stars twinkling, and it was really a beautiful...marble steps going up to the upper level. And it was really a lovely theatre. And that's, of course, when Eddie came...my husband came to manage this theatre, and that's where I met him.

JD: Yeah. Tell...and I was going to ask you that.

HK: Mmmm-hmmm.

JD: But tell me, where...where did he come from? And why was he sent for especially to come to Fargo?

HK: Well, Eddie was a troubleshooter. Well, he was sent...He was single, of course, and he was sent different theatres. He'd been at the State Lake in Chicago.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And he had been in the Hennepin Orpheum in Minneapolis as manager. And he was sent in this territory to sort of bolster up the business and take care of the...of...well...

JD: He scheduled different acts into Fargo?

HK: Yes. And...and...

JD: Was that the time in the Fargo...?

HK: Well it was a...there were the managers here that didn't understand how to promote a picture coming.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: In other words, they'd put out for the...for the day, they'd put out the new picture. And nobody knew what the next picture was, you see.

JD: No.

HK: And [unclear] up and...

JD: Well, how many of our theatres in Fargo-Moorhead at that time then were under his direction?

HK: Well, just two, the State and then the Fargo.

JD: Fargo.

HK: And when the Fargo opened, they had a man from Minneapolis, and he was here only four months. And then they put Eddie in charge of all the theatres. And also the Moorhead theatre.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: So Eddie had charge of...of the theatres, three theatres.

JD: He had a big job.

HK: Yes. A big job is right.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And at one time there was a Garrick Theatre here.

JD: Yes.

HK: And I did a little substituting there.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And ah...but the State Theatre was a beautiful theatre at that time.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And then the Fargo, of course. And then when...hmmm...the State Theatre was closed, why then they sent me down to the Fargo.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm. Now I know you told me you weren't good with dates, so I'm not going to press you there.

HK: No.

JD: But now can you just sort of estimate about how many years you played for silent movies before the talkies came in?

HK: I...I just...I really couldn't.

JD: You just couldn't. No.

HK: Because it's so mixed up with so many different places and things, you know.

JD: Yeah. Uh huh. Uh huh.

HK: I even...I even went up to Grand Forks and played for vaudeville for this same company. Because I could read the music, you know. That they...

JD: Sure.

HK: With the markings on. Sometimes you couldn't tell what there was, but you had to just guess. And I was pretty good at guessing.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: It...all this...it wasn't that I was that good, but I just had a...a knack of knowing what to play.

JD: Oh, that playing by ear will get you everywhere, won't it?

HK: Yes. Uh huh. [Chuckles] That's right, it just...

JD: Yeah.

HK: Yeah, that's what it was. And if I couldn't read it, why, it just seemed to me like there was some sense that I could chord it some way or another and...and develop it.

JD: You know, well, we've been friends for a long time. And I remember a little story you told me once about how the orchestra greeted you back after your marriage to Eddie. I...

HK: [Chuckles] Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

JD: Tell me...

HK: Well, that...well, that was at the State Theatre. And so we just...we went up to Moorhead, a Reverend Hall at a Methodist church, I believe, in Moorhead was where...where we were married. And then, hmmm, I had to go back and play the rest of the picture.

JD: Oh!

HK: At that time, there was an orchestra in the pit, the Bierstadt[sp?] Orchestra, that was simply marvelous. And it was a real nice organ, I had studied in Minneapolis with Eddie Dunstedter on this...about this new organ. And so I didn't know that anybody knew that we were getting married. And so when I...it...it leaked out some way or another. And the orchestra, the minute I was in the back, they cut right into the picture and started "Here comes the Bride."

JD: [Laughs]

HK: [Chuckles] And I walked down the aisle to the organ, and I was just shaking. And everybody, you know, was looking...you know, wondered what...what has happened, or what it was all about.

JD: [Laughs]

HK: And I can't remember what I played, or whether I played or not! [Chuckles]

JD: It sounds to me like other musicians have been having fun with you for a lot of years! [Laughs]

HK: Oh yes, they really did. [Chuckles]

JD: Ah, golly.

HK: But I...if anybody remembers the Bierstadt[sp?] Orchestra, they were so marvelous. They could do the same kind of thing that I could do, only better. I mean, but can you imagine a five-, six-piece orchestra being able to play without a sheet of music in front of them?

JD: No score at all.

HK: And cueing a picture? This is something that just kind of comes to you.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: Sometimes you hit it well. Sometimes I say *I* hit it well, and sometimes it's probably pretty bad!

JD: Mmmm.

HK: But anyway, it...it is a certain knack to it, you know, and...

JD: Now did this orchestra play at the Crystal Ballroom in [unclear]?

HK: No, no.

JD: Was their whole...their entire job just at the State?

HK: It was at the...yes. And they were going to...to build a theatre in...hmmm...oh, someplace out of Minneapolis.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And they wanted to know if I would come. They were going to install an organ, and I would come and be the organist. And I said, “Yes!” I was ready to quit, you know, at the State Theatre.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And then that’s when Eddie came along, of course, you know.

JD: Ah ha! A little competition.

HK: And so I told him, I said, “Well, I’ve got a chance,” I said, “to go to make more money and so forth.” “Well,” he says, “We’ll take care of *that*.” He said...[Chuckles]

JD: [Laughing] He’ll raise your salary!

HK: My salary, yeah, I guess so!

JD: Bring you over to the Fargo, hmmm?

HK: Of course, it wasn’t very much anyway, you know.

JD: No.

HK: I mean the pay was...and well, people just laugh at what...when I tell them some of the stories, you know, of...of playing. [Chuckles]

JD: Sure. Can...can you remember offhand maybe what your average monthly salary was?

HK: Well...

JD: I mean so that...It...it’s kind of an interesting thing.

HK: Ah...I...I think about forty or fifty dollars.

JD: Dollars a month. Yeah.

HK: Yeah, something...You know, I mean...no...

JD: Yes, something pretty pitiful. [Laughs]

HK: Yeah, it was just enough, you know, to have me...ah, I had...my father had passed away...

JD: Oh.

HK: And my mother was teaching school. And as I said, I was going to take an expert accounting course.

JD: But you...

HK: I don't believe I was ever cut out to...for figures. [Chuckles]

JD: Well, you were kind of on your own then?

HK: Oh, yes. Mmmm-hmmm.

JD: From the time that you finished high school and came to Fargo...

HK: Yes.

JD: ...until this Eddie came to town and you fell for him.

HK: And he changed my mind.

JD: And he changed your life, too, didn't he?

HK: Mmmm-hmmm. He did.

JD: Yes.

HK: You know, we...we had kind of a quick courtship, because we had no place to go.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: Hmmm, I was in a rooming house. And of course I...you know, those days...that the...it was a little bit different, you know.

JD: Yeah, there wasn't any...

HK: You didn't take a man to your room! [Chuckles]

JD: To your room, no.

HK: And he lived in the hotel. And of course, naturally, he wouldn't take me there.

JD: No.

HK: And so we really didn't go together very long. We'd sit over in the café and order food, and maybe hold hands, you know.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: Keep ordering food, it was stacked up so we could stay, and talk, and visit, you know.

JD: Sure. Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And so anyway, why, that's the story of...[Chuckles] Mmmm-hmmm.

JD: That's the story of that swift courtship.

HK: Yes, that's right. Mmmm-hmmm.

JD: Okay. So then you went over to the Fargo. Well, when you were playing at the Fargo did you play other...? Did you continue to play at other...? But you were pretty well taken up there at the Fargo.

HK: Well then, of course, the State closed, you know, after a while.

JD: Yes.

HK: And then when the Fargo opened, they had a man from Chicago that played for about...oh, I think he was here about six weeks, something like that.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And I wasn't hired by Eddie to take it over, but I...I did, I left the State Theatre and went to the Fargo.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: But hmmm, no, now wait a minute. I'm a little ahead of my time.

JD: Okay.

HK: Because I went to WDAY. Earl Reineke called me and asked me if I would like to come up and be the organist at WDAY.

JD: Were you the organist then at WDAY before you went to the Fargo Theatre? I thought it was after.

HK: I guess it was after.

JD: Yeah, ah...ah...

HK: You know, this is a long time ago, June. That you're making me...

JD: Yeah. [Laughing] Go back!

HK: [Unclear] showing up, shows how much I remember, I mean...

JD: [Chuckles] Well...well, no, that's okay.

HK: [Chuckles]

JD: Ah, I...I guess that...

HK: Because I was at WDAY twenty-eight years.

JD: Yes.

HK: And you know, going all the places, and...

JD: Yeah, right.

HK: And all the changes I made...

JD: Well...

HK: And never thought I'd ever have to be interviewed by you! [Chuckles]

JD: Well, see, I've been reading up about you, too, besides what I have known before. And I had guessed that perhaps the talkies had come in, and hmmm...What...you...? After the talkies came in, there wasn't...they didn't need those organists for the silent movies?

HK: Well, that's the whole thing. And I was there then when the first talking picture...I was at the Fargo Theatre when the first talking picture came in.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And hmmm...I forgot what it was. Was it Charlie Chaplin or something? I can't remember.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: I probably have it written down someplace.

JD: Finally got a...got a voice after a while. [Laughs]

HK: [Chuckles] Yeah, that's right.

JD: Yeah.

HK: And hmmm, anyway, why then, you see, I lost the job.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And that is when Earl Reineke called and asked me if I'd come to WDAY.

JD: Right.

HK: And I was there for twenty-eight years.

JD: For twenty-eight years.

HK: And they were *wonderful* years.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: Because everybody was so great.

JD: Sure. Now what kind of things did you do besides play the organ at WDAY? Because I know that you...they all...they got you as an organist, but then they always gave you other jobs besides.

HK: Oh, my. Well, I took almost every person that came up for an audition, I took their auditions. If they'd sing or...or whatever it was. Ken Kennedy, of course, was alive then, and he would cue me as to what. And I...I had a lot of...hmmm...

JD: He would be the programmer.

HK: ...people that wanted to talk, and speak, and so on. So...and sing, and some of them didn't know...even know how.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: I think one of my favorite things was a girl that came up, and she wanted to sing at WDAY. And so Ken said, "Well, find out what she sings, and take her audition. I'll listen." So I said to her, "What...what do you sing?" And I said, "Do you have your music?" "No," she said, "I haven't got my music." And I said, "Well," I said, "Give me an idea, and I'll go back and get some music." And she said, "Well, I know the chorus of 'Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair'."

JD: [Laughs]

HK: [Laughing] And she wanted to be in...to be on the air. That was her...

JD: Ah! Were you...were you there? I presume you were...Yes, I should know you were there when [unclear – sounds like Jean Yom] was singing there.

HK: Oh, sure. I should say so.

JD: Sure.

HK: And Frank Scott.

JD: Yeah.

HK: Oh, yeah.

JD: And who were some of the other radio personnel besides...? Do you remember any of the names of any of the announcers?

HK: Well, Mary Lou Dunkirk, of course. And we had a program every Sunday, a religious program for all the various denominations.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And we'd do the hymns of whatever church it was, and had her. And then I accompanied Ken when he had...he did poems early in the morning at eight o'clock. And that nearly killed me. [Unclear]. [Laughs]

JD: [Unclear] morning! [Laughs]

HK: Well, I wasn't used to that. But it went on for a long, long time. And it was really quite a popular thing. And then I also did some commercials, and I even announced them. And I even did some recipes, and then a little music, and another recipe.

JD: Yeah.

HK: And that went over pretty good. [Chuckles]

JD: And you were an early Verna Newell [a popular host of WDAY television show *Party Line*], were you? [Laughs]

HK: Oh...[Laughing] Yes, sort of!

JD: Well, I seem to remember when I was in high school, in fact, that I'd come up with the Campfire Girls, and you would introduce our program with organ music, etcetera.

HK: That's right.

JD: And I think that...

HK: And the [Uncle Ken's] Kiddie Club. Were you in the Kiddie's Club?

JD: No, I never was in the Kiddie's. I never could sing!

HK: [Laughing] I hope not, because I'd hate to think you were in the Kiddie's Club!

JD: [Laughs] But I remember a fellow up there by the name of Howard...

HK: Yes.

JD: Hmmm. Howard...[Laughs]

HK: Nelson! Howard Nelson.

JD: Howard Nelson, right.

HK: Easiest name in the world to remember.

JD: Yes, and...

HK: And that's when you forget. [Chuckles]

JD: That's when you forget then.

HK: Oh, yes. He was one of my favorite announcers.

JD: Yeah. Well, hmmm, after you...? Hmmm...when...did you ever retire really? I mean, I don't think you ever have, have you?

HK: No, I didn't. I just...

JD: But...

HK: Excuse me.

JD: That's alright. Ah, was there any period though after the...after the...? You did...you said you worked at WDAY for twenty-eight years.

HK: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

JD: Well, when you quit there, why did...? You know, what...what went on then?

HK: Well, and then...then it was time for the...hmmm...radio...radio was the past. And it was television, and I didn't want to be on television, and...

JD: Ah. Oh...

HK: And my husband said, "Oh, what do you want to keep working for, 'til you're hauled out to Riverside?" I'll never forget that! [Laughs]

JD: [Laughs]

HK: And oh, I felt so bad. And they...you know, Ken came out to the house and tried to talk me out of it. And I said, "No, I'd better...I'd better quit now."

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And then I was just heartbroken. I just felt so bad that every day I wanted to cry, I missed it so much, you know.

JD: Mmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: I was going to tell you one thing about that. I think you'll get a kick out of this. It was a little before I quit. [Chuckles]

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: I did Kenny's Kiddie Club.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And now there are some ladies that I played for...then I belong to the Fargo Music Club.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And there are some ladies there that were on the Kiddie's Club that I played for! [Laughs]

JD: [Laughs] No kidding!

HK: And boy, did they ever like to let me know that, too! [Laughs]

JD: Oh, of course! [Laughs]

HK: But I...I enjoy it. I really...that was really a fun program. And there was a thing that you never knew what they were going to do. They would sometimes start at the end of the piece and sing, and then you'd have...I'd have to quickly change over, you know. And then they'd forget

the words, and...and that was really kind of a chore. But it was fun to do. And a lot of them I know right now.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: That...are a couple that are married, and, you know, quite a few.

JD: Sure. Oh, yeah.

HK: And, hmmm...

JD: Well, now that you mentioned that...you sort of retired. That is, you weren't at the WDAY or playing at any of the theatres or anything.

HK: No.

JD: And then, hmmm...

HK: For twenty-eight years. I told you that.

JD: Yeah, right. But hmmm...you...you said that you kind of missed it all. You missed the...

HK: Oh, I did.

JD: Yeah...

HK: I missed it so much, yeah.

JD: So ah...I suspect that...that you're certainly not retired now. You've come out of it again since this organ society and so on got busy with you.

HK: That's right. Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

JD: But all the time you played some. And, hmmm, I remember that you mentioned...ah, or did I read it? That there was someone who particularly influenced you in the days after your husband died?

HK: Well, I was...of course, that...I really was very depressed. We never had a family, and, hmmm, it was awfully hard to lose Eddie. We were a happy couple. And I really kind of was very depressed. Being alone...you know, it's not fun to be alone.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm. And you had no father or mother.

HK: And of course I'm an only child. That's right.

JD: Sisters, brothers, nothing.

HK: I'm an only child. I had nobody to lean on. I was here in Fargo just a...you know, on...absolutely on my own.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And when I lost Eddie, I was really very depressed. Because he was a very...hmmm...well, you know, he was...

JD: A social, outgoing kind of person.

HK: Yeah. Yes, he was a very loving person. I'm an outgoing person. I love people, you know that.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And so I kind of quit playing. Because it just seemed like every time I'd start to play, I'd want to cry. And I did a lot of crying.

JD: Oh...

HK: Which it...doesn't do a bit of good.

JD: No.

HK: I know the doctor says, "Well, Hildegarde, we can't bring Eddie back."

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And of course I knew that, too. But Stella Pollock[sp?], and I think a lot of people listening in will know who Stella Pollock is.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And she said, "Hildegarde, you cannot waste this talent."

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And she says, "I'm going to see that you play again." And I thought, well, I don't know. I didn't think I could manage it. Because, as I said, if I'd sit down to play, well then I'd start to cry.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: It sounds, I suppose, very shallow maybe that I couldn't take it any better than I did.

JD: No! The grieving process is no fun. And it takes a little longer for some than others perhaps.

HK: Well, that...that's probably it. I think if you have a family, you know, but no mother or father, and no children and that. And you know, just depending upon myself. And I have to say, I felt sorry for myself. [Chuckles]

JD: Mmmm-hmmm. Sure.

HK: But she got me out of this. She said, "Hildegarde, you cannot waste your talent." And so she got me to play for a couple things. And I hadn't played for a few months.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And I couldn't believe that I could sit down... and I accompanied a very lovely singer. I couldn't believe that I could play again...and pick it up right away.

JD: Just pick it up again.

HK: And not as...probably as well, because I was out of practice. But I did it. And from that time on, I gained up the confidence and got over this depression that I had, and started to...to do things.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And then I had been called for a lot of things, like a lot of style shows, as you know, and parties and different organizations.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And I have enjoyed that a lot, too. And at the Fargo Theatre, of course, you know. And playing over at Weld Hall once in the summertime.

JD: Yes, tell me about that. What do you...? What do you do at Weld Hall?

HK: Well, I play for a silent picture in Weld Hall. They have one...usually the closing picture.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And it's fun to do, whether it's...hmmm...hmmm...they're always so nice to me over there. And it's always a full house when I play, which I am very thrilled about.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm. Now you mentioned that you hadn't played for a few months, and you were concerned about whether or not you could still do it. Ah, I suppose maybe to some people

they don't quite understand that, unless they would know that you practice every day. Don't you?

HK: Yes, I play some every day.

JD: Yeah.

HK: Sometimes I get up in the middle of the night.

JD: [Laughs]

HK: I'm kind of a poor sleeper. And that's why I have to have my home, because nobody could tolerate having somebody be playing at two o'clock in the morning! [Laughs]

JD: Oh, I don't know. I think...I'd like to have you in an apartment right next me! [Laughs]

HK: Well, thank you! That's one of the nicest things that's been said!

JD: [Laughs] Well, hmmm, I guess the public now knows what you're doing. And lots of us come every single Silent Movie Night to listen to you either play in the lobby, the piano, or as the last silent movie was, to hear you at the organ. And I guess most of us would say that you haven't...you haven't really lost a thing. You're still...you're still going strong.

HK: Well, thank you.

JD: Now I know that you and Eddie did a little traveling, hmmm, with...in connection with his business.

HK: Oh, yes.

JD: And people have perhaps seen the picture of Claudette...Claudette Colbert. And hmmm...

HK: Jimmy Stewart.

JD: Jimmy Stewart.

HK: Mmmm-hmmm.

JD: Hmmm...do you want to tell us about that trip?

HK: Well, we were sent out to Hollywood by the firm.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: Eddie's firm that owned the Fargo Theatre, oh, to see what kind of pictures that this part of the country would like. And so we met a lot of producers. And some of them, the names, I wish I'd have written them down, because it's a long time ago and they are very important people. But we were...hmmm...then we were there for about three weeks. And they came and got us every morning in a big limousine and took us to the various studios. And that's where I...the picture of Jimmy Stewart and Claudette Colbert was made.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And we could have had a lot of pictures taken with other stars, too, but they...they said that the fact that we didn't try to push it, we got to see a lot more things than people that always want...

JD: Who were just tourists?

HK: Yes.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And then, hmmm, one thing that I thought might be kind of interesting is that we were on the set of Lucille Ball when she had her first picture.

JD: Well!

HK: And we stood and watched this, the picture, watched her make this picture all afternoon. Of course now, Lucille Ball, practically, I think, everybody knows her. At that time, that was her first picture.

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And it was Ginger Rogers and...and hmmm...oh, so many others. That...that I can't even...

JD: Cagney?

HK: Yes, Jimmy Cagney.

JD: Yeah.

HK: Oh, yes. We saw that, we were on the set with that. And Ginger Rogers and...

JD: Mmmm-hmmm.

HK: And hmmm...oh, I...I just can't think of so many.

JD: Well, Hildegarde, you've had a long and wonderful life, and you're still *pleasing* the crowds. You're still a real crowd pleaser.

HK: Well, I love to do it! I really do! I'm so happy that they still want me, you know. I mean, I...I do a lot of style shows, as you know. And it's always a pleasure to work with you, June, on these style shows that Margaret has. And...and I am going to play out at the Holiday Inn this next week, and I'm going to play at the country club tomorrow!

JD: Well, I...I just predict no end.

HK: [Chuckles]

JD: I don't think you'll ever retire again...

HK: No.

JD: ...until they do take you out! [Laughs]

HK: [Laughs] It's got to come, of course.

JD: Well...

HK: And I keep thinking, well, now maybe I shouldn't...And then, you know, Ted Larson of Weld, you know, at...over here at...he's a teacher, and he...he kind of keeps me fired up.

JD: Yes.

HK: Because he sort of likes the thing I do, and...and I'm awfully proud that he wants me to, you know.

JD: Well, I just want to thank you a lot for spending this time with us this afternoon and...and hmmm...just thank you.

HK: Well, I hope you haven't been all bored.

JD: Not a bit! [Chuckles]

HK: And I hope anybody that listens to it isn't bored! And thank you for asking me.

JD: Not a bit.

[End of interview]