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Oral history interview transcript with Louise Prugh

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Mike Gray

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**LOUISE PRUGH
INTERVIEWED BY MIKE GRAY
EWU Women's Oral History Project
EWU 984-0094 #72
FEBRUARY 23RD, 1983**

[Editor's Note: Louise PRUGH: joined the faculty as an instructor in Home Economics in 1964. She retired in 1985 as Professor of Home Economics Emeritus. PRUGH: is an active member of the Spokane area 99's – a women's flight group.]

GRAY: This is Mike GRAY interviewing Louise PRUGH for the Cheney Women's Oral History Project. Her topic concerns working with airlines during World War II and the interior designing of various campus facilities. The date is February 23rd, 1983. Hello, my name is Mike GRAY:: How are you doing today?

PRUGH: Just fine.

GRAY: That's good. What do you think of this snowless weather?

PRUGH: Well, I'm rather disappointed because I enjoy skiing and it's made the winter a little longer without being able to ski.

GRAY: Oh, I see, well, I'm just the opposite, I like the warm weather. Do you mind if I call you Louise?

PRUGH: No, not at all.

GRAY: I'd like to start out with...can you tell me a little about your family and background?

PRUGH: Well, I grew up in Nebraska and then went to the University of Nebraska. Later, I went to Chicago. I worked at Marshall Field's Company for a while and then World War II started and I felt I should be a little more involved in the War effort, so I went to work for Trans World Airlines that had a contract with the War to fly airplanes overseas and I worked with them for five years. Do you want me to go on?

GRAY: I see, well, no, that's fine, the War was on and you just felt like you should do something, you wanted to get involved?

PRUGH: I felt...that's right, everybody in those days felt very strongly that they wanted to do their part for the war effort. My brothers and husband were all in the service and I felt I wanted to do my part.

GRAY: That's really interesting, it's...I don't know...it's different now. I suppose if our land was invaded now, it would probably be the same thing, except that with Vietnam, the climate is so different now than it was then. Everybody was get involved then, and now it's 'how can I get out of it'.

PRUGH: That is right, very true.

GRAY: Okay, I'd like to ask you what local events or issues most markedly stand out in your mind in the history of Cheney.

PRUGH: In Cheney? Well, I didn't move to Cheney until 1956. So, I just...

GRAY: Okay, tell me what events stand out in your mind most with your background, historically wise [sic].

PRUGH: Well now, do you want to revert back to World War II, or do you want to talk about...?

GRAY: Anything that you think that stands out.

PRUGH: Well, we started out talking about the War and those are very, very vivid years, then, of course, after the war, getting back into a normal work and going back to what we called civilian life took some readjustment. As far as Cheney, not living here at the time, I don't recall a lot. When I came here, it was Eastern Washington State College.

GRAY: Now, you say you flew.

PRUGH: Well, I started to work for the airlines, and they wanted all their employees that were interested to learn to fly, however they were thinking primarily in terms of the men and they were a little startled when I appeared and said that I would like to learn to fly also. Because I wanted to learn to fly, they gave me a chance, and I did. I learned to fly in 1946.

GRAY: Well, I think that's really interesting. Did they give you your own plane?

PRUGH: Well, no. We had to rent a plane to learn to fly in. It was small, a J-3 Cub.

GRAY: What was your job?

PRUGH: Well, actually, my job with the airlines...I had been flying...but I was training airplane, I mean the new employees I had the – an introduction course. All new employees that went through my program learned about the airline, the routes we flew, the type of airplanes we flew, and they were either going to be flight attendants or they were going to be ground personnel and I was in the training department. We told them how to write tickets and that sort of thing.

GRAY: I see. This was where?

PRUGH: It was in Washington, D.C.

GRAY: I see. Was it your job...did you just fly...?

PRUGH: I just learned to fly for fun. The reason they wanted employees to learn to fly was so that we could sell flying. In those days, many people were afraid to fly. Matter of fact, I guess there still are a few, but they wanted us to know enough about flying so we could talk intelligently about it.

GRAY: I see, okay.

PRUGH: But they didn't hire women for pilots in those days.

GRAY: Okay, so your job basically was to train. Did you ever like [sic] fly supplies to...?

PRUGH: No. I rode with planes that were supplying things, supplies and so forth, as a flight attendant.

GRAY: I want to move now back to your family background, how many did you grow up with?

PRUGH: I'm the oldest of four children. I have a sister and two brothers younger than I.

GRAY: Were you born in Washington, D.C.?

PRUGH: No, I was born in Nebraska.

GRAY: I see. Okay, now I would like to turn now to what women or what woman do you think was the most influential in your years in Cheney?

PRUGH: Well, I knew Cecil Dryden. She was on the faculty here when I first came and I was very interested in her and I had read her history of the University and Cheney. I think she was a very interesting woman.

GRAY: What did she do?

PRUGH: Well, she was a professor of English at Eastern when I came. *[Editor's Note: In 1956 Dryden was a professor of History. She was given emeritus status in 1957.]*

GRAY: Okay. Were there any more women that stood out in your mind as being influential?

PRUGH: Well, when I came here, the Home Economics Department had women faculty and they were the only women that I really knew. At that time Dr. Clarke was the Chairman of the Department of Home Economics. She was a very interesting woman. She had a doctorate in textile science. At that time, there weren't a lot of people that had that background. She

influenced me a great deal in my studying textiles. *[Editor's Note: Eugenia B. Clark was head of the Division of Applied Arts and the chair of the Department of Home Economics. She earned her A.B. at the University of Wisconsin, a B.S. in Education from SE Missouri State Teachers College, a B.S. in Education from the Stout Institute, an M.S. at Iowa State College, and a Ph.D. from Texas State College for Women. She joined Eastern's faculty in 1956.]*

GRAY: I was going to ask you next, this brought that up, are there a lot more women around now...around the campus...?

PRUGH: Oh, yes!

GRAY: Around Cheney...being involved and...?

PRUGH: I feel that there are more women on the faculty, there are women that are doing a great deal more on the campus that when I first came.

GRAY: I see. For what reasons, do you think, that the ladies influential...the ones that stand out in your mind as being influential? What reason, what gave them the influence, do you think?

PRUGH: I think the women that stand out are the women that wanted to promote women's equality...that women could do the job just as well, that one shouldn't think am I a woman or am I a man, but that I can do the job.

GRAY: Okay, what was the general reaction of men or your family towards women's or your projects

PRUGH: Well, I had a little trouble with the flying. My father, when he found out that I had soloed in an airplane was a little upset about it, primarily, not because I was a woman, but he didn't want me to get hurt. He thought that was a pretty dangerous thing for his daughter to do. I think people just didn't think about women flying. There were a few women that did fly supplies, that flew, that ferried some planes; Amelia Earhart, of course, had flown. We've all heard a lot about her. But, at that time, as far as women being pilots on airlines, well, it was not even considered.

GRAY: I understand. How did you react to these attitudes?

PRUGH: I accepted them because I grew up in the era when I was taught to be a lady and that it was important that I had children and a family, and I really wanted to! I have two sons that I have enjoyed seeing grow up.

GRAY: Now do you mind if I ask how old you were during World War II?

PRUGH: No, I was twenty, I have to stop and think (laughs), I was twenty two when it started I guess.

GRAY: So, you were really active? Now you already have told me that the attitudes have changed. Can you go further on that?

PRUGH: In what respect? I mean toward...

GRAY: Well attitudes toward women being...

PRUGH: Oh, I think the freedom that women have today...they can choose their career. I have some very interesting friends that are in the airforce. They fly the tankers. As a matter of fact, at Fairchild, I know a young lady who flies one of the tankers which refuels aircraft. She is the first women to fly in what is a combat unit. She doesn't actually fly a combat plane, but she flies the plane that refuels the combat plane.

GRAY: I see.

PRUGH: So, that would not have been possible during World War II.

GRAY: So...

PRUGH: The attitude toward women has changed a great deal. I have found no problem on the campus. Everybody accepts me as a professor and I am no different.

GRAY: Now I'd like to turn to minorities in Cheney when you were here. What minorities had influence in Cheney.

PRUGH: When I first came, I don't remember seeing very many. We...there were very few blacks on campus in 1960 when I first started here. There were very few Indian students. Then, I believe it was during the late 60's or early 70's perhaps, some blacks...they brought some students from Chicago and I remember they had a hard time adjusting to Cheney; not so much the University but the fact that Cheney was a small town and they were used to a big city and I think they were lonesome for the friends that they had left in Chicago and I think it was as hard for them as it was for us, because their training had been so different from the students that we were used to having.

GRAY: So there weren't many blacks in Cheney?

PRUGH: Not at the time, no.

GRAY: You can really think of any minorities that might have a lot of influence?

PRUGH: No. Since then, the Indians...I think I have had more Indian students and there are many more of them I notice on campus now, many more than there were when I first came.

GRAY: The attitudes are really changed a lot towards...?

PRUGH: Then, of course, in the last few years, the students from Iran and places like that...

GRAY: How much prejudice did minorities experience from your point of view in the early years you know when you were here in Cheney? Did they experience much?

PRUGH: I don't have any feeling that they did. Maybe they did, but I wasn't associated. The ones that were in my class...the students accept them and there didn't seem to be that much problem. I think they stayed with themselves more. I don't think there was as much social mixing as there is now.

GRAY: I see. Okay. I'd like to turn now to how were women important historically to the development of Cheney?

PRUGH: I think you should be talking to an historian rather than to me (laughs). Really.

GRAY: (laughs).

PRUGH: I have lived in Spokane, I have not lived in Cheney. Unfortunately I have not had a chance to know a lot of people. I have read about them. I don't know them personally. I think that there was a lady on the Board of Trustees that was very influential and right this minute I can't think of her name. I wish I had looked this up before you interviewed me (laughs).

GRAY: I see. Okay. Can you tell me what you found most fulfilling about your career.

PRUGH: Oh, I have thoroughly enjoyed my teaching at Eastern. I think working with the students. I think Eastern has a fine group of students. They've been an inspiration to me. They make me work harder because they're cooperative, they're bright. Really they're a joy to work with.

GRAY: How did you get started in textiles?

PRUGH: In teaching?

GRAY: Yes.

PRUGH: Well, after my career with the airlines...I want to tell you one other thing about that that was pretty interesting...right after World War II, TWA sent me to Europe and I spent a year in Geneva, Switzerland training European people to be employees of Trans World Airlines as they became a commercial airline. Well of course Geneva is pretty close to Paris, and so I went to Paris to the fashion openings and that was pretty exciting and of course, Paris has always been a leader of fashion, and I thought I'd be interested in that type of work, so I worked with Marshall Field and Company for a little while and so forth. Well, I was interested in that. Well, then my

husband was transferred to Spokane. He worked for the Crescent. My sons were in school and I needed something to do so I came out to Eastern primarily to get teaching certification. Dr. Clarke talked to me and she found out that I had worked with some of the larger stores and that I had a degree in Home Economics from University of Nebraska with a major in textiles. She needed someone else on the faculty so I was asked to serve on the faculty here. Because of my background in retail, I started the Fashion Merchandizing Program at Eastern and I don't have the dates in front of me, but I believe the first class was in about 1968.

GRAY: You started the Fashion Merchandizing...?

PRUGH: Program. Yes. Since then, it has grown considerably. We now have of half our courses are offered with the business school. Our students take about forty some hours in business and the rest are in Home Economics. They go to work in stores throughout the United States. I have some in Canada. It really worked out as a really nice program.

GRAY: That's really a credit to you. I know some Fashion Merchandise majors here and they all really like it. You graduated from where?

PRUGH: My first degree is from University of Nebraska.

GRAY: Then...?

PRUGH: Then I studied at Northwestern when I lived in Chicago. Also, one summer, I went to Southern California and then I had a master's in Education from Eastern. Wherever I had a chance to take a class or two, I have.

GRAY: Now when you were in Paris, was that after you graduated?

PRUGH: Oh yes, that was after World War II.

GRAY: Oh, I see. That must have been a lot of fun.

PRUGH: Oh, it was great! It was very exciting. As a matter of fact, I've gone back five times. I went back in '71 and '76 and '79. I have gone to the fashion openings when I go back because I think it's rather exciting to bring back pictures of what's going on in the fashion world for my fashion merchandizing students.

GRAY: Now is Paris, is that really the center of fashion? Is that where fashions come from?

PRUGH: I really think it still is. Of course, Italy and Spain and England, many countries are coming to the fore. This last year Japan had some very exciting fashions, but having been there as recently as 1979, I would say that Paris is still the fashion center. We all look to them and then take some of their ideas and copy some of them.

GRAY: Now I'd like to turn and find out what was most frustrating about your career.

PRUGH: That's a very difficult question without having time to think about it. I think I've been very fortunate in the fact that I've enjoyed it so much.

GRAY: Everything's gone pretty well?

PRUGH: It has really gone well. I'm trying to think where I'm sure I've had frustrations, but I've forgotten them.

GRAY: Well, is there anything at all you would change if you could do it over? Career wise?

PRUGH: Career wise, no I think I've been very fortunate in being able to really have a career with the airlines, then I had a career...I call it a career as a wife and mother and raising two sons and then to have been a professor for over 20 years. I think I've been very fortunate to have had these different experiences. They've really been rewarding.

GRAY: Do you fly anymore?

PRUGH: Oh yes. I'm current, as we say. I'm also a flight instructor and I do a little flying. Usually I have women that come to me who are afraid of flying and they want...their husbands fly in small aircraft and they want someone who is familiar with flying to take them up and help

them overcome the fear of a little airplane. Really, they are...if you respect the weather, if your airplane is in good mechanical shape, I don't think there's anymore risk with that than driving a car. I enjoy it. As soon as the weather gets a little better, I'll probably be flying. Maybe this weekend.

GRAY: Okay. Sounds like you're really busy. Can you tell me something about your farthest back historical memories, like World War II.

PRUGH: Oh, I think...you mean before that? The beginning of the war, that was very vivid.

GRAY: Pearl Harbor was a shock to you?

PRUGH: Pearl Harbor. That was very shocking. Then I remember President Roosevelt and how he was re-elected and I remember his Fireside Chats and I remember, well all of the difficult times during the War. Then the young people's adjusting to life after the war.

GRAY: That's what's really strange because I look at Pearl Harbor and everything that happened as history, as you know, it doesn't...but as I get older, I realize, that wasn't very long ago...

PRUGH: That's right.

GRAY: There were so many people that lived through it and it makes it just so much more real.

PRUGH: Oh, absolutely.

GRAY: Can you tell me which President had the most affect on your life?

PRUGH: Well, I suppose, probably President Hoover because my father was on the Federal Reserve Board in Washington, D.C. under President Hoover and I remember meeting him when I was very young.

GRAY: Oh, that's really interesting. Did your father know him?

PRUGH: Yes, President Hoover appointed my father to the Federal Reserve Board.

GRAY: Wow!

PRUGH: So, I went to school in Washington, D.C. at an early age.

GRAY: Which President had the most affect on Cheney would you say?

PRUGH: Well, I think that's hard to answer, except to say that I was here at Cheney when President Kennedy was shot and of course, we have Kennedy Library, so I suppose...

GRAY: Was that before he was shot?

PRUGH: That was after he was shot, but it was...I doubt if the library would have been named Kennedy Library except it was being built just at the time, and as a tribute to Kennedy [sic]. I was on campus at that time and it was another very...a date that I remember very well, sadly.

GRAY: Yes. Now, the Depression. How old were you during the Depression?

PRUGH: Well, the Depression...

GRAY: Do you...?

PRUGH: Yes, I remember it. I wasn't very old and of course, the fact that my father was appointed to a position in Washington, D.C., we probably didn't feel it as much as many people, but I remember there were a lot of people out of work, and of course, in those days, we didn't have unemployment and social security, those things and I remember there were many people that were having a very hard time.

GRAY: I see. Well, I'm about at the end of my questions. Is there anything that you might like to add that might be important for historical value, in your years at Cheney?

PRUGH: Well, I've seen three Presidents at Cheney. Dr. Patterson was President when I came, and then Dr. Shuck, and now Dr. Frederickson, so I've served under three different Presidents at the university. I've certainly seen it come from a state college to a university.

GRAY: Were you happy to see that?

PRUGH: Oh yes. I was very happy because we are a university, and I think for the students sake, to have a degree from a university is very nice. I think it's become more important in Spokane, I think. Our Spokane Center, I'm quite excited about that, having lived in Spokane, and they have Gonzaga and Whitworth. I'm glad to have Eastern have a downtown campus.

GRAY: So you're all for the expansion to Spokane.

PRUGH: I am because I think it will make people more aware of what we really do out here.

GRAY: I agree.

PRUGH: I'm very excited. I think the building they have is absolutely beautiful. I admired it as a building. Bruce Walker, who designed it, I've known and have seen other buildings of his. I think it's a beautifully designed building.

GRAY: Now, you've been in Cheney how many years?

PRUGH: I started out as a student here in '60. I have worked on the faculty since '64. I was a graduate T.A. and things before that.

GRAY: About how much has it grown since you've...?

PRUGH: Oh, tremendously.

GRAY: Has it doubled?

PRUGH: As a matter of fact...oh, I'm sure the enrollment has more than doubled and the number of faculty.

GRAY: Well, that's all I have then. Are there any questions or anything else you'd like to ask me?

PRUGH: Well thanks, it's been an interesting experience. I've certainly enjoyed chatting with you.

GRAY: Well, I sure thank you for your time, and thank you again.

PRUGH: Thank you.