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This interview was conducted with Mr. Homer Bernard Mathes, Jr., alumnus, and grandson of Edward T. Mathes, the first President (principal) of Western Washington University (then Washington State Normal School at Whatcom, 1899-1914), at Wilson Library on February 19th, 2003. The interviewer was Tamara Belts.

Today is February 19, 2003. We are in Wilson Library. My name is Tamara Belts. I'm interviewing Homer Bernard Mathes, Jr. He's an alumnus of Western and also the grandson of Edward T. Mathes, the first president (principal) of Western.

TB: Mr. Mathes how did you get to Bellingham or tell us how you would like to start your story?

HBM: It all started on August 2, 1928, the date of my birth. I was born in Bellingham, raised mostly in Bellingham, and left Bellingham in 1953, on graduating with a second degree from Western, to go to Washington State University at Pullman, to get a degree in Physics.

TB: Where did you go to school? Did you go to Campus School?

HBM: My elementary years were at Birchwood Elementary School, grades one through six and I went to Whatcom Junior High, which is now I think the middle school, and did three years at Bellingham High over on Cornwall Avenue. Graduated from there in June of 1947.

TB: Did you live right on Lake Whatcom Boulevard?

HMB: That was later. From about 1933 to early 1945 I lived with my grandfather and grandmother on Northwest Road, on their little estate there. My mother and father lived there also. It was during the Depression. My father, who was a sort of combination architect and industrial designer, had lost his main employment with the Schilling Evertz Company, which I believe had a small foundry here in Bellingham and did the bronze doors to this building in the old main entrance. And so when the Depression hit in 1929, the company here in town that he worked for went under, went bankrupt or closed business. Then they had a branch I believe in Vancouver, B.C. We lived in Canada for about a year. And then that closed and he was completely out of work, so we came back to live with the grandparents on the little acre that they had on Northwest Road.

TB: Did they call that a farm?

HMB: It was a farm yes, and it was just outside the city limits, in fact almost a mile outside the city limits at that time. And they had a business in town which was the Avalon Theatre. They also had chickens, egg laying chickens and they sold eggs to the local egg co-op. And I'm not sure about names. I was just a little

kid then. I knew those things went on, I didn't keep track of details (laughter). But I remember thousands of chickens in several chicken coops and open yards where they could circulate around.

TB: Your grandfather was also mayor of Bellingham?

HMB: Yes he was. I think two terms. I don't know the years exactly.

TB: Nineteen twenty to 1924 I think.

HMB: Then he ran for governor probably in '24.

TB: Did he used to tell you a lot stories about that?

HMB: No. I heard from my grandmother and from my stepmother Miriam about some of those years. But I wasn't aware of those much at the time. We packed up to move away from the Northwest Road residence, I think in 1945 or there about, my grandmother sold the property. My mother and father had divorced and the family was splitting into different areas. My dad I think went to Seattle to find work. My grandmother stayed in town. It was then in 1945 that my mother, my brother and I moved out to Lake Whatcom Boulevard, 68A was the address at that time.

TB: Right, and then your grandmother moved into town and she was on Garden Street?

HMB: She did and I visited her at that apartment quite often. It was on the top floor. I forget what exactly the address was.

TB: So it was an apartment not a house?

HMB: Yes, well she was renting space on the top floor from some lady that owned the property.

TB: And was she an art teacher?

HMB: Yes, she was many things; businesswoman, she ran the Avalon Theatre for a number of years. She filled her spare time with teaching china painting. She was something of an artist in her own right, in that she did a number of oil paintings and water colors of various scenes around the county.

TB: Do any of those still exist?

HMB: Yes, we have some at home.

TB: That's a treasure. Did she go to college herself?

HMB: She did in fact. I don't know the year. It was in the 1800s. She was born in 1873, and met my grandfather at a university or a college in Kansas. He was teaching history, she was a student. They were attracted to each other and, as they say, the rest is history (laughter).

TB: Do you have any stories of the bookstore?

HMB: No. I knew that they had one, but I don't know much about it. I think they probably sold that by the time they were building the Avalon Theatre.

TB: When you were growing up, did you have very much interaction yourself with Western?

HMB: No, not at all. I did teach at the Campus School though.

TB: When did you teach at the Campus School?

HMB: I was a teacher in training for my public certification. I taught geology to a fourth grade class (laughter).

TB: So what was it like teaching in the Campus School?

HMB: Fun. I wanted to teach college, but that was part of the training, teaching youngsters (laughter).

TB: Did you ever teach elementary school then yourself?

HMB: No, no I wanted to teach adults. I decided after being guided by Miss Merriman who was the teacher in charge of the Fourth grade Campus School, how to simplify things down to very basic concepts of fourth graders. They don't have the gift of understanding that older folks do. So I had to learn how to tear everything down to very simple things that they could relate to. I decided then I was more geared to teaching people that are older, that had broader knowledge of things.

TB: So did you know Miriam Mathes before she married your father?

HMB: I knew of her, but I didn't really know her, as a friend or acquaintance, at all.

TB: So what about you? What was it like growing up in Bellingham back then?

HMB: I was a country kid. We came into town to go to school after we started with junior high. And the town kids were like from a different planet you might say (laughter). So at the end of the school day, my brother and I would jump on our bicycles and bicycle three miles back up to Northwest Road and the chicken farm (laughter).

TB: It sounds like you liked living on the farm?

HMB: Oh yes. We had many, many acres of undeveloped woods behind us. We spent a lot of our time following game trails and looking at wildlife and plant life and stuff like that, gathering licorice root and all kinds of crazy things kids do.

TB: So you moved into town then by the time you were in high school?

HMB: Well, Lake Whatcom, that's really not in town.

TB: So it was still kind of country wherever you were on Lake Whatcom?

HMB: Oh yes, about twenty minute hike up the road from the lake into the woods and we were in deer country. In fact I hunted deer up there when you were able to hunt deer.

TB: So you went to Western because it was so close?

HMB: It was close. I lived at the lake at the time. I didn't have a car but I could always hitch a ride to come into school and get a ride back out in the afternoon or evening.

TB: What was campus like then in the late 1940s?

HMB: Small (laughter).

TB: Post World War II were there a lot of returning Veterans?

HMB: I wasn't aware of it at the time. In probably 1952, I was appointed as instructor in Geology to teach Physical Geology and Historical Geology for a year while the one and only Geology professor was at Berkley getting her PhD.

TB: And who was that?

HMB: That was Marie Pabst.

TB: I've heard of her.

HMB: Yes she was quite a gal.

TB: Tell me more about what she was like?

HMB: She had a very stern demeanor and a very wry sense of humor (laughter). But she was a very wonderful person.

TB: So who are some of the other people that you were had while you were at Western?

HMB: Oh, because I was a science major, Leona Sundquist, who was head of the Science Department, was an acquaintance and I worked for her as a lab, well not for her but I was employed part time as a lab assistant in the Biology and Zoology classes. Ruth Platt, I was her assistant for awhile. And there was a younger lady I'm forgetting her name, June something, I can't remember. I was lab assistant for her, made sure the proper equipment was out, ran the projecting microscopes so that the instructor could give her lecture while I was chasing paramecium. They swam around on the water mount on the slide. And things like that, just kept the stock room in order. There were three or four of us that worked part time.

TB: Did you have Lucy Kangley?

HMB: Oh yes. I was engaged to a pretty young lady from Blaine at the time. She and I sat in the front row right in front of where Lucy Kangley gave her lectures and held hands while she was talking us through *The Iliad* (laughter).

TB: My goodness, how did that go over?

HMB: She was smiling a lot (laughter). Kangley was, that is (laughter). She had a happy demeanor anyway, like Ruth Platt. Ruth Platt was always happy.

TB: Did you know Nora Cummins?

HMB: No, doesn't ring a bell.

TB: I don't know when she left, it's right in there. I know she chaired the Centennial Committee in 1949. But she taught Social Studies I think.

TB: I'm trying to think of some other names. It's just kind of fun to get a personality behind the name. Did you have Ed Arntzen.?

HMB: No, don't believe so.

TB: Ada Swineford wasn't here yet was she? She was in Geology.

HMB: No, doesn't ring a bell at all.

TB: Well who your favorite teacher?

HMB: Ruth Platt was one because of her background in geology. Marie Pabst was one. She was always teasing me, but I liked her. She, like I said, had a very wry sense of humor. And Leona Sundquist, I respected, I didn't dislike her as far as I know. I also gave her a lot of trouble (laughter).

TB: What did you do? How, what was the trouble?

HMB: Because I was in the stock room, and I usually ate my lunch in the stock room.

[BRIEF BREAK TO MEET MARIAN ALEXANDER]

TB: What were some significant things that you remember from college? I mean they did have the Fifty Year Anniversary, do you remember anything? Or as a student did that mean anything to you?

HMB: What year was that?

TB: 1949. May of 1949 there was a big celebration.

HMB: Boy it's a blank. I remember, I think it was the 75th that the Governor was here. My brother and I were invited along with Miriam and some others and we attended a luncheon or some kind of get together. Had a meeting in the auditorium with the Governor and I don't know how many others. We were seated in the front row, as honored guests, that type of thing. Yes, there was the usual protest in the balcony (laughter).

TB: What were they protesting?

HMB: Oh, something about salmon fishing and Indian rights.

TB: What about your brother, you were very close in age but he didn't go to Western?

HMB: No he didn't, he married at age seventeen, in his last year of high school I think. And he had a son early on and so he, being a very practically minded type of fellow, went to Oklahoma to a sort of trade school facility, to learn weather forecasting. I think he spent a year there. And then he became a weatherman (laughter). He worked for the U.S. Government in the Weather Service for many years. Eventually he went to the Arctic. He had wanted to go to the Antarctic but never made it. But he did live in the Arctic and various parts of Alaska. As the years went on, he got some special assignment to be part of an American-Canadian team a few hundred miles south of the North Pole, to winter over on an island in the middle of the Arctic Ocean to send weather reports back.

TB: And he liked that?

HMB: Oh yes (laughter).

TB: Sounds cold.

HMB: He's an unusual guy.

TB: But he obviously settled back in the Northwest, because he is in the Seattle or Tacoma area.

HMB: Yes. He had a fairly long interlude in the Washington D.C. area when he worked for the Department of Commerce. I think it was still the Weather Service then. I could be wrong. You would have to get him the mic to get all that straight.

TB: OK, well you said you were quite the character in college. You gave somebody a bad time, Miss Pabst?

HMB: Oh, no, Miss Sundquist. I was in the stock room one lunch hour. I brought sandwiches and just brown bagged it for lunch hour. And there was nobody around. I was just kind of looking around the stock room from the little wooden table I was sitting at. It was probably three feet long and maybe two feet wide. And I noticed way up on the top shelf of the stock room (I think it was up on the third floor at that time in Old Main). There was a binocular microscope kind of tucked away in the back corner of the top shelf all by itself. And it looked all dusty, so I got up on a ladder and brought it down and looked at it. I set it up with a microscope illuminator and looked through the optics. And there were all types of dirt and dust particles and things inside so I thought, "Gee I've got almost an hour, I can take this apart, clean it up and put it back together and restore it to really workable condition." So I laid out several paper towels, disassembled the microscope, had metal parts over on one side, optical elements were over on another towel. And the fastenings carefully laid out so I could pick up the right screw to go into the right place to put it back together.

And just about the time I had all the parts out and had dusted off the glass surfaces to get rid of the debris inside the microscope, who would come in early from lunch but Miss Sundquist (laughter). She froze in the door when she saw what was laying out on the table. And she said nothing for about five seconds and it seemed like an hour because I could see there was shock; shock and dismay on her face. And she said "What are you doing!" and I said, "I'm cleaning up this microscope." She said, "That is my personal property I went through school with that microscope and I don't want any harm to come to it." And I said, "I'll put it back together." She turned around and left, and went to her office which was just a ... maybe like half an office width apart, but in a separate room. And the door slammed and she left (laughter). Well now I was nervous, but I managed to get the microscope back together. Checked it out, everything lined up. It was back in working condition. I brought it back a little bit late you know from the end of the lunch hour. Put it on her desk. She was busy writing something on her desk. She gave me kind of a strange look. I said, "I think it's in good shape." Turned around and left (laughter). And she never said another word. After that she was much more friendly.

TB: You said you graduated in 1953, or at least you got a second degree from here in 1953.

HMB: Yes I did. I got my BA in Biology in 1951. And shortly afterwards got a draft notice, answered the draft call, went to Seattle for the pre-induction physical and flunked it (laughter). I passed everything but the stethoscope test because I have a heart murmur. So they flunked me and I came back 4F. So I never got to go to war.

TB: So then you came back and got a second degree in?

HMB: Education with a social science major I believe. I got more specialties then I can even remember anymore.

TB: And then what did you do?

HMB: Then I transferred to Washington State, enrolled as a graduate student and went for a degree in physics. Because I decided by then I could make a decent living and support a family that way; rather than spending summers at the low end of the salary scale where paleontologists were. I knew my wife wasn't exactly the enthusiastic outdoor type. I practically grew up in the outdoors myself, but she was a city girl, and she didn't like roughing it. So I decided life with her was more important than a career digging up crazy rocks in the middle of nowhere. I was always interested in mechanical things so I got my degree in physics, and was hired by the Navy as a scientist. I went to work at China Lake in California. As a ... well first as a physicist I was assigned to the research department and stayed there for like thirty years as a research physicist.

TB: Then you probably retired from that after thirty years?

HMB: Yes, went to work for a private industry briefly under government contract mostly to the Navy; also had a stint as an independent contractor with NASA. Part of the time I worked with the Navy, I was loaned out, oh maybe a third of my work year, to NASA for work on the space shuttle.

TB: What do you think about the space shuttle?

HMB: I think it's miraculous we have had as few accidents as, as we've had. It's a very, very risky business. However, I volunteered to go on one of the flights where they allowed civilian scientists. And I was having breakfast one morning, I think it was in Downey, California, my NASA boss was head of the solid rocket branch. I was involved in the behavior of the booster motors that lift the whole works off the ground. And he said something about seats being available in the near future for technical people rather than just astronaut types. And I said "Gee you know John, I'd like to go on a flight." And he had a fork halfway to his mouth and he dropped it, and it clattered on his plate. And he looked at me with the strangest look, he said "I wouldn't ride on that thing for all the money in the world" (laughter). And he was serious. I said, "Well, I think it would be a thrill ride."

TB: But you didn't go?

HMB: No.

TB: You have lived mostly in California? And where do you live now?

HMB: California, same place, same town.

Well actually I was civilian resident on Navy property for many years. They had a civilian community there because it was so isolated. There weren't any facilities in the little commercial center nearby, which was called Ridgecrest. Over the years the Congress has decided to kind of de-fund the support for civilian occupation of government property, and so we eventually moved out into town, with very few exceptions. But we lived in Navy housing for many, many years.

TB: Going back to your time at Western. Do you have any other big significant memories of that?

HMB: I remember a teacher in the English department by the name of Albert Van Aver.

TB: And what did you think of him?

HMB: I liked him! Yes. I mentioned his name to Miriam one time and she said "Oh, what an awful man" or something to that effect. And I paused for a second. I thought you know well, he was different. But to me I learned so much from him in just one quarter on how to write documented papers. And that became my life

blood, when I went to work for the Navy, writing research reports and things like that. I used so much of what I learned from him.

TB: That's great. Do you have other specific memories, or really significant memories of your grandparents?

HMB: My grandfather I remember only a little bit about. He passed away when I was like about nine years of age. But I do remember him being a great tease. He had a wry sense of humor (laughter). He could lead a person on with a very serious face and convince you that he believed what he was saying when he was just pulling your leg like you wouldn't believe (laughter).

TB: Did he tell you a lot of stories? I noticed that he traveled a lot.

HMB: No, well he may have but I don't remember. Oh, he was a great lecturer from what I've heard from those who knew him, yes. But he had given that all up by the time I knew him.

TB: What about your grandmother?

HMB: Yes, I worked with her and for her for a long time.

TB: In terms of working at the farm and working at the theatre? Or how else did you work for her?

HMB: It was mostly at the theatre.

TB: Was Avalon the first theatre in Bellingham?

HMB: No. It was probably built in, around 1927. It was the first theatre, according to what my grandmother said, the first theatre in Bellingham to be designed and built specifically for sound movies. So it was the late '20s when it was conceived and constructed.

TB: And they built it originally, or they bought it from someone else?

HMB: I think they had it built. I could be wrong. They were in a partnership with two fellows from Seattle. Al Finklestein I think was one. I don't remember who the other was.

TB: Are there some other things that you would like to share?

HMB: Nothing I can think of right off hand. When I think back, those are important years that I spent here. But always looking forward to the future, you know, I kind of used what I learned here and just went ahead and into new fields, and new projects, new ideas.

TB: Well that's exciting. When you were here did you feel this awareness of your grandfather having been president or it wasn't a big deal?

HMB: Oh yes. Well, I knew of it and it wasn't that big of a deal to me. It was just part of the family history, and, you know, we were in the present not the past and it was a deal of moving ahead.

[TURNED OFF TAPE BUT STARTED TALKING AGAIN]

TB: So you taught geology, do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

HMB: Yes. I taught geology, first as a fourth-grade teacher in training at the Campus School. And, it was then I decided I really wanted to teach adults, preferably college level. But I did another training session at Bellingham High School in the very room, but with a different teacher, where I had been taught geology at Bellingham High. And the fellow that I learned geology from the very first was the high school teacher, his last name was Montgomery ... I think John Montgomery. I'm not sure about the first name. But he was an older fellow, and by the time I'd gone back the younger more energetic fellow was in charge of geology there. So I had a chance to reprise my being a student as the guy up front doing the lectures (laughter). So that was kind of neat. But then I think it was probably in 1952, Marie Pabst, who was the only really qualified geology teacher at Western left for a year to finish her work on her Ph.D. at Berkeley, California. And so unknown to me, there were plans made at the staff level here at Western to have me teach the classes in Physical Geology and Historical Geology that Marie normally taught. So I was an instructor at a hundred dollars a month (laughter) and that was great because my wife, who was working part time to help support my education, had lost her job and she was out of work during the months that I was employed here at Western as an instructor. So I'd teach geology here in the morning and then change clothes and be a student in the afternoon working towards my education degree.

TB: Did you meet your wife at Western?

HMB: No, I met her in the wilderness on the slopes of Mt. Baker so to speak.

TB: I know you said she really didn't like the outdoors.

HMB: She very reluctantly accompanied her parents on a fishing trip into the very same lakes as my Uncle Ted, from my mother's side of the family, and I were. And we actually camped within about fifty feet of each other. So, the fishing was bad, I was never much of a fisherman. There was a pretty young lady I thought was about, maybe twenty years of age, which was about my age. (Well no I wasn't quite that old then. It was in 1947. Gosh how old was I? I don't know, old enough to know better but too young to care (laughter) I guess.) I thought she was maybe 16, 18, maybe 20. And she thought I was like 15 or 16. It turned out our ages were about opposite. (Laughter) She was either 15 or 16 and I was three years older.

TB: But she did come to Western?

HMB: Yes she did eventually. Well, she was still in high school then. But I found an excuse to invite her to go blueberry picking. I wore an old, beat-up felt hat to keep the sun off, and we turned it upside down and used it as a bowl to collect blueberries. And her mother was not very comfortable with her being off in the woods alone with some strange guide, but I told her we'd be just over the hill, a few yards away from camp. So she was OK with that. But anyway, we took a hat full of blueberries back to her mom. And her mother said she would like to have them and make blueberry pie. And would I come up the next weekend, for blueberry pie? And I said I would love to. So we got connected that way and courted for several years and eventually we married in 1950. And she was a student here on campus when I posed the big question.

TB: Did you propose to her on campus?

HMB: It was walking up Garden Street coming back to Edens Hall. She was boarding at Edens then.

TB: There are a lot of stories about people proposing on campus like in Fourth Floor Central of the library. Those are kind of fun stories. What was her career? What did she major in? Was she a teacher also?

HMB: No she was just kind of a General Studies type. She was interested in English. She did a lot of proofreading on things I could let her read after I went to work for the Navy. She helped me keep my sentences straight. Although I think my language skills were above the usual scientist/engineer. Having

grown up in a very literate family, it was sort of learning by example. I still can't diagram a sentence I don't think (laughter), but sort of learned by doing.

TB: What about Miriam Snow Mathes?

HMB: Oh gosh. As I mentioned earlier, I knew of her being around because she was here in the library building. I knew the name, but she specialized in children's books and I wasn't connected with that end of things at all. So I paid no attention really, until she and my dad met probably in 1950. And of course I was in the final stages of courting and getting married and starting to live with my wife and he was getting acquainted with Miriam. Actually I don't know if I should tell this or not. They lived together before they got married, and someone discovered it and because she was worried about her reputation on campus they chartered a small airplane to fly down South somewhere. I've forgotten where. She wrote it up in a story, about how they had a flight into hell trying to get to a justice of the peace to make their living together legal through marriage (laughter). So we visited them quite often afterward, and at that time I had a mother, a stepmother, a father and a stepfather.

TB: Because your mother had remarried by that time also?

HMB: My mother had remarried in 1950 my dad remarried in 1951 to Miriam and they all knew each other at least casually (laughter). But they didn't mingle, you know, they were living separate lives. But my wife and I would visit them and then of course her parents. We were busy on the family circuit.

TB: Then you kept in contact then with Mrs. Mathes all these years. What about the Mathes House, that used to be a dormitory, was that any connection with your family?

HMB: Yes, I think it is. Is it on Garden Street or is it off High?

TB: The one now is off High.

HMB: OK that's where the Mathes House was. I don't know if they owned it outright or if it was property the college owned, and let them live in it as president. I'm not sure.

TB: Then it became a dormitory (rooming house).

HMB: Well it was just a residence for many years. And then I think the property and several lots to either side of it were cleared for the present dorm.

TB: There was a Mathes Dormitory, separate from the current Mathes Hall, it is listed in the Polk's Directory, and I wondered if it had any family connection at all.

HMB: It might have had.

TB: I think it's different than the current Mathes House. The Mathes House now is up at the top of High Street.

HMB: Oh, my dad designed and built that house for Miriam.

TB: Then she must have left it to CCM or something.

HMB: She sold it to somebody.

TB: They still call it Mathes House and students live there. But I picked up that there were two. And that's why I think there was two different ones.

HMB: Right yes, the old one that was, that goes back to 1898 or whatever, I guess was the one on High street. I think they might have had extra rooms that they leased out or had co-ed's live in with them, I'm not sure. That's way before my time. And all those things that probably were, but I didn't learn about.

TB: Anything else that you can think of?

HMB: Lets see, we covered his being mayor, business man, candidate for governor on the Democrat ticket, lost to a Republican (laughter).

TB: Did you ever hear any stories about that? Was that a painful loss?

HMB: The stories I heard were from Miriam. My grandfather was a rather erratic driver and he had so much trouble getting around without crashing the car, that my dad ... lets see that would have been 1923 or '24, '25 along in there. My dad was his chauffeur to tour the state and give campaign lectures and that sort of thing.

TB: He was very active during World War I, he traveled a lot in Europe.

HMB: Yes, Miriam wrote some of that up. And I heard a good deal of it from my grandmother also. In 1917 their daughter Virginia died.

TB: That's right, flu?

HMB: They had previously lost ..., no, it was from appendicitis.

TB: Oh, that's right.

HMB: And, in 1901 they had lost their only son at about a year of age. My Uncle Paul if he had lived. And Virginia's loss was a real tragedy to the family. I think my grandmother probably went into a very deep depression because the family almost fell apart for awhile. According to Miriam, my grandmother was unable to care for my dad who was ... lets see 17 ... subtract ... he was born in 1905. So he was how old, 12 years? Yes. Yes, see this is one reason I got an education degree, because physics is highly mathematical, and my mathematics are not all that good, so I had to have a back up. I could always teach public school. Having family responsibilities, I had to have a back up.

TB: So Mrs. Mathes was really devastated by the loss of her daughter Virginia?

HMB: That's my understanding.

TB: So she had a hard time caring for your father?

HMB: He spent a lot of his youth around that time with his grandmother Ella Jones. Who was my grandmother Mathes' stepmother. And she was a wonderful lady from all I heard. And took very good care of him, according to my grandmother, spoiled him rotten (laughter), as grandmothers can do.

TB: Was she out here in Bellingham or was she somewhere else? A lot of family came out here with the Mathes'?

HMB: Oh yes, her father lived here, he's buried out there at the Mathes site. Surname was Jones. James Chapen-Jones, and her stepmother's name was Ella.

TB: Yes I read things in the early newspaper things about when Virginia died. And it would go back and forth, they thought she was going to get better, and then she wasn't, and the whole campus was in mourning when she died because she was only a couple years out of being a student here.

HMB: Yes, she was teaching in Sedro Wooley as I understand it. And it took so long to get her back into Bellingham for real medical aid that her appendix ruptured and they weren't able to save her. And you know peritonitis can kill you, especially when there were no antibiotics.

TB: Right. So he lived with his other grandparents then for quite awhile?

HMB: Yes, and for how long I don't know. But I'm sure it made a mark on his life.

TB: Tell me a little bit more about him. How did he decide to be an architect?

HMB: I'm not exactly sure. He attended both Washington State and UW. And exactly what he majored in I'm not sure. He was a multitalented guy according to Miriam. And I did at one time see the flute that he played. He was something of a musician. According to Miriam, he would fill in for missing flutists in the Seattle Symphony when he was living in Seattle. He practiced with them. He was artistic. He had an artistic temperament in some ways, very sensitive; like I say a multitalented guy. He took after his grandmother or after his mother, my grandmother, really multitalented.

TB: When I saw she had been an art teacher and I realized he had been an architect, I thought there's some kind of a link there.

HMB: Yes, and I think his function with the Schilling Evertz Company that did the ornamental metal work and bronze work, I think he was probably in the role of an industrial designer at that point. You know, on the artistic side of things.

TB: Now I know he did the front doors of Wilson Library, do you know if he did the doors on Fourth Floor Central?

HMB: I have no idea. But there are bronze plaques in Seattle that the same company had fabricated. What role he had in those I don't know. But gosh around 1938 or so I remember him pointing up to, you know under the window; between the windows on some of the older style buildings, there will be kind of an ornamental bronze plaque and apparently the Schilling Evertz Company did those. So he had some kind of connection with them, but what it was, I don't know exactly.

TB: Anything else?

HMB: Grandmother was a musician.

TB: Now they went to the Presbyterian Church, did she play?

HMB: Yes both sides of the family. My mother's family was all Presbyterian and his family was all Presbyterian. She played organ, she also played either piano or organ in some of the theatres where they played silent movies and with live musical accompaniment. According to either her, my grandmother or someone who knew her, she did some of that.

TB: Did they go to the First Presbyterian Church or which Presbyterian Church did they go to?

HMB: Yes, mainly here on Garden Street. In fact I was baptized there. My mom and dad were married there.

TB: I think Edward T. Mathes also taught some bible classes there.

HMB: Very well could be.

[END OF SIDE ONE OF TAPE]

HMB: Oh we didn't finish part of his World War I stuff, too many things to cover here. After Virginia died there may have been some estrangement between my grandmother and my grandfather. Exactly the nature and the depth of it, I have no idea. But it was 1917, the nation was entering World War I. And my grandfather decided for one reason or another, maybe to get his mind off the loss of Virginia, to go overseas. And the way he did it was to become affiliated with the Salvation Army. And they picked him to be a field representative in France with the American Expeditionary Force. So he got as far as New York with all his papers and passport and all that stuff and then they wouldn't let him board the steamer to go to France. His father was born in Alsace and people of German descent were not thought to be completely trustworthy in 1917, 1918. So he had to go to the New York City library, according to Miriam, get out a book of history that covered the 1830's or '40s or whenever his father was born. Take the copy down to the officials that approved the overseas travel and prove to them that Alsace was part of France that year his father was born (laughter).

TB: Whatever works!

HMB: Alsace is part of France again this time, it changed hands back and forth so many times, but he proved to them that he was of French descent not of German; even though we are German, Swiss-German.

So he went overseas on a sort of a tramp steamer type of vessel. And they got as far as the Irish Sea and a torpedo hit them after dark. The ship went down. He bailed out and went into a lifeboat with everybody else; had his nightclothes and an overcoat and that was all. Everything went down. But I think all the hands were saved, all the passengers. He landed in Liverpool with nothing but, literally half his clothes on his back. He made his way to London and a few days after arriving in there he got a message from the American Consulate that the port authorities in Liverpool had a steamer trunk with his name on it.

TB: Nice!

HMB: So he got his stuff back.

TB: So he must have got on the wrong boat?

HMB: No it came loose from the cabin somehow; as the ship went down it may have broken apart. The trunk floated to the surface and a fishing boat picked it up the next day. That's my theory.

TB: So then he traveled across Europe?

HMB: He went to France, toured parts of the front, stayed there until some months after the war. I think he did for the Salvation Army served the same thing the Red Cross does. But exactly what the details were I don't know.

TB: So then shortly after Virginia had died, and he's going to Europe your father is actually living with his other grandparents so Mrs. Edward T. Mathes was actually kind of alone then?

HMB: Yes I think so.

TB: Going through a difficult time, alone.

HMB: Yes. Miriam says there was a doctor in town that was kind of looking after her. And whether they had an affair I have no idea. But, you know, they didn't talk about things like that in those days (laughter).

TB: Right.

HMB: But anyway, they got back together and spent the rest of their lives together.

TB: Right.

HMB: And he did many lecture tours after coming back from overseas. Apparently he was on the lecture circuit and quite a bit in demand.

TB: Really interesting guy. Do you have anything else?

HMB: Probably, but it doesn't come to the surface right at the moment.

TB: Well this is really great and I really appreciate your willingness to do it and thank you very much.

HMB: OK, very good. Well it was a pleasure.