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Guild, Margaret oral history interview

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Interview with Catherine Margaret Cram Guild by Mariah Pfeiffer

Interviewee

Guild, Catherine Margaret Cram

Interviewer

Pfeiffer, Mariah

Date

July 18, 2006

Place

Livermore, Maine

ID Number

MC 101-07

Format

Audiocassette

Biographical Note

Margaret Guild was born in 1929 and grew up in her family home in Livermore Falls, with her grandparents, parents, sister, and brother. Her father worked briefly for Livermore Fall's paper mill, but made a living as a butcher. Guild married when she was eighteen. Her husband worked in the paper mill until retiring in 1987. Guild lived through two floods and two strikes in Livermore Falls.

Scope and Content Note

This interview covers information about Guild's family: their biographical details and their relationships; poverty; Guild's relationship to the Androscoggin River and tributaries: the floods of 1936 and 1987, playing in streams and ponds, water quality, and her impetigo infection; her experience in school; downtown Livermore; strikes at the International Paper Company mill; riverfront property development; and railroad tracks: playing on them and visits from tramps.

General Notes

The recording quality is good. Mariah Pfeiffer omitted large portions of the interview in her transcription. The omissions are indicated in the transcription.

ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Margaret Guild: My name is Catherine Margaret Cram, that was my maiden name. Catherine is spelled C-A-T-H-E-R-I-N-E.

Q: And Margaret?

MG: M-A-R-G-A-R-E-T

Q: And how do you spell your last name?

MG: Guild, Cram, my maiden name, C-R-A-M.

Q: Okay. Great.

MG: And my name now is Guild. A lot of people call it Guilde or Guild or whatever. And I was born November 14, 1929.

Q: And where'd you grow up, Margaret?

MG: I grew up in Livermore Falls.

Q: Livermore Falls, in that house you just showed me?

MG: Until I was eighteen and I got married. And I have a sister, and I did have a brother who passed away.

Q: And they are younger, older?

MG: I'm the baby. My brother was the oldest, my sister, and then myself. There was two and a half years difference between all of us.

Q: Were you close, growing up with them?

MG: Oh yes, oh gosh, yes. They were my friends.

Q: That's great.

MG: And my father's name was Fred Smith Cram.

Q: What did your father do for a living?

MG: He was a butcher, a meat man. He delivered meat to different people, you know he had a route, a meat route, and he also slaughtered, he had a slaughter house that he went to. And my mother's name was Olive Norton, N-O-R-T-O-N, Olive Norton, and they were wonderful parents. Especially my mother. She was a sweetheart.

Q: In Livermore Falls, when you were growing up, were you living right by the river?

MG: Yup, right by the river. There was my house, and then a road and then the river. We could look out the window and see the river.

Q: What's the first thing you remember about it?

MG: Well, actually, I guess the first thing I remember was probably the flood, because I was seven years old. The flood came in our house, and it was three feet deep to the windowsills. We had moved everything to the second floor, my folks had – I don't really remember them moving it – everything, all the furniture was moved to the second floor. And my brother and I was told by my mother, because there was a railroad track right directly, like here's the barn, the big barn, railroad tracks went right by the corner of the barn. We were told to go out by the barn and go up the railroad track, to get away from the rising water, because they had some things they had to finish up before the water would get there. So my brother took my hand and we walked up the railroad tracks to get away from the rising water, up to higher ground. And my sister had already gone on, she was going to stay with another family up on higher ground, but my brother and I had to stay in this particular house. And I remember the thing about it, because we always had sheets on our mattresses and so forth, there was no sheets on the mattress.

Q: Why not?

MG: I don't know. They were awfully poor, I knew they was poor.

Q: The house you were staying in?

MG: Yes, the house that we stayed in, and I thought that was so strange, and that's one of the things I remember. We had pillows and things, but no sheets.

Q: How long did you have to stay there?

MG: Well, we only stayed there probably a week, a week and a half, something like that, until the water subsided and my folks were able to clean the house. They took a hose, I remember, and hosed it all out, because there was mud like inches deep, and filth and everything, dirt, dead fish and all kinds of stuff, debris and stuff that had come

into the house. And so that really impressed me.

Q: I imagine, yeah.

MG: I remember that. And it was kind of scary to walk up those, you know. My mother says, now you go ahead with Sherm, that was my brother's name, and she said, you go ahead and go and we'll be along just as soon as we get everything upstairs. So I did. And then after awhile I was, I missed my dolls, because I was a great doll lover, I had dolls and I had doll carriages, doll cribs and everything, and I said to my mother, I miss my dolls. So they took a rowboat and they went in on the water right to the foot of the steps, because we had like a shed and it had steps that went up to the second floor, and they went to the steps right in through the door and they got my doll for me. And then I was happy, I remember that. That's really about the only thing I can remember, and I do have pictures of when the flood subsided, with the big huge ice cakes that came down.

Q: What time of the year was this?

MG: I believe it was in March.

Q: March, it must have been pretty cold water?

MG: It was cold. It was cold, and I think it was in March.

Q: That was in 1936?

MG: Nineteen thirty-six. I was seven years old. You'll see when we get over there, I'll show you. The river has an island, and you can see the island from the road. Here's the house and here's the road, there's the river, and the island is just a little ways out. And there was this man, his name was Mitty Therrien (*sounds like*). He had a herd of goats out there on the island, I don't know how many, and there was an old barn, and when the flood came – of course he had gotten the goats off the island – and when the flood came, it took the old barn right along with it and the barn was no more, it went downstream. So that was kind of interesting. His name was Mitty Therrien, and I believe he owned the island. I'm sure he doesn't own it – well, he's dead now anyway. I don't know how come he owned the island. I don't know that.

Q: So this flood must've been pretty widespread?

MG: Oh, yes, it was. I'll show you the vicinity that it was, when you get over there. And then, this was another time, when it was not the flood time but a little further on down, my sister got into a rowboat – well, first of all, from the island to the mainland there was a metal cable, that's what it was, and Mitty, this Mitty Therrien, would take a rowboat and go over to see his goats, and he would pull himself over with the cable in

his rowboat. And I think he was a pretty brave man, because the river there was quite, you know, had a lot of current at that time, and so that kind of impressed me, I remember, you know, going over.

So my sister, her name was Rosanna, she probably was, oh, I'm just guessing, maybe twelve or thirteen or something like that, she and three others, two boys and another girl, they started to go over on the island, pulling themselves over. And my mother was frantic, because she always told us, never go near the water, don't go near the water, because its very dangerous. And I can remember seeing her crying, because she went down, Sherman, my brother, told my mother that they were down there on the water, and she went down, of course, and she was just frantic, she was crying. You come back in here, she said, don't you know you could drown. She just was so upset. Scared her to pieces. Well, of course that never happened again. And I don't really remember what happened to the goats. I suppose that they were brought in safely, before the flood, I would like to think.

And in the winter there was like, we called it the bog. It wasn't the actual river, but it was like an inlet and it was clear water, it didn't have waves or currents or anything. We used to go skating on the bog. And we would build a big fire at night, and all the kids in the neighborhood would come, we'd skate, have hot dogs. That was kind of fun. Of course, I was older when I did that, older than seven.

Q: All the neighborhood kids would get together?

MG: Get together, yeah. We'd go skating. We had a great time.

Q: Does the water still freeze frozen?

MG: The water would stay frozen, because it didn't have a current, because it was calm, like an inlet. Here was the river and this was, like over here, I suppose it drifted over there, you know, the water. Well, let's see, what else? I'm going ahead a little bit now. In 1987 we had another flood, and at that time my sister was living there, my brother had passed away, and my sister was living there, and her husband had passed away, so she was living in the old house. And the water came up, and for the second time we moved all their furniture – at that time I was married – we moved all her furniture up to the second floor again, and I walked the railroad track for the second time in my life to get away from the rising water. Only this time I walked up with my husband, not my brother of course, so that was pretty good. But the water at that time only came into the cellar and to the front steps, it didn't come in the house. It flooded the cellar, but it didn't come in the house for the second time.

Q: That's lucky.

MG: Yeah, that's very lucky.

Q: Was that flood a little less scary because you were older then?

MG: It was a little less scary because, of course, I was older. I had my husband and I was trying to help my sister and so forth. My grandfather and grandmother lived upstairs when I was a little girl, and then, of course, there was us three children that came along, so after my grandfather – no, I got that wrong, my grandfather and grandmother lived downstairs, we lived upstairs. So then, when my mother started having all of us children, we moved downstairs and my grandfather and grandmother moved up, because there seemed to be a little more room downstairs for all of us.

Q: So, did they stay during the flood and help out with your parents, or did they walk up railroad tracks too?

MG: Well, you know, I don't remember. No, my grandfather died in 1934. And I don't seem to remember much about my grandmother, but she must've been there, must've taken care of her somehow, I'm sure. But I don't remember that. But anyway, I can remember my grandfather would give us little tiny boxes of raisins, and that's about the only thing I remember about him, but my brother and sister always said, which was true, that he had a wooden leg. He got kicked by a horse when he was young and he had a wooden leg. But my grandmother lived to be, oh gosh, she lived to be eighty-nine years old, and she lived with us, she lived upstairs with us after my grandfather died. She lived there quite a while.

Q: You mentioned that your mother always told you to stay away from the water. Why was that, exactly?

MG: Well, because the water was filthy dirty in those days, you know. All the sewers, everybody's sewer went into the river, by pipes, from the toilet right directly into the river. And we would dump our rubbish over the bank, because everybody did, you know. It was just a filthy river, and that's what people did, they just threw their rubbish, bag after bag of rubbish in the water, because that was the thing to do.

Q: Wow.

MG: So, no wonder it was filthy, huh?

Q: Yeah, I guess so.

MG: Well, I told you about the rat, the rat coming up through the pipe.

Q: How did that happen?

MG: Well, of course the pipe, you know, the pipe that went down to the river, like I said, went directly from the toilet into the river. And he was a big old river rat, and he just saw that opening and he just thought he'd swim up and see what was going on.

Q: Now, did you see it come out of the toilet?

MG: I saw it, and there it was, clawing to get out of the toilet. I lifted up the cover and there he was, I couldn't believe my eyes. And he was going like this, you know, trying to get out of the toilet. And I went out in the kitchen, and the first thing I could think of was a big spoon, you know, and I went in and I conked him on the head. And this, of course, was when I was a teenager. And he looked like he was, you know, hurt or something, so I flushed the toilet and down he went. But it plugged up the whole system, so my father had to get someone to unplug it, or unplug it himself.

Q: How did that work, how did things not come up more often?

MG: Well, I don't know, I really don't. Perhaps it was low water and he saw the open pipe or something, I don't know. That didn't happen again. Not that I know of.

Q: He learned, right?

MG: And I can remember my father having a Model T Ford. I suppose it was, I was born in '29, it was probably a '29, I would say. It was black, and he painted it by hand, with a brush. Of course, I was just a little girl and he'd say, don't get near the Ford, don't get near, you know. He didn't want me to get into the paint. And I can remember that pretty clear. They don't do that, they don't paint cars by hand anymore. He had a brush. Well, let's see. You want to know about school?

Q: Sure, I'd love to know about school.

MG: I went to a one-room schoolhouse, not too far away from the house, probably a quarter of a mile. I can take and show you where the spot was. Of course, they used it after a while, when they closed the school, they used the school for like Pythian Sisters and meeting house and so forth. But after a while it needed a lot of repairs, so they tore it down. Well, when you went to school, you were lucky if you had someone that was sweet on you, because that's what they called it in those days, if you had a boy that was sweet on you. What he would do, he would chase you around the schoolhouse, that's how come you knew that he was sweet on you.

Q: Did you have a boy?

MG: I had a boy that was sweet on me, and he chased me around, and oh, I thought that was the greatest thrill, you know, have somebody sweet on you. And my mother would always make me wear these long cotton stockings, with some sort of a little

garter belt, I remember, because she didn't want me to be cold, she didn't want any of us to be cold, you know. And I used to wear these long stockings, and I hated them. So, this boy that was chasing me, he told my sister – of course, she was older, she had gone on to a different school – and when she got off the school bus he met her. He told her that I had rolled my stockings way down to my ankles. And so, she went home and told my mother. Well, I didn't do that again.

Q: Did you get in trouble?

MG: Probably I did. I remember I didn't do it again. And the schoolhouse had two doors, one on this side and one on this side, and this is where the girls lined up and this is where the boys lined up. And the teacher would come out and ring the copper bell, when the recess was over, and we'd line up and march in, first the boys and then the girls, and we'd go in and get a drink of water. The sink that we had was black, was a black sink, and we had little cups on hooks up here, up over the sink, and they were little tin cups and they had our names on each and every one with adhesive tape. And we had cold water only, and we would always get some water when we came in from recess, that was the thing to do.

When we were out at recess, down over the bank in the back, there was a little brook called Red Water Brook, and that eventually would run into the river. So it was clean, the water at that time was clean, because it hadn't come to the river yet. And in the winter we could go on it, if it was frozen, just a little section down behind the school.

Q: Walking on it?

MG: We could walk on it. But in the summer, when it was not frozen, the teacher wouldn't let us go near it because she didn't want us to get into the water.

Q: Fall in?

MG: It wasn't very deep, but we had to stay away from it, I remember that.

Q: What was the town of Livermore like when you were growing up?

MG: Well, it was a nice little town. We had a ten cent store, we had Coolidge's, which was a dry goods store, and we had two hardware stores. And we had band concert one night a week, and we would love to go to the band concert as we got older. And we would have ice cream cones. That was a big thrill, that was a big treat, five cents would be the ice cream cones, or ten cents for the large ones.

Q: Did you go for the large ones?

MG: Usually did. We were lucky to get the ten cents. And, let's see, what else did

they have for stores. They had a couple of old garages, right there in town, and people could take their cars, get their tires and so forth. We had the Shy School, that I went to, and we had a primary school in town, in Livermore Falls – I'm talking about Livermore Falls, not the town of Livermore.

Q: Right. That's fine.

MG: They're two different towns. That was the Shy School that I went to, which was sub-primary, first and second, and when you got to third grade you went uptown. That was the big thing, going on the bus. And I think it was third, fourth, and fifth, and then you went to a different school, you went to grammar school after that. And then, of course, you went on to high school. It was a nice little town, it really was. It was quiet and didn't really have too much going on. They tell me, I don't remember it, but they tell me one time the bank got robbed.

Q: Oh, really?

MG: And that was really something. And one of the lawyers in town chased the robbers. I don't know how far he went. He chased the robbers, and I really don't know what happened after that. But that was a big thing in town, bank robbery.

Q: Did most people work here in Livermore, or Livermore Falls?

MG: Yes, a lot of people worked in the mill, International Paper Company. My father worked in the mill. And I can remember them telling that he'd bring home thirteen dollars a week.

Q: That's pretty good money, right?

MG: Well, I can't tell you that, I don't know. Probably not. Probably, at the time, that probably was fairly good money. And of course, they kept getting raises, you know. And there was a strike going on, but I don't remember too much about that. I think that was before I was born. I think it was 1921. There was a big strike, and the town people never got over that strike.

Q: What do you mean by that?

MG: Well, there was a lot of bitterness, you know, how they went on a picket line and all that stuff. I mean, if you go on a picket line you're a scab, you know. Even years and years down the road that was still, that was a terrible thing to do, go on a picket line and be a scab.

Q: Now, was your dad part of that?

MG: I don't think so. I don't think he went back as a scab. I think he waited until the strike was over and then, of course I never heard anything about that, that was before I was born. But there was a lot of bitterness, and of course, there was another strike, too, in 1987, there was another strike, and my husband was the one that was, well, you know, he retired just before the strike.

Q: Okay, so he just missed out on that.

MG: He just missed it. I wanted to go back to the school and tell you about those little cups. We thought it was such a novelty to have them. It was so thrilling, to have our names on those cups, they were little tin cups, just about this big, and they had a little handles. And we only had cold water, and we had a wood stove for heat and the teacher would put wood in the stove. Apparently, somebody would bring the wood to the school, I would guess, I don't really know. We played games in those days.

Q: What kind of games?

MG: With all the kids in the neighborhood, we'd play Red Light. You ever hear of Red Light?

Q: Yes, still play it.

MG: And Simon Says, and marbles, we played a lot of marbles, and we'd skate and we'd slide with sleds and things. We had a radio, which we thought was wonderful, you know. We'd gather around the radio at night after dark, and we'd listen to all the programs. Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy, that was one. And The Guiding Light, that was a soap opera. And Stella Dallas, oh, it was wonderful. And The Shadow Knows. And to take a bath, we had this great big round tub we'd get in, and we'd heat the water on the stove, and usually Sunday nights we'd take a bath. And the rest of the time we'd take sponge baths, we'd have one just once a week. Imagine, just once a week.

Q: I used to do sponge baths when I was a little, too.

MG: You did?

Q: Yup.

MG: We'd ask my father for some money to go to the movies, as we got older, you know, and it cost twenty five cents to go the movies. And usually they had what they called a serial in the afternoon. It was like a program that was, it would be one part on this Saturday, and then they would leave it in a very exciting place, and the following Saturday we'd go and there would be another segment to that film before. It was so much fun to go to the movies. It was twenty-five cents, and then after a while in went to

thirty five, I remember. That's about what we did, was go to the movies. We were lucky if we went once a week, and we kind of had to beg for some money, because my father was kind of tight. He'd say, well, do you think money grows on trees? So that was kind of interesting. My mother used to like to get everybody all together that she could and take this great big truck – someone would drive, I expect it was my father, I don't really remember – and we'd go to the coast at least once or twice a year. And that was a big treat, I'll tell you.

Q: Whereabouts?

MG: Oh, we'd go to Rockland and Bailey's Island, and we'd always take a picnic, take a great big watermelon and, oh, that was such a big treat. At Christmas time we'd hang our stockings, and most of the time we'd get oranges and apples to help fill up the stocking, and we'd get some treats. We were quite poor. Everybody was poor in those days. People didn't know it, you know, because everybody was poor. But I always had plenty to eat, and plenty to wear. My mother was a good seamstress and she would make me pretty skirts and tops and things, you know. And I remember one time she made me a black taffeta skirt with a great big wide waistband. It was pretty. It was beautiful. And a long sleeve satin white blouse. I thought I was the most beautiful creature on earth. I got a lot of compliments on that.

Then, another time, I remember, I wasn't quite so pleased. She made me a bathing suit out of wool. It was called wool mill felt, pulpwood felt, that's what it was called, and she dyed it a green, a dark green. And when I come out of the water, from going swimming, of course, which we didn't do very often, you know, because we didn't, well, money was scarce and we didn't have a lot of money to spend for gas and stuff, but once in a while we'd go swimming.

Q: Swimming at the coast?

MG: No. Well, we'd actually go swimming at the coast. But at the little ponds around here. And she wanted me to wear that bathing suit. When I came out of the water, you can imagine how heavy it was.

Q: Made out of felt?

MG: Made out of felt

Q: Wow.

MG: It was pretty heavy, I remember that. And once in a while, or maybe a couple of times a year, if we were lucky, we'd hire a cottage down by the coast. And we thought that was great fun, because my mother just loved the coast. So, if we were lucky we did that once or twice a year.

Q: When you went swimming in the little ponds, that was right around here?

MG: Uh-huh.

Q: Were those cleaner in those days?

MG: Oh yes, they were all clean, yes. We wouldn't have gone in if they weren't clean. My mother wouldn't let us, of course.

Q: How could you tell which parts were clean and which were dirty?

MG: Oh, well, my folks knew which ponds were clean. They always told us, this is a nice clean lake. In fact, this lake today, you could come over here and go swimming. My father was the first one – I don't know if you saw that little house, I'll show it to you, right down there. Can you see the house, as you drove in? That spot, right there, is the spot that my father had a first, he was the one that had the first cottage on this side of the lake. It's not that building. That old original building is gone, but when I was about thirteen, we used to come over here and go camping in the summer.

And I wanted to tell you a little bit about my grandfather. I guess in those days, if you owned a lot of property, you didn't really want your neighbors to know how much you owned because, well, it was just your secret. So he apparently owned quite a bit of land around the old house, that I'm talking about, and I guess in those days he was considered to have money, but not on today's standards, of course. But, because when we went to, after my mother and father passed away, and my grandfather and grandmother, my sister and I and brother had to go and take care of things, because the place was left to us, you know. And we had to go and try to find who owned what and get things straightened out, warranty deed and all that. We had a heck of a time to do it, because he hadn't registered these places that he'd owned, these different properties, and we had a heck of a time, but we finally got it straightened out. And my father was a little bit like that, he loved to have a wad of money in his pocket. And come to find out, they would be all one dollar bills. But he loved to impress people, thinking that, you know, that he wanted them to think that he had a lot of money. Isn't that funny?

Q: Yeah, that's really funny.

MG: Nowadays, you wouldn't want to have this great big wad, you know, take it out and show people.

Q: Yeah. People would take notice.

MG: That's right. But that's the way he was. And I don't really think he had a lot of money, but I guess my grandfather, in those days – according to – I guess he was

pretty well off.

Q: Did he own property right around here?

MG: No, not around this section, but over near the old house, around by by the (*unintelligible*). To go back to school – I'm kind of going back and forth.

Q: That's quite all right.

MG: The toilet that we had, I guess, must've been some sort of a chemical toilet, because you could go in and flush it, but, it made a terrible noise, used to scare me to death. I was afraid I was going to get sucked right in there. And I remember one time, it was in the front of the class, because the teacher would always make us get up and make a little circle and read, in front of the class, we had to read our little book aloud. And, oh, I had to go to the bathroom so bad, I had to go just something terrible. And this is the way we raised our hands, we would go like that, and we'd put up number one, that was the pee, and number two. Isn't that's funny?

Q: Like a code.

MG: Like a code. I don't know why the teacher had to know that.

Q: Yeah, that's your business.

MG: But anyway, I was going like this, you know, I put my hand up, number one, and I had to go really, really bad. Really bad. And she says, now, you're all right, you can wait until we get done. Finally, you know what happened, I wet my pants. I was so embarrassed. With all those kids in school, it was so embarrassing. And I don't know how, but my mother, I don't know that she must've had to tell her. I can't remember if there was a telephone in the school. There must've been, because my mother came with some dry clothes anyway, and I stayed in school, but it was pretty embarrassing.

Q: Yeah, I imagine. Happens to those little kids.

MG: My father used to hay a lot, and he'd hay the fields around the river. Because we had animals, we had a couple of cows and we had chickens, and I think we had a pig, if I remember right. We had a horse at one time. It was a very small farm. And the barn was quite big, but, I guess you'd say it was a small farm. He would put the hay in the back of the truck, in the back of a pick up truck, as I remember. And the truck would go forward like this, and this great big thing from the barn would come down and pick up the hay and put it up there somehow. And he had to drive the truck back and forth, because it was connected on a pulley, some kind of a pulley. And I remember, I used to love to go out and stand on the running board of the old truck. I thought that was so much fun, stand on the running board. And one time I put my foot down, and he run

over my toe. And I didn't want to tell him because I was afraid to get scolded. And it didn't break my toe or anything, because it sand underneath it, and he was going very slow. I never did that again.

Q: Learned pretty quick.

MG: And I remember sitting on the porch, with my family, with my grandfather and grandmother, and we had pictures taken, all of us on the porch when the kids were little. So that was good, and I wished, I felt so bad, I've been hunting high and low for those pictures. But if I ever find them and you're still around, I'll show them to you.

Q: Okay, that sounds great.

MG: That's all I think I've got written down, but if there's something you'd like to ask me.

Q: Yeah, I've got a couple of questions, actually. One thing was, you mentioned that both your father and your husband had worked for the mills.

MG: Yes.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about what that was like for them, and what they told you about that?

MG: Well, I don't remember too much about my father coming home, except that he would come home tired. He always took his lunch in a dinner pail, they called it a dinner pail, and he worked on the beaters. And I think he was fairly content. And then, after awhile of course, he didn't work in the mill anymore, he would run the meat cart.

Q: Right, right. How long did he work in the mill?

MG: Well, I don't know. I can't tell you, I guess, how long he worked in the mill.

Q: Did he start doing the haying on your farm after he worked in the mill, or is this -

MG: He did that in conjunction.

Q: In conjunction, okay. That must've been tough work.

MG: Yeah, it was. But, of course, we only had a couple of cows. It wasn't like we had had a big whole herd.

Q: Okay. Right, right.

MG: Yes, my husband work in the mill, for, oh gosh, he worked in the mill for well over twenty years.

Q: What was he doing there?

MG: He was a millwright.

Q: What exactly does that mean?

MG: Well, it has to do with maintenance. He was kind of like a troubleshooter. If something happened to the machines or whatever, you know, he and some other folks would try to fix it, (*unintelligible*).

Q: Did he enjoy his job?

MG: I think he did. He used to get awfully tired. He had a heart attack in the mill and he had to have open heart surgery, but he was able to go back to work. He lived for twenty years after he had open heart surgery, so he did good. My father also had a heart attack, and that's what he died of. And my mother was in an automobile accident, she died. She was a widow of course at that time, and she and two other ladies had gone to a like an old fashioned dance, and this drunk person ran into her, and she was in a coma for five weeks. And the lady that was in the middle, she was driving, and the lady that was in the middle didn't get hurt at all. The lady that was on the passenger side, she died, too. Two on the outside.

Q: I'm really sorry to hear that.

MG: That was in 1965. Well, let's see, my sister and I, to this day, are close friends. She's my best friend. We chum around together a lot, she's a widow also.

Q: She did all the same things growing up that you did?

MG: She did all the same things I did, except that she didn't care for dolls. Not her. She was kind of a tomboy, and she was also kind of klutzy. She fell down the stairs one time, I remember that. In a plate of butter. My mother had a plate of butter and she was taking it out into the cooler, out to the shed, and my sister was up those same shed stairs that I was telling you about, where my father went to get the doll, and somehow she tripped and down she came, landed right in my mother's arms.

Q: In the butter?

MG: In the butter. And she was always falling, you know.

Q: Does she still fall?

MG: She's still quite a klutz. She broke her toe not too long ago, a couple years ago, she did. And my brother was a real good brother, he was very protective. And, oh, we had our little squabbles, like any other kids do, but as a rule we got along good together. I'm sorry my voice is so crackly.

Q: Oh no, its fine. Clear as a bell, it's good.

MG: So, that was my childhood, growing up. And the river, the river smelled. Oh, it smelled terrible, but we got used to it.

Q: You did?

MG: Oh, yes, I mean, that was just the river, that's part of life.

Q: So, you didn't notice it after a while?

MG: We didn't notice it. I mean, we might smell it a little bit, but we'd say, well. It had its days that it would smell worse, like on foggy days, and rainy days you could smell it more. You can't smell it now, you cannot smell the river. Up to Rumford, it must be real relief for them because, oh, it was terrible up there, Dixfield-Rumford. Have you ever been up there?

Q: No, but I'm going up there soon.

MG: You're going up there. Well, you won't smell anything now, but it was, oh, it was terrible up there.

Q: Did you go up to Rumford a lot?

MG: Well, not when I was little, but later years. It was terrible, it was almost unbearable.

Q: Why was it so much worse up there?

MG: I don't know. There was a mill, of course, up there. There was also a mill here in Livermore Falls. I don't know why it was so bad, it was just unbearable. And I can imagine the people today are pretty relieved, because they don't smell it.

Q: Right. I'd imagine as well. So you've seen a lot of change go on with the river.

MG: I have. I've seen a lot of change. And the river, of course, is wonderful because its so much cleaner now. People catch fish out of there.

Q: Do they?

MG: I'm not sure whether they eat the fish, but they catch a lot of fish.

Q: Did anyone go fishing when you were younger?

MG: No, because, oh no, because the currents and everything was dangerous. We didn't go near, it except that one time. I waded. I waded, and got impetigo. I had big sores all over my arms and my legs. Oh, it was terrible.

Q: What exactly is impetigo?

MG: Well, it's like I said, it's great big sores, it just spreads all over you, some of them are that big. And I had scars for a long, long time all over my legs. The only thing I remember they used to do for me was give me sulphur, and that was about the only drug that they had in those days. That I can remember. Of course now, they have penicillin and they have this and that and the other. And the nurse, the town nurse would come and change my bandages, you know, every other day or so. I had to stay out of school, I was so bad.

Q: For how long?

MG: Oh, gosh, I had to stayed out of school a whole year. I took my studies home, and I passed. My brother had impetigo, too, because I guess he went along with me, but not as bad as me. If only I had gone home and told my mother what I had done, she probably would've bath my skin right away quickly, and maybe I wouldn't have got impetigo. But of course, being a little girl, I was probably, I don't know, maybe seven, maybe six, I don't really remember.

Q: Is that caused by some of the waste that was going in there?

MG: Filth in the river.

Q: From the sewage system, or?

MG: Everything.

Q: Everything else.

MG: The rubbish that everybody put over the banking, and no telling what was in the rubbish.

Q: Did you know other kids that got diseases?

MG: No, I didn't know. And I don't remember anybody else doing that. No, I would seem to be the only one.

Q: The only brave one.

MG: The only brave one, or the only stupid one, whatever.

Q: Also, I was curious that you mentioned your bathing suit was made out of pulpwood felt?

MG: Yes, I think it was called, wish I could remember how they called it. Pulp felt, it was felt. But it was to do with the mill, I know. It came by the yard, and apparently my mother had bought some from the mill. Or perhaps they gave it to her, I really don't know. But it was from the mill.

Q: One of the products they were making up there?

MG: Apparently. I was so little that I can't tell you too much about that. Let's see, what else. Anything else you can think of to ask me?

Q: Well, I read about the Clean Water Act in '72, and I was wondering if you had ever noticed any changes right around that time because of that law?

MG: Well, I don't know as I can be specific, but over the years I've noticed there's a lot of, it even looks cleaner when it comes over the falls. It used to be a terrible murky color, you know, yellow, when it come over. I'll show you the Falls. Have you seen the Livermore Falls?

Q: Very briefly, I think I have driven by them.

MG: Well you'll see the falls. So I noticed it then, it was much, much cleaner, coming over. Then after a while we'd see a lot of birds, which you never saw before, they'd light on the different rocks and things. So we figured that they must know its cleaner. And the smell, the smell was one of the big things. It doesn't smell at all now, which is wonderful.

Q: Do the people use the river for recreation nowadays?

MG: Well, of course, I don't live over there anymore, so I can't really tell you too much about it. I don't think it would be really safe to go on the river with a boat, unless you pick your special spots. If you pick a special spot where it's calm, it would be different. I think further down to Leeds, they have places that doesn't have the current, and I think they do go out on boats. But I don't think they really make a big habit of it, because its very dangerous to be in the current. You get in trouble.

Q: I imagine. And you mentioned that you've gone up to Rumford. Have you seen the river in any other places besides Rumford?

MG: Well, I guess I haven't really noticed. I go down to Leeds quite a bit, and I noticed the water coming down through there is very clear, so that's good. I'm hoping that it will continue to get even cleaner. But I'm sure it's a lot cleaner because of the smell, one thing, one big thing.

Q: The big signal?

MG: The big signal.

Q: If you think about the future of the river, what do you think about?

MG: Well, I think sooner or later people who have property on the river, I think those properties are going to be worth a lot of money. Because of anything that is on a lake, or water, think of how much it's worth today. Even a little small building is worth a lot, just because it's on the water. So, I think that anybody that lives on the river, it's going to eventually be clean enough for people to go swimming. You know, you'll have property that's worth a lot.

Q: Right. Do many people live right along the river?

MG: Oh yes, there's a lot of people that live on the river. In the house that we sold – of course, when we sold it after, see, my grandfather died, it was my grandmother's, and then when she died, it belonged to my father. And then when he died, it belonged to my mother. And then when she died it belonged to my brother, and then when he died, it belonged to my sister and I. So we were the ones that sold it, because we each had our own home and we were both married at the time and we couldn't take care of it or handle it or anything.

Then my sister's husband died, so she moved in with my brother, who was still alive, and they lived there and they were living there during the flood. And then, of course, my brother passed away and that left my sister and her son. And so we just had to sell it. It broke our hearts to sell it.

Q: That land must've had some meaning.

MG: Yes, it did, you know, because I lived there until I was eighteen years old. I wasn't born there, I was born in a nursing home uptown, about a mile away. But many happy times in that house, and we had some real good parents.

Q: Sounds like it.

MG: Yeah, especially my mother -

End of side A

Side B

MG: Like I said, my mother was a good disciplinarian. She never slapped us, but just one look from her and we would toe the mark. But she was kind, she was the kindest lady, she was an excellent mother. We could always go to her with our problems. My father was a little bit different, although he was good, but she was very excitable and he was nervous, you know, but he was a good dad too. We called him Papa. Papa and Mama.

Q: That's cute.

MG: Can you think of anything else you want to ask me?

Q: Well, I guess my last thing I would ask, at this point anyway is, is there anything that you thought of throughout the conversation that I may not have asked about, or that you'd like to explain a little more?

MG: Well, let's see. The railroad tracks. We had a railroad track right behind the barn, which I'll show you when we get there. Of course, that was another no-no, we shouldn't go on it, except the time that I had to walk up to get away from the water those two times. And down below, which was a little ways, I'll show you where it is, it was called a trestle, that was where the railroad goes over the water, which would be Red Water Brook, the same little brook behind the school, and that eventually, of course, went into the river. And so, once in a while we would go down there on the trestle, and especially if my mother wasn't home, we'd walk down there, go to the trestle, just to look down and see the water. That was an exciting thing to do, go down to the trestle. Of course, when the train went by, if we were talking on the telephone to some of our friends and the train went by, our friends would say, oh, there's a train going by. And I'd say, there is? Because I was so used to it, I'd look out and I'd say, oh yeah, there is a train. I was so used to hearing it day in and day out, and it would usually go by at least once a day, big freight train.

Oh, and another thing I must tell you is about the tramps that would come up from the railroad. They would come at our house, they would stop almost every time, and they'd come to the door and they'd say, could I please have a cup of tea. And my mother would see them coming and she'd say, now, you all come in, you come in the house, and we'd go in the house. And the tramps, you know what tramps are, don't you? They were the people that rode the trains from place to place, and once in a while they'd get off and see if they could get something to eat from these different people that lived near the tracks. And she'd say, you come in the house. And she'd tell him, now you stay on

the porch and I'll bring you out something to eat and a cup of tea. And so she'd make him a sandwich, or some apples or whatever, give them something to drink, and she'd take it out he'd eat it on the porch, because she didn't want to invite him in, of course. Every year, she'd have the same tramps that would come, because they'd know that she'd feed them. It was kind of scary, but it was exciting, you know, to have tramps come to your house.

Q: Did you get to talk to them ever?

MG: Oh no, no, no. We had to stay inside, because that was a no-no, no talk. But they were very good, they didn't do any damage. They were just hungry, that's all. And then after a while they'd leave, they'd go away. Where they went, we don't know. Probably hopped on the train. That's what they did, the train would slow down and they'd get up the little ladder on the train, with the door.

Q: Sounds like Livermore Falls was sort of a bustling little town.

MG: Yes, it was. Like I said, it was a nice little town, it was quiet. I didn't get up town a heck of a lot. I was lucky if I got up there once a week. After a while I had a bicycle, and of course I would ride my bicycle uptown, which was only a mile away. So that was pretty exciting. One night, a girlfriend and I went to the movies – this is when we were teenagers – we went to the movies. And we thought we'd walk down the railroad track, because of course the railroad track was right behind the house. Well, we never did that again, because somebody chased us. And it was pitch dark, and we ran like the devil.

Q: Do you know who it was?

MG: No, I have no idea. Probably somebody trying to scare us, you know. We ran down the railroad track, and we never did that again. Of course, it wouldn't be safe to do that now, and it really wasn't safe then I guess, but we did it anyway.

Q: Sounds like you were an adventurous little kid.

MG: We probably did our share. We smoked pine needles. We thought that was a big deal. But, oh, did they taste terrible. We'd take any kind of paper that we could get and wrap them up, and go behind the barn and smoke pine needles, just because we weren't supposed to.

Q: Right. Exactly.

MG: Never got caught, though.

Q: That's good.

MG: We probably did it no more than a couple of times, you know, because it was so horrible. Horrible smell and horrible taste. I never did anything really, really terrible. I suppose that we scrapped with the neighbor kids, just like any kids would. But we had a lot of fun. Everybody was poor, but we didn't realize it, you know, because everybody was. Everybody was in the same boat. I always had nice clothes to wear to school, because like I said, my mother was a seamstress, she could make most anything. She did a lot of sewing. And didn't I love to get my sister's clothes, when she'd outgrow them.

Q: Hand me downs?

MG: Hand me downs. Oh, that was so much fun, I was so thrilled to get her things.

Q: I can imagine.

MG: We didn't have a lot of store bought things, although at Christmas time she did pretty well, she'd somehow come up with the money. Of course, I was born in 1929. That was the year of the Depression, you know, so I lived through real poor times. So, we had a garden, a very small garden. We had corn and peas and string beans, and beets and carrots. What else did we have? We had lettuce. I guess that's all I can think of.

Q: One other little question. Do you remember, you had mention a lot of bitterness around the mills and strikes, do you remember like '87?

MG: Oh yes, I do, because my husband, of course he retired three days before the strike, and there was a lot of damage to different cars and things that people did. The mill workers resented the scabs that went in and took their jobs, and so they would throw rocks at people, and slice the tires. Even to this day, there's still a lot of bitterness. Even though the workers finally eventually got their jobs back, there's still a lot of bitterness.

Q: How can you tell?

MG: Well, people don't speak to each other. The mill workers don't speak to the scabs. I think that's terrible, to call them scabs, but that's what they call them.

Q: Right, but that's the worst.

MG: I don't think there's any more damage to cars and things, that's kind of settled down. There was a lot of damage, I know, to people's property, I remember that.

Q: But nothing ever happened to your husband.

MG: No, nothing ever, because he didn't go on strike, because he retired three days before, so he was lucky.

Q: Did he know about all the tension that was going on, did it bother him?

MG: Oh, yes, yes, it bothered him terrible, even though he was retired. No, it bothered him, but there wasn't anything he could do about it.

Q: And were the scabs that came in from Livermore and Livermore Falls too?

MG: Yes, they were from Livermore. That's why there was so much bitterness because they were people that mill workers knew. And of course there was some that came from out of state, and they were resented, too. But it finally I think calmed down a little bit, but there's still hatred, there's still, oh, I wouldn't speak to him, I've heard people say. I just go in there and do my job and don't pay attention to the scabs. Of course, it's a lot different working in the mill now because, well, the mill had to put their foot down, though, they had to. Because there was a lot of, well, I don't know how to tell you what it would be, but, in the mill now, I guess, everybody has to help each other, whether they want to or not. Before the strike, everybody had their specific job. But I think now, if I'm not mistaken, people have to help each other. If they get done with this particular job, they have to go and help the other person. So, I really don't know a heck of a lot about the mill anymore, because it's been so many years that my husband hasn't worked, and I don't hear too much about it. But that's as I see it.

Q: It's still there, running.

MG: Yes, yes, and of course the mill has been sold, you know.

Q: To whom?

MG: I don't know, I can't tell you, but the mill has been sold.

Q: Did that happen recently?

MG: Just recently.

Q: Okay, I didn't know that. It used to be an International Paper mill.

MG: Yeah.

Q: Okay, I'll have to look that up. Well, is there anything else for the moment, or would you like to go drive out?

MG: Okay. I can't think of anything more. But when I was little, my goodness, I'm

wracking my brain.

Q: I know, it's my job, I guess. No, I mean you've been through two floods, two strikes. Well, sort of.

MG: And I've walked up the railroad track twice.

Q: And walked up the railroad tracks twice. Yeah. Those were some great stories.

MG: You like that?

Q: Yeah, that's pretty powerful.

MG: Oh, good. I did well to remember all that stuff.

Q: Yeah. Thank you.

MG: Of course, during the flood I was only seven, so. Well, I had a good childhood.

Q: It certainly sounds like it.

End of interview
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