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Oral history interview transcript with Pat Conrath

Patricia Conrath

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PATRICIA CONRATH
INTERVIEWED BY JANET ANDERSON
EWU Women's Oral History Project
EWU 984-0094 #15
OCTOBER 6TH, 1982

ANDERSON: This is Janet Anderson interviewing Pat Conrath for the Cheney Women's Oral History Project. Her topics mainly concern the community service council and the Cheney float and rodeo. The date is October 6th, 1982. Okay, we're sitting in Pat Conrath's very comfortable dining room in Cheney and talking with Pat, and Pat I'm going to ask you to tell me just a little bit about yourself.

CONRATH: All right. I was born in Saint Maries, Idaho, September the 11th, 1926. We lived there a short time before moving to Emida, Idaho where my father ran a grocery store. This was during the Depression, times were very, very tough. My father extended so much credit, that he went broke and then he went into the woods to work, he was quite a lumberjack. Dad was always concerned about us getting a proper education and had heard of Cheney. So we packed up in 1934, six kids, my folks, three dogs and four cats and an old Ford truck and came to Cheney. Our first home is now a John Elliot sheep shed.

ANDERSON: Oh, is that right? That's way out there on the, where is that now?

CONRATH: That's out beyond the cemetery, sits close to the Antonio School.

ANDERSON: Oh, okay. Yeah, right.

CONRATH: Right and...

ANDERSON: You were what, eleven?

CONRATH: I was eight when...

ANDERSON: Eight?

CONRATH: When we moved to Cheney. I attended the Campus school. In fact there was no other school than the Campus school.

ANDERSON: Was that in what's now Martin Hall?

CONRATH: No, it wasn't. It was in the old, wooden, three-floor structure that sat to the left of Showalter Hall.

ANDERSON: Oh, okay, and it went from the first through the sixth grade?

CONRATH: Right, and we had the privilege of moving from there to Martin Hall. It was like moving in to a palace after attending this rickety wooden structure, you know. Shortly after that they tore the structure down. I went through school, through high school in Cheney, and I had three children: Becky, Phil, and Bill.

ANDERSON: Let's get you married first. When were you married?

CONRATH: Yes, all right. Let's get me married. We were married in 1948. I married Bert Conrath from Sprague, who then wished to live in Cheney, and we've been here ever since. Then we had our children, and Bert started working for Ford Radcliffe way back when we lived in a small rental house, which would be in back of the old Texaco down by Willow Springs until we built our new home in 1952.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: Where do I go from here?

ANDERSON: Well, that sounds pretty good. We're gonna pick up on some of the things that happened in Cheney in the past.

CONLEY: That's important too because what I remember of Cheney then is so, we've seen so many changes.

ANDERSON: Well, why don't we just talk about that? Can we talk about that now? Sure...tell me about...you got here in 1934. So tell me what you saw in Cheney when you came in 1934.

CONRATH: Of course in comparison to Emida, Idaho, population 100, Cheney seemed to be pretty good sized but it wasn't. I believe, and I'm not really certain... I must look it up... I believe the population was around 800 at that particular time. I remember this home that we live in now was classified as really living out in the country.

ANDERSON: But it was just across the railroad tracks, right? Or was it on this side of the railroad tracks?

CONRATH: It was on this side...

ANDERSON: This side of the railroad tracks. But just sort of a block down from Main Street on the highway, right?

CONRATH: It would be across the side street from the county equipment company.

ANDERSON: Okay, okay...

CONRATH: Yeah, or almost directly behind the Willow Springs as it is now.

ANDERSON: Okay, but downtown Cheney was several blocks or a ways away, wasn't it?

CONRATH: I remember in particular it was such a booming block or two. Every store was filled. There were ice cream shops and hardware stores, the actual downtown Cheney was just bustling, but of course that's all there was. But I remember how I was impressed at how many different types of stores and how active Cheneyites were.

ANDERSON: It must have been then between say if the Book and Brush is on F, right? It must have been between F and College? Was that the main block?

CONRATH: No, I would say it would be a couple blocks this side of...one block this side of Book and Brush.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: When you... where the old post office was, which would be in the Chevrolet garage.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: What it is now.

ANDERSON: Okay, Okay.

CONRATH: Yes.

ANDERSON: So there were little grocery stores, were there grocery stores there?

CONRATH: Yes, A Mrs. Behr had her charming little grocery store. Like Hanson's hardware store, and a lovely little ice cream shop and a...it was very adequate. Of course you have to remember too, that in those days it was a long way to Spokane.

ANDERSON: Oh, that's right. How did you get to Spokane in those days? When did you want to go?

CONRATH: There...we could always catch a train.

ANDERSON: Okay. Where did the train...?

CONRATH: Lovely train service, which would be behind the Chevrolet Garage at that particular station. I can't recall the railroad. I wish I could. But yes, lovely service, bus service and train service.

ANDERSON: When did that train service phase out?

CONRATH: I wish I could remember.

ANDERSON: I was just wondering.

CONRATH: Approximately, I would say approximately 15 years ago.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: That would be an approximation.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: Because I do believe that up until then you could catch some kind of transportation to Spokane, by train.

ANDERSON: If you drove to Spokane...would you drive, ever?

CONRATH: Once in a blue moon. Not very often.

ANDERSON: You would go by Marshall.

CONRATH: Yes, oh yes. Yes.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: Yes.

ANDERSON: Then you arrived there.

CONRATH: Right.

ANDERSON: That's interesting, tell me about Cheney High School.

CONRATH: George Fisher was my principal. The high school was of course where the administration building is now. Of course, compared to now, the classes were so small in comparison. I would say if you had 50 graduating it was really something, you know. A lot of the teachers are around. Florence Fryer was my English teacher. Let me see...in ...What would you like to know about the high school?

ANDERSON: I was just thinking, I don't know, whatever your outstanding memories about it are.

CONRATH: Of course what I remember about the high school is sports. I threw myself into sports in high school. I'm afraid I neglected some of my studies for sports. But Cheney, the only way I could describe the high school is like describing all of Cheney. I just can't tell you how Cheney welcomed our new little family coming in as did all the schools. Of course in that...at that period, within an hour, everyone in Cheney knew of a newcomer.

ANDERSON: Oh, sure.

CONRATH: You know?

ANDERSON: Oh, sure, if it was that small.

CONRATH: But I tell you, it was wonderful to raise our children in the Cheney school district and the churches and the people. I can't imagine having lived anywhere else.

ANDERSON: Can you think...you mentioned one, one English teacher. Why was she, do you remember her as being an outstanding teacher?

CONRATH: Yes, I thought Flossy was a fantastic teacher. She taught us our good basics.

ANDERSON: So she was good.

CONRATH: Which...and Mr. Fisher was a fantastic principal. He replaced C.J. Coyle, which a lot of people will remember. George Fisher was very strict, but he was fair. Let's just say he was firm but fair. He kept all of us under his thumb, and consequently there was not discipline problems as young people face nowadays.

ANDERSON: You talked about sports, were you active in sports?

CONRATH: Very much so.

ANDERSON: Girls were active in sports?

CONRATH: Not what they are today but as much as they would let us. Half-court basketball, Baseball, volleyball...

ANDERSON: Did you play other teams?

CONRATH: Yes, we did.

ANDERSON: Did you have like a...?

CONRATH: We had play days occasionally, and it was something very special. They would take us on a trip to Spokane to compete.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: Not too often but maybe once or twice a year we were able to do this.

ANDERSON: But it wasn't on the same basis that the boys would take the basketball teams?

CONRATH: Oh, no. No, it was more classified, more as a play day. But it was enough that it wetted your appetite for competition.

ANDERSON: Do you think in 1948 when you were doing...when did you graduate?

CONRATH: '44.

ANDERSON: '44. Okay. At that time, did you feel there was any stigma and/or honor for girls being in sports?

CONRATH: No.

ANDERSON: Were you less 'lady-like' because you were in sports?

CONRATH: Perhaps. I know what I was fighting all the time is what has taken women many, many years to achieve, and that is to be recognized as athletes. I felt that I could probably play football and baseball equally as well as the guys. Sports were my whole life. But then you didn't really fight for anything. You felt bad because you couldn't compete like the men, like the boys. You see what I mean?

ANDERSON: Sure, absolutely.

CONRATH: But you more or less stayed in the background.

ANDERSON: You played volleyball and basketball...

CONRATH: Basketball and baseball.

ANDERSON: Half-court basketball is hard because you run to that center line...

CONRATH: It's just a pain...

ANDERSON: Yeah. It's nice they've got...they switched that.

CONRATH: I really admire the women athletes this day. I wish we would have had a little bit of that in my day.

ANDERSON: Did your family encourage you into sports?

CONRATH: Very much so.

ANDERSON: They did? They did, and your brothers?

CONRATH: My brothers were very fine athletes.

ANDERSON: They thought that was just fine?

CONRATH: Yeah.

ANDERSON: Isn't that great? Okay, Pat, you've been involved in the Cheney Float and with the Cheney Rodeo for a number of years. Can you tell me how you got started in that?

CONRATH: Yes. I got started...a woman named Elaine Ingall called me and said she knew that I was interested in arts and crafts and she asked if I would help with the float. I said that I would be delighted to, and before I knew it, I was up to my ears in it. Now that

particular year that she asked me to help the float had already been designed and it was a matter of piecing it together. Then after that for many years I designed the float, and was very difficult because we not only had to design it but we had to raise the funds for it and enter it and cart it around. It was quite a big job.

ANDERSON: Can you come up with a timeframe for me when you started?

CONRATH: I think so. I think that would be approximately 20 years ago.

ANDERSON: Okay, so that would be like '50...no...'62.

CONRATH: Let's see, yes. Maybe before that, even.

ANDERSON: Maybe before that?

CONRATH: Maybe around '50, 1955 rings a bell in my mind.

ANDERSON: Okay. Okay.

CONRATH: Then our float would just enter in the Spokane Lilac Parade. We, as other towns around us, did not have funds for their parades like they do now. So it was a big event and it was a chance for Cheneyites to get together and work together. It was actually quite interesting. Then there was a period of years that I was out of it and then I didn't start up again until about 6 years ago when I helped design and build float.

ANDERSON: Okay. Tell me about the first one you designed and built. Can you remember?

CONRATH: The first one was a giant seashell, a very complicated float. I really don't know now why I even thought we could build it, but we did, perseverance. I remember a very pale satin seashell which was to be the setting for the Miss Cheney, which I believe at the time was Jeanie Kerr, daughter of Ivan and Margo Kerr, a giant tropical fish hanging from fine wire.

ANDERSON: Oh, goodness.

CONRATH: Incidentally, it was a prize winner.

ANDERSON: I bet, was it on a...it was on a flat thing with the driver sitting down below and driving it like that?

CONRATH: Yes, right.

ANDERSON: What did you make it out of?

CONRATH: We had to beg, borrow, and steal anything that we might. Even though we could build them in those days for probably a third of what we're building them now, it was very difficult. However, Cheney businessmen contributed, as did Cheneyites...contribute their time. For instance, the Radcliffe Garage would probably give us an old chassis. Anyone in the lumber business would help us with the lumber. Through all that we were able to piece floats together. I am a firm believer in a float for a city. I believe that the Cheney Float Association are the best PR people that Cheney has. You cannot imagine getting out and visiting the other towns, and they in turn will come to visit us. So this was one of the reasons, besides loving to draw them and build them, that I am definitely a firm believer in floats.

ANDERSON: Now there's almost a float season, isn't there?

CONRATH: Yes.

ANDERSON: Like from May to September?

CONRATH: Well, actually if you do it right, you just finish with the last parade of the fall and you should be working on your...

ANDERSON: Gearing up for spring?

CONRATH: Absolutely. If you do it right, it's really a full time job.

ANDERSON: Then in the past few years the Cheney float has gone to ten, eleven, twelve different communities, hasn't it?

CONRATH: Absolutely, as many as we could afford. This really put a kibosh on it, the high price of gas. It's been so difficult to take them around like we really wanted to. I would say now it costs us around a hundred dollars a week and a lot of us... this was coming out of our own pocket. You know, there comes a time...

ANDERSON: Either when you have to stop or you have to get it from someplace else.

CONRATH: Right.

ANDERSON: Now, it seems like the Cheney Float Association as such is a fairly...it's just been within the last few years right that they've had an official association? How was it organized earlier? Who decided to do it? How did they get it off the ground?

CONRATH: Just maybe 3 or 4 interested individuals. We knew that there would be young ladies representing Cheney, and they needed something to ride on. I think their parents... Miss Cheney's, it isn't Miss Cheney now, what is it?

ANDERSON: The Junior Miss.

CONRATH: The Junior Miss. I think the Junior Miss and her princesses and their parents do an awful lot of work. They did in the past, you know. Because that was the only way to get one completed.

ANDERSON: So, but you would just...it would just be a group of...a small group of people, and then you would just knock on business doors and whatever to get it going?

CONRATH: That's right.

ANDERSON: There would be what, four or five people maybe?

CONRATH: Probably, and all we had to do is to ask for contributions and Cheney came forward. I remember this was before the days of the fireproof materials. The Cheney Fire Department would fireproof it for us and that saved us a lot of money.

ANDERSON: That's neat.

CONRATH: So...

ANDERSON: So you've been doing that except for that period you said you weren't doing it from...

CONRATH: I've had my finger in it for many years.

ANDERSON: For a long time. Were there other women or was it mostly men that worked on it?

CONRATH: I believe it was mostly women that did the basics, and then we'd always con our husbands into the heavy...

ANDERSON: The heavy stuff?

CONRATH: Heavy duty.

ANDERSON: Right. Where would you build it?

CONRATH: Anywhere that we could, maybe a...Roy Miller's barn, any available garage in Cheney.

ANDERSON: It seems like once you were at...you had been at grain growers...one of their...?

CONRATH: I can't recall being at the grain growers.

ANDERSON: Yeah, okay.

CONRATH: But it's a very exciting project. I'm all for having a float and involving as many people in the community as you can.

ANDERSON: How did that whole float thing connect with the rodeo?

CONRATH: Actually, the float doesn't, but they combined it, and it works out beautifully.

ANDERSON: So, because there is a rodeo parade and the float was in the rodeo parade.

CONRATH: Absolutely.

ANDERSON: In the rodeo parade, yeah.

CONRATH: Right now I'd say they're better organized, the Cheney Float Association and the Rodeo than they've ever been; a group of very, very dedicated people. Have you not noticed how this is building up so tremendously?

ANDERSON: Oh yeah. Who are the movers and shakers in the Float and Rodeo...?

CONRATH: I hesitate to give too many names in case I miss somebody.

ANDERSON: Miss somebody...

CONRATH: I know Bonnie Behr is a real instigator of this and Linda McQuerey, Keith Cummings, the Hites. In the float, the Blumes, I would say.

ANDERSON: Jean Blumes, and the Coy Smiths and the Gesckes.

CONRATH: Of course, Judy at the bank. Judy White.

ANDERSON: Judy White, yeah right.

CONRATH: Right. But there really are so many people now behind it.

ANDERSON: That's good, and you say that...before you said something about making posters for the rodeo?

CONRATH: Yes. I have always done the posters for the cars, you know, to tell the...

ANDERSON: Oh, mayors, who love cars...

CONRATH: Yeah.

ANDERSON: Or something like that, yea, right. Okay!

CONRATH: Anyway, I can and I have judged floats for years for Cheney. This is quite interesting, of course. We do not judge our own because we are hosting it. I'm in charge of the judging and I have my little committee that judges the floats from the other communities.

ANDERSON: Oh, that must be fun.

CONRATH: It is. It's very interesting.

ANDERSON: Great.

CONRATH: You meet a lot of beautiful people.

ANDERSON: I guess you do. Now, can you think of anything else we should talk about in terms of the float or the rodeo?

CONRATH: I can't think of anything. I think we've covered it all pretty much.

ANDERSON: Okay. Let's talk about the ...let's answer the phone. Do you have...okay, What about the community services council?

CONRATH: Okay.

ANDERSON: What can you tell me about that?

CONRATH: My first love, yes.

ANDERSON: Your first love. Tell me about your first time being on the service council, or whatever.

CONRATH: Because of Ella Frost, I involve myself with the Cheney community services. Ella at that time was in charge of the food bank, which was housed at the Cheney City Fire Department, and then I was off and going. One day I...well, first I'll talk about the food.

ANDERSON: Let's figure out when we're to talk about here.

CONRATH: All right, let's try to figure out...I would say that this would be approximately 15 years ago.

ANDERSON: Okay. That would be '60. Ella Frost...it was '65? '68?

CONRATH: Approximately.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: Yes.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: That's about as near as I can remember.

ANDERSON: Okay. That's it.

CONRATH: I told you I was terrible at these things.

ANDERSON: That's all right. I just want to get a feeling for it.

CONRATH: Cheney food bank is a beautiful thing in that we service everyone within the Cheney school district. The foods and moneys that we have are donated by our Cheneyites strictly. They've never let us down. We've never been without. When we are low, all we have to do is put in a notice in the Cheney Free Press and we have everything we want. The one thing that I am so proud of the food bank is Cheney as a whole has involved themselves in that's, say the Campfire Girls and the Cub Scouts, the College, the various organizations. They have food drives, they ask how they can help us, and this way it has really developed into a community project. Great for involving as many people as possible, and this is really beautiful.

ANDERSON: Tell me how you were involved in it.

CONRATH: Okay, I chaired it...

ANDERSON: Now this is part of the community service...this is sort of like a branch of the community service council.

CONRATH: Absolutely.

ANDERSON: You were put in charge of the food bank?

CONRATH: Yes.

ANDERSON: Now, had you been involved in the food bank before that?

CONRATH: Never.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: I never knew about the food bank.

ANDERSON: So then you just walked into the fire station one day...

CONRATH: Absolutely cold turkey.

ANDERSON: What did you find?

CONRATH: I found then not too much food, a sort of haphazard way of delegating the food out, and I decided we'd best get organized. So, I got the fire men to cooperate in helping delegate the food out. Now, let me tell you who's eligible for the food, through the ministers, teachers, city nurses, and county nurses, they are in a position to really know those in need. All right, if they would bring a note to the fire department or to myself, we would donate food to them. It was getting to be a hassle for the fire department to stop their duties and throw everything in a box for the needy families. So, I decided we could do it better by making up sacks and boxes and we would write from 1 to 2 persons or from 2 to 6 persons. This way then, all we had to do is go down and hand the recipients the box and it went a lot smoother.

ANDERSON: Would you try to get a variety of food in each box?

CONRATH: In our sacks are a complete balanced diet. Now with donated food, we're very, very fussy about baby foods and the expiration dates and bulging cans...

ANDERSON: Sure.

CONRATH: And all this and that, you know.

ANDERSON: Sure.

CONRATH: But we would have soups and vegetables and meats and milk and everything in it. We would have the satisfaction of knowing it would be as balanced as we could. Now when I first started out, we didn't have any monies to supplement. So we...some of the sacks were quite sparse. But we built it up so that we had monies for the food bank. A lot of the farmers would give us their produce, extras.

ANDERSON: Oh, wow.

CONRATH: We would get fresh apples and it was not long before we were giving fresh vegetables and fruits to the recipients, which always makes you feel so good about that, you know. Okay, not too long ago, I would say approximately two years ago, the firemen needed the space in the department as they are expanding. So, the city let us have a room in the Wren Pearson building.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: Which is very nice and it has so many of these community activities like the museum and recycling. I think it's so nice to have them all in one building. I'll go back a little ways and tell you...[tape ends]

>>>>>>End of Side One<<<<<<<<

>>>>>Beginning of Side Two<<<<<

[did not allow for leader]

CONRATH: ...maybe I can state it in a little...

ANDERSON: No, you did just fine.

CONRATH: ...an easier way, anyway, me and my foghorn voice.

ANDERSON: This is side two...Pat Conrath and Pat, you were telling me about some things and we didn't have on the record and we'll try again. This is such an efficient tape. You were telling me about the clothing bank.

CONRATH: Yes.

ANDERSON: Okay, would you mind telling me that again?

CONRATH: We felt a true need to start a clothing bank. There was an attempt to keep up with those in need but nothing ever organized so I made Cheney Aware of it and it wasn't long before they were contributing every type of garments you could imagine. The first home...Jan Hancock housed the clothing bank in her home [cuckoo clock ring three times]. Then Lee Ferguson housed it in her upstairs and then when we moved the food bank to the Wren Pearson building, we also asked for a space large enough to house a clothing bank. Now we have everything imaginable in the clothing bank.

ANDERSON: It's donated used clothing?

CONRATH: Absolutely. There are even some new items that people throw in that they can't wear. There's every type of clothes imaginable for every age. Also we keep some aside for burn victims. They need them right now, we'd give them to them right now. The food bank is a room within our clothing bank.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: Run by Georgiana Smith. I didn't know if we got that on the other side or not.

ANDERSON: Well, we have it now. Good. So, she does the food bank?

CONRATH: She absolutely is in charge of the food bank.

ANDERSON: You do the clothing bank?

CONRATH: I'm in charge of the clothing bank.

ANDERSON: I see.

CONRATH: Any time I need help, I just plain ask for it, through the betas or whatever. We survived two floods.

ANDERSON: Oh, my.

CONRATH: We finally got all the holes patched up and hopefully we'll have a nice warm building for this winter. I would like to tell you about the Christmas Baskets.

ANDERSON: Yes.

CONRATH: I really felt a need for Christmas...a good Christmas for those in need. Probably because my folks always saw that even how what little money we had we had a good Christmas. So we make sure that the needy families are given a complete turkey dinner, clothing if needed, and toys and gifts. This is all put together by the three of us. Georgiana does the food...am I repeating myself?

ANDERSON: Hmm-mm.

CONRATH: Georgiana does the food...the stores in Cheney are awfully good at giving us discounts on the turkeys.

ANDERSON: Oh, that's good.

CONRATH: Lou Ferguson the clothing, and I'm in charge of the toys. The way this works, they called myself... usually it isn't the individual in need but maybe a nurse or a minister or teacher or whatever. We average anywhere from 24 to 34 a year, we put all this together and it's delivered a few days before Christmas.

ANDERSON: Do you take it out yourself?

CONRATH: No. I have my Santa Clauses, which the ministers of all the churches... are really good. If they themselves cannot deliver it, they find individuals who can.

ANDERSON: I see. So you do have someone dress up like Santa!

CONRATH: Uh...no.

ANDERSON: Oh, no, no. That's just what they're called, right. That's neat.

CONRATH: But you can see...I have delivered lots and if you could see the look on the recipients faces, it makes all that hard work worthwhile.

ANDERSON: Sure, sure.

CONRATH: It's really beautiful.

ANDERSON: That's a real joy.

CONRATH: Now, in the future I hope to start a baby furniture rental type thing. Not rental but loan. There's a need...

ANDERSON: Oh, sure there is.

CONRATH: Of this too, you know. We will be expanding I'm sure but for now that's pretty much it.

ANDERSON: That's good. That's exciting. [tape is stopped and then started again] Pat, you came to Cheney during the Depression. What can you tell me...what do you remember about that time? What stands out?

CONRATH: I can remember a period of eating oatmeal three times a day.

ANDERSON: Really?!

CONRATH: It wasn't really that bad for us because my father was pretty self sufficient. He had a cow and chickens and beef so actually food-wise it was not too bad for the foods.

ANDERSON: What was Cheney like then? We see pictures of people selling apples on the streets of New York. What was Cheney like then?

CONRATH: I think Cheney was not too bad off at all. I think because then everyone had gardens and there was a lot of trade. I'll trade a sack of wheat for thus and thus, you know. But actually I did not notice it in Cheney. I couldn't honestly tell you.

ANDERSON: Okay. You noticed it within your own family though, that things were a little tight.

CONRATH: Yes. Absolutely, and I imagine...of course I was so young. I imagine my folks had a big worry about where the next batch of clothes would come from and thus. But I never heard them complain too much at all after we moved to Cheney.

ANDERSON: How about World War II? What do you remember about World War II? You were in high school during those years, weren't you?

CONRATH: I remember there were not too many men around. I remember to help supplement the income I worked at the Shell service station.

ANDERSON: Did you?! What did you do at the Shell service station?

CONRATH: I did everything like...

ANDERSON: Did you pump gas?!

CONRATH: I pumped gas and I changed tires...

ANDERSON: Is that right?

CONRATH: Honestly, it was not difficult for a woman to find a job because there were just not that many males around at that particular time. It seemed very strange. Then we were collecting aluminum and various metals and there were ration stamps and that type of thing. Everyone was so worried about the war and anxious for it to be over with a lot of prayers going up at that particular time. But I really think living in Cheney protected us from a lot of...how should I say...problems that you would probably be faced in a big city like New York or Chicago. But we all did what we could and pulled together. I remember that too. I remember the people in Cheney were so great at when a crisis would arrive about pulling together.

ANDERSON: You talked about working in the service station which is unusual because it's a woman doing a man's job at that point in time. Now, were there other situations where other women working in those types of jobs?

CONRATH: Absolutely.

ANDERSON: When did that stop?

CONRATH: Well, it stopped as soon as the war was over.

ANDERSON: As soon as the war was over?

CONRATH: The young men started to return home. Of course we stepped down so that they would have something to do. Yes, a lot of women involve themselves in work that they would not ordinarily have been doing.

ANDERSON: What do you remember about the '50s?

CONRATH: What I remember is not too exciting for anyone else other than I was very, very busy raising three children. We were trying to keep our head above water. We had a happy time, but actually I really was tied up with raising children.

ANDERSON: That was the time for you and family, then?

CONRATH: Absolutely.

ANDERSON: Sure.

CONRATH: Absolutely.

ANDERSON: Now, thinking about the 60's...when we think about the '60s we often think of civil rights movements, the beginnings of the Vietnam War protesting and hippies and the beginnings of the women's movement. Tell me about the sixties in Cheney. What stands out?

CONRATH: Probably a lot of controversy. It was hard for Cheney to get used to changes. Changes were starting to take effect, you'll have to admit. It didn't...it did not...I don't think it affected Cheney a bit, other than it gave people something to talk and think about.

ANDERSON: When you say changes were happening and Cheney was slow to adjust to changes. Can you give me an example, for instance?

CONRATH: Well, I hope I'm speaking for all of Cheney but I think, you know, there's one reason you live where you live and that's because you love it, alright. I think Cheney wants Cheney to stay as it is. To think of anything that would change it drastically would not have been welcome in Cheney.

ANDERSON: Okay. Okay. I'm gonna ask you...as you look back over the years you've been in Cheney well, since 1934, what local events or issues stand out in your mind?

CONRATH: Local events or issues of what magnitude? [laughs]

ANDERSON: The magnitude is your...[laughing...] you decide the magnitude. What stands out when you think back about your time in Cheney, what kinds of things stand out?

CONRATH: Well, I think a lot of happiness, a lot of hard work. You know, [laughs] I really ...solving problems. I think that it's neat the way Cheney solves its problems. There was a little controversy with college vs. Cheney and nothing really exciting that I can even think about.

ANDERSON: Well, personally, you know, the food bank got off the ground and organized and the clothing bank got going...those two that you were involved in. Tell me about the college vs. the town. Has that been an ongoing thing?

CONRATH: Oh, yes, and it always will be. It's this way in any town that has a college. I think it's probably nothing to get too excited about. I think the college and Cheney are now working together better than they ever have and I think the college is good for us and vice versa.

ANDERSON: Okay. Let me ask you something else. Let me ask you what woman or women do you consider most influential in Cheney? Why don't you just give me a list of women you think are influential and why?

CONRATH: Well, I'd like to at the top of the list name a little lady that I admire very much and that is Marion Behr.

ANDERSON: Who had a grocery store, right?

CONRATH: Who lost a husband and a son and was courageously able to carry on after this great loss and raise a family and run her grocery store.

ANDERSON: She is really an amazing woman.

CONRATH: A super...I'd like to say college-wise. I think Nancy Kate Broadneck Phillips is probably a lady that I admire greatly.

ANDERSON: What has she done? I'm not familiar with her.

CONRATH: Nancy was a Home-Ec teacher at the college and has been very active in civic affairs... college. She has a true love of Cheney and has been here for years and years. Now, right at the moment, she retired to Dallas, Texas.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: But she's a person that I admire very, very much. It's really difficult. I think another lady that I really truly admire ... these ladies that have never asked for any recognition whatsoever but have stayed behind the scenes and done their thing, and I think another one is Clarisa Stewart who typed for the blind for years...or for the blind for years and years and years...

ANDERSON: Is that right?

CONRATH: I admire her very, very much. Yes.

ANDERSON: Marvelous contributions. [phone rings] What other women can you think of who've made their contributions to Cheney, [phone rings] were influential?

CONRATH: I think a lady [phone rings] that we lost not long ago, Woody Thelma Johnson [phone rings] was...had Cheney's best interests at heart and did [phone rings but is picked up before ring finishes] so much for Cheney. I think it's fresh enough that I think we're all well aware of what Woody did for Cheney.

ANDERSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Okay. Now, a lot of the things that you've done...This is the hard part...What of the things that you've done have been considered or would be considered women's projects? Helping the needy, helping the poor has for years been a role that women...have just naturally done. The food bank and the clothing bank have pretty much been women's projects. Then of course you worked with Sunday school too, is often a women's kind of project. How do you think men feel about women's projects?

CONRATH: Well, it's hard to say. I know how my husband feels about women's projects.

ANDERSON: Well, he's a man.

CONRATH: My husband feels that there is such a need. If he had the time, he'd probably be doing the same thing but he's the breadwinner in the family. I only worked for three and a half years and who else would do it? He's always told me to go out and do what you have to do. You talk about liberated women but that never was a problem in our family because he knew that I would do the thing that I was happy doing and I did. Who else would do these various things if women didn't do it? Don't you think that if men had more time they would be doing it?

ANDERSON: Maybe they would.

CONRATH: I think so.

ANDERSON: Maybe they would.

CONRATH: I really think so.

ANDERSON: I see...have you ever noticed any minority influence in Cheney?

CONRATH: None whatsoever. Of course Cheney has never had too many.

ANDERSON: That's right.

CONRATH: You know, really.

ANDERSON: Okay, do you think that women were important historically in the development of Cheney?

CONRATH: Oh, absolutely.

ANDERSON: How?

CONRATH: I think they were the backbone behind a lot of Cheney's development, I really do.

ANDERSON: Can you give me some for instances?

CONRATH: I think that even though there weren't any women on the city council or this or that um...there were still a lot of women that way back had their own groups and the men I'm sure asked how they felt about things. Don't you think that behind every man is a heck of a good woman?

ANDERSON: It's probably true! [laughs]

CONRATH: Oh, I mean ...gosh, I can't see that men could have done it alone. What Cheney has accomplished, sure it takes men and women.

ANDERSON: Tell me when you became aware of the women's movement and how it's affected you.

CONRATH: I became aware of it probably from the start. I've been very interested in it. I think they had some real good ideas, however it makes me angry to a degree. I think they're pushing too much. You've heard this over and over again, I believe if a woman does a man's job she should receive equal pay and that's as far as I go on this. I'm really disgusted with the whole thing. I really am.

ANDERSON: Could you expand on that a little?

CONRATH: I think they're pushing, I think they're creating constant problems and friction and I don't understand really why. You can be ... this living is geared so everyone can do what they wish and maybe and maybe there's a lot of things that I do not know but I can't see that anyone is holding women back. I really can't.

ANDERSON: Okay.

CONRATH: Maybe years ago when women were not able to vote. You know, then they had a ...room to squawk. But I think in this day and age, no. I think I'm disgusted.

ANDERSON: Okay. [tape is stopped then started again] Pat, you just told me something as we were talking after [laughs] we quit this tape. I had forgotten that you were woman of the year, is that right? When was that?

CONRATH:1981.

ANDERSON: They must have made a long list of things that you had accomplished. Do you remember what they said about you?

CONRATH: Mainly what we've been talking about that surprised me because I didn't think anyone was aware of what we were doing. But it was food bank, clothing bank, float, Christmas baskets...

ANDERSON: How do you feel about that?

CONRATH: Wow. I was shocked. I really was.

ANDERSON: Really?

CONRATH: It was rather embarrassing to me. You don't like to call attention upon yourself but it...I think it was one of the finest things that ever happened to me.

ANDERSON: Yeah. That's neat. I'd forgotten about that. I'm glad you reminded me.

CONRATH: Loved it. [tape is stopped]

>>>>>>>End of Interview<<<<<<<<