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This interview was conducted with Isabelle Berry at her home in Bellingham, Washington, on September 23rd, 2005. The interviewer is Tamara Belts.

TB: Today is Friday September 23, 2005 and I am here with Isabelle Berry. She is a Golden Viking and the sister of Vene Fisher, who was one of the avalanche victims in 1939. We are now going to proceed with our oral history. My first question is, why did you choose to attend Western?

IB: Because he did.

TB: Did you know you were going to be a teacher?

IB: Yes.

TB: What were your dates of attendance at Western?

IB: From summer of 1936 until spring of 1939. Then I went back and got my degree in 1942.

TB: Your BA degree?

IB: Yes. That's all they gave then.

TB: Did you go anywhere else or get any other certificates from any other institutions?

IB: No. I did go to Monmouth because my first year of teaching was in Oregon and I had to take Oregon history and law.

TB: O.K. Have any other family members attended Western?

IB: Yes, my granddaughter.

TB: What's her name?

IB: Rene Rhone.

TB: And then your brother.

IB: And my brother. He was in about the third class that got their degree, BA.

TB: Do you know why he picked Western?

IB: No.

TB: Where did you live when you attended Western? Did you live in a dorm?

IB: I lived in Mrs. Davis' house, but I didn't see it listed as an organized house. But I know it was an organized house because my sister-in-law had graduated in 1919 and she lived at Davis Hall. The last year I lived at the Harborview Hall.

TB: Any favorite memories of your living experiences?

IB: No, I don't think so.

TB: What was your main course of study?

IB: Science and math.

TB: What classes did you like the best or learn the most from?

IB: I think math. Although, I took a lot of history because I felt I was weak in history. When I went back for my degree, I took several history classes, and I ended up with that as being a teaching a field because I had taken so many history classes.

TB: What other extracurricular activities did you enjoy the most?

IB: I loved sports. When I was a junior, I was vice president of the Associated Women Students.

TB: What was that like? What kinds of things did you do?

IB: The Associated Women Students provided three assemblies for the women during the year and I was in charge of doing that – of getting the speakers or entertainment.

TB: What kind of speakers did you usually try to get?

IB: I only remember one and that was Miss Lowman, who had paddled to Alaska in a canoe. She was from Anacortes. She came and talked to us. I don't remember the other two!

TB: Was it usually a woman speaker?

IB: No, not necessarily.

TB: Also, you were on the WAA (Women's Athletic Association) cabinet.

IB: Yes. I was one of the sports directors or whatever. General Sports Manager I think it was called. That held the same point value as the president, and you worked for points to get a letter sweater. The quarter I was to get a letter sweater, they discontinued them! Miss Rupert, the newest of the PE teachers, was very opposed to the letter sweaters. She got them done away with. That was a disappointment.

TB: Was Lillian George still around when you were there? She worked in the library as a cataloger.

IB: I believe she was, but I don't remember her. I'm sure she was.

TB: Did you have any experiences with the Campus School or the Training School?

IB: I did my student teaching in the Campus School. Well, not in the new school, it was in Old Main. My first student teaching was in math in the seventh grade. Then I did my second student teaching in the spring under Miss Trent because I thought I needed to be qualified for both fourth, fifth and sixth and seventh, eighth and ninth. That was junior high. You had a different supervisor for those. Miss Trent was very unhappy with people who came down from junior high and taught in intermediate because you needed it to get a job, or you thought you might.

TB: Oh. So she didn't think you were as devoted to that age group or something?

IB: She didn't think that we should change.

TB: What was it like doing your student teaching in the Campus School? What was the Campus School like?

IB: It was part of Old Main. I had Miss Van Pelt as the math teacher and she was a very strict, very severe person. But I don't remember the lady I taught under out in the city. I went out to the city for my intermediate teaching. I can't remember where the school was. I've tried and tried to find it!

TB: So you did the Campus School student teaching...

IB: In the fall. Then in the winter I did some student teaching under Miss Weythman for PE. In the spring I did student teaching out in the city.

TB: Was that pretty customary for people to do student teaching out in the city as well as in the Campus School?

IB: Well usually you had a choice, but I was working toward my degree. When I started, I thought I would go straight through. I started it in the summer. But then I didn't do that so I was just getting in all my student teaching in one year. When I went back to get my degree, finish it up, I didn't have to do any student teaching.

TB: Who were your favorite or most influential teachers and why?

IB: I think Dr. Bond (he was the math teacher), Miss Weythman and Miss Rupert, and then I took some classes from Arntzen in history. I think they were my favorites.

TB: Tell me a little bit more. What was Dr. Bond like?

IB: He was a very friendly, interesting person. He had been superintendent in Coupeville at one time. He always treated the kids from Coupeville with a little special favor; we were always invited to his house for dinner. My first quarter I took two classes from him, I took beginning math and junior high math. I did very well in the beginning math but not so good in the junior high math. I think I got a B. Then I took trigonometry from him. I used to be very good in geometry in high school but somehow it didn't carry over to trigonometry and I had a little trouble with that but I got through it all right. He was a very kindly old man. I think he started the climbing up at Mt. Baker. Maxine said that my brother worked for him, but I didn't know that he did. He worked for a man named Herbert Ruckmick.

TB: The industrial arts guy.

IB: Yes. He did a lot with them on printing and so forth.

The one thing Br. Bond did, he used to scribble maybe three columns of figures across the board real fast and then write the answer down at the bottom. I know how he did it he did it because he kept adding groups of ten. But it was very impressive.

TB: What about Dr. Arntzen? What was he like?

IB: The thing I remember about Dr. Arntzen, he was always telling stories about the history of things. The one thing he said was that whoever started Boeing (I can't remember his name) graduated at the end of his class in engineering at the University of Washington. He said there were 157 in his class and he was 157! He always thought that was so funny because Boeing had developed into such a good company.

TB: Who were your science teachers?

IB: Miss Plympton and Miss Sundquist.

TB: Can you tell me about them, what they were like?

IB: They were both very friendly and pleasant, but Miss Sundquist was more outgoing and I think maybe it was the course, but I seem to remember learning a lot more from her. I think in Miss Plympton's class we measured the amount of coloring in the root of your hair and they told me I would not turn white! I remember that. I remember the astronomy part of it was really interesting. We used to go up on Sehome Hill and observe the stars and things sometimes.

TB: That was with Miss Plympton?

IB: Plympton, I think.

TB: What about Miss Weythman. What was she like?

IB: She was the PE teacher. She was a good teacher, but of course she was older and the younger teacher always captured your imagination more and Miss Rupert had just come the first year I was there I think. The thing I remember about her, which didn't set the best example maybe, but, she had a new Pontiac, a very nice car, and she came from I believe Iowa or Ohio, back east somewhere, and she said no one ever passed her on the highway. That's not such a good thing to tell a group of college students!

TB: She had a heavy foot, then!

IB: Yes. She was a little lady; she was small. But Miss Weythman, they used to take us on campouts over on the island. There was a Women's Athletic Association camp on one island, I can't remember. What island is that?

TB: Sinclair Island. You didn't know Margaret Aiken, did you?

IB: No.

TB: What about the library? Do you remember the library or did you know Mabel Zoe Wilson?

IB: The library was quite new when I went to school there. We thought it was beautiful. It was a nice place to study in the reading room. We were very impressed with it.

TB: What about Miss Wilson?

IB: Well she was kind of a strict little lady, but we all liked her I think. And then Miriam Snow was there too. She was in charge of the children's library, or they called it that.

TB: Special Collections where I work is the old children's library. So what was she like, Miriam Snow Mathes?

IB: I don't remember so much except that I know we had to go into her part of the library to get books for our students.

TB: What do you remember about Dr. Fisher?

IB: He was a big man who was very friendly and he used to have assemblies for the kids, every Tuesday I think it was, 11 o'clock, and it was required that we go to the assemblies. We had some very interesting speakers. One was Thorpe.

TB: Oh, the runner? Jim Thorpe?

IB: Yes, Jim Thorpe. I think it was football. The other one was Jesse Owens, the runner. He brought in very interesting people. In fact, Owens gave a demonstration of running in the gym one time. I think he talked to us in assembly, too. Different kinds of programs like that that were really something for someone who came from Coupeville to hear. I thought that was one of the nice things he did. 1939 was Fisher's last year. Of course, they tried to say he was a Communist, but I never did believe it.

TB: You just thought it was really enlightened kinds of speakers, not political. As a student, did you have very much sense of the politics involved in trying them trying to get rid of President Fisher? Did you know before he left that they were trying to get rid of him?

IB: I think it came out more after I left than I knew about it at the time.

TB: I'm going to try telling you the story of the Avalanche in 1939 that you told me when the tape wasn't on and maybe you can just sort of confirm it. Maybe that will be easier?

IB: O.K.

TB: Your brother Vene was not going to school anymore but had wanted to go on this hike, and so he had drove himself up to the mountain and by himself had hiked in to Kulshan Cabin. Then he met up with the group there.

IB: Yes.

TB: So they did the hike, and at least story-wise, you've always heard that he was the last man in the group, sort of bringing up the rear. We think the hike was on a Saturday.

IB: Well they hiked in Friday and then they climbed up the mountain on Saturday and then came back to Kulshan Cabin and hiked out on Sunday – normally.

TB: O.K. So on Saturday there was this avalanche.

IB: It was just after lunch, I believe.

TB: Then your family didn't hear about it until your mother went out to get the paper on Sunday morning and that was the headline of the Seattle paper. You were living at Coupeville at that time. You were upstairs and not up yet.

IB: No.

TB: Your mother came up and got you up and told you about it. Where was your father?

IB: He was there. Mother woke him. Then we I suppose discussed what to do. We called Roscoe Berry, my boyfriend, and then he came and helped us drive up to Point Roberts.

TB: Point Roberts, where your older brother was fishing. What boat was he on?

IB: The Saint Michael's. It was owned by Mike Criscoll and his son did have the boat up here afterwards.

TB: But the boat was actually out of Coupeville, so your other brother had been still living in Coupeville.

IB: Yes.

TB: So you went up and got your other brother from Point Roberts and you all went up to the mountain, it sounds like.

IB: Yes.

TB: Then your brother Allen...

IB: I'm sure he stayed. And then he brought Vene's car down.

TB: He went and worked with them (the rescuers) and tried [to find the bodies] and stayed for a couple days. They probed every square foot of the slide area.

IB: Well I think longer than that. They searched for quite a while. You know, they didn't have helicopters. They didn't have cell phones. They ran out of money and they had to stop looking. Things were kind of different then. They didn't call in the government. They didn't blame the president [laughs].

There was some controversy at the time about them not being roped together. Some people felt if they had been they would all have been lost. They had just got around the crevasse and they thought that the ones that weren't found were swept into the crevasse. Nobody thought to sue in those days! One girl's father used to come back every year [to look for her body] because they were Catholic and having the body was real important to them.

TB: O.K.

TB: Tell me about Mr. Kibbe.

IB: Mr. Kibbe taught psychology and we had a good time in his class. He never got a PhD because he said that only those who had to have a doctor's degree to get a job went for a PhD. I think he had a Master's. He didn't have a PhD.

TB: Woodring wouldn't have been there yet, was he?

IB: Woodring came my last year, I think. The other person that I knew really well was Dr. Upshall because I worked in the research bureau. Charlotte Hood was his secretary and she was in charge, but Dr. Upshall taught me to give the Stanford-Binet test, and it was one of the first years when they gave every Kindergarten student a Stanford-Binet test. Anyway, when I went to teaching special education in Burlington in 1953 they were giving the kids intelligence tests and I said, "*Well I have given the Stanford-Binet.*" But they had come out with a new test, the Wexler, and so I went back to college to learn to give the Wexler test [under Dr. Budd].

My daughter was in the first grade when I went to teaching special education in Burlington. It was the first year the Dolls were in Bellingham. They started a special education class in Burlington for all the Skagit counties. Jim Larson was our director, and there were two of us and we taught in the old elementary school,

and the room I had had at one time been the coal bin! But they fixed up the bottom part of the school because it was condemned at that time. It was an old school.

TB: Did you know Sam Carver?

IB: He was there when I was there, but I didn't know him.

TB: Coach Lappenbusch?

IB: I knew him better. I took health education from Lappenbusch. That was the only contact – of course, he was the coach and everybody knew him.

TB: Did you go to very many of the games?

IB: Oh yes, we went to all the games.

TB: So all of your classes would have been in Old Main.

IB: Unless they had them in the gym. When I started in the summer, I took badminton at eight, tennis at nine and swimming at eleven. I had to run down to the YWCA! That's where we took our swimming classes. By fall, it was finished (the gym). Then I got down to the serious part of my college education after lunch!

TB: I was going to say! Three PE classes in the morning, that's pretty good! How many classes did you usually have in a day? Or how many hours?

IB: I took fifteen or sixteen hours.

TB: All those PE classes would have just been one credit.

IB: Yes. Then that first summer I took math, which was five credits, history that was five credits, and then the junior high math was three credits and the PE classes were three credits.

I will say one thing: when I went to school, lots of the students went on a shoestring. I mean that they had very little. Tuition was about \$30 a quarter, and if they could raise that, they went to school. A lot of us lived in the boarding houses and did our own cooking. One time at the house next to me (and I can't remember the name) there were four girls I knew living there. The last three weeks of school, all they had to eat was cornmeal, canned milk, and jam!

One girl did have some money, but she chose to eat with the rest of them and not spend her money. Students really struggled to get through school. I will say that apparently some of them could borrow from the college, but I didn't and I didn't know anybody that did.

When I graduated in 1939, there were very few jobs. Afterward, someone told me that unless you knew somebody, had a connection with someone, or if you had borrowed money from the college, those are the ones who got the jobs. I didn't teach my first year out. I went and took my brother's job in the engineer's office in Coupeville. Because I had told my folks I would teach two years before I got married, I got a chance to go to eastern Oregon because a girl that I had met in college had also taught in the school in Oregon. She got me the job. There again, a connection. Her husband was on the school board, so I went there, where I rode horseback to school. It was a one-room school in the town of Ritter, which was a population of four. But I taught out of town at the Three Mile School. There was no Ritter school at that time.

TB: How many students did you have in your one room?

IB: I had fourteen to start with and then three moved away so I ended up with eleven. I had every class except fifth.

TB: Wow. So is that hard or easy in a one-room classroom?

IB: Well, in a way it was harder and in a way it was easier. For the students, too, because the students were always reviewing as you taught the class under them, and then looking ahead to what they were going to get the next year. It was not bad in a way, but of course now we do it differently.

TB: Right. But you had to be prepared for all those classes! That was a lot. You were there two years?

IB: One.

TB: Just one. Where was your second year?

IB: Woodland. That was a two-room school. It was up the river from Woodland at Green Mountain. That was one of the richer districts in the state because they had the money from Ariel Dam. They had half of it, and half of it went to the school across the river, and we were on the south side of the river. That was interesting. I taught the upper grades and the other lady taught the lower grades. We had a janitor, a music teacher, and a cook!

TB: Wow! That was pretty lush!

IB: Yes, it was. If I had known then what I know now I could have bought a lot of things, but of course, a lot of the things they use now weren't available then anyway, but I would have done things a lot differently. That school is still operating. It is more than a two-room school now.

TB: About how many students were in the class that you had? The dam probably had a lot of workers.

IB: No. I think I had about twenty-five in the four classes. Not in each class, but all total.

TB: Wow. So then you two must have gotten married and you came back to Washington?

IB: He worked at Boeing.

TB: Excellent. Where did you teach most of your career at?

IB: Well, I taught at the Maple Leaf School, but the most years I taught at Sedro Woolley. I taught at Maple Leaf and it's no longer a school in the Shoreline District. That was the year before Shoreline became a district, then I taught there the second year when it was the Shoreline District under Dr. Howard. Then we moved to Mount Vernon after Roscoe got out of the service. Then I went to Burlington to the special education school for one year and then I was out for a couple years then I went to Sedro Woolley and I finished up at Sedro Woolley.

TB: Nice. That must be where Danny taught then?

IB: Danny Beatty? He taught one year there and then he went to Anacortes.

TB: Oh O.K., but he still gets invited back to your retired teacher's picnic?

IB: Well, it's for all of Skagit County.

TB: Oh O.K.

[End of tape]