

Selma Denecke

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DENECKE: Selma Denecke

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Tape 1, Side 1

1999 March 17

EM: This is Elizabeth Meyer, and I'm interviewing Selma Denecke in the Jefferson Room, here at the Oregon Historical Society on March 17, 1999, St. Patrick's Day. So, Selma, can you tell me a little bit about the conditions surrounding your birth?

DENECKE: It's my understanding that I presented my mother with a very difficult birth. I was, I think, overdue, and I believe I weighed eight pounds, which is a pretty good size. My father had just returned from overseas in World War I; in fact, he had been requested to get back here to Portland in time for my birth because it was anticipated that it would be difficult, and he was wanted to be here. Both his father – who was a doctor, and who was here – and also the attending physician to my mother were requesting this. Somewhere there is a copy of a telegram that was sent to General Pershing – who was in charge of the American troops in Europe – and this shows you how personal and relatively small the military situations were in those days. Granted, the war had been over since the previous November – November 11, 1918. My father and many other military people were still overseas. In fact, he – my father – caught that very, very bad flu that existed in Europe at that time and was very ill. There is a picture of him showing, I think, that he certainly had been ill at that time. Anyway, there is, somewhere, a copy of this telegram that was sent to

General Pershing requesting that my father be allowed to come home for the impending birth of his child, not knowing then whether it would be a boy or a girl. So to that extent I do know. I was born in Northwest Portland, not at Good Samaritan Hospital, where all my own children were born – [clears throat] here we go again [makes disapproving sound] – but at a maternity hospital that existed on Northwest 18th Avenue called Miss Gavin's, G-a-v-i-n-'s. The building is still there – has always been there, that I remember – but certainly is not a hospital now. It hasn't been, that I remember, either. It would be 18th and about Irving or so, in that area. That's where I was born.

EM: Mm-hmm, and the date?

DENECKE: June 11, 1919.

EM: Did your parents tell you what reaction they had to having you, and having a girl?

DENECKE: They didn't – no, that aspect of it didn't enter into it at all. It was just that they were so pleased to have a baby, because I was a child of their marriage, which had existed over a period of years before this. Of course, I turned out to be the only child, I'm sure [loud background noise], because I was a difficult birth, and I just know that they were extremely happy to have me. The fact that I was a girl I doubt entered into it a bit. They were just as pleased to have a girl as to have had a boy.

EM: Did your parents talk to you at all about their meeting each other?

DENECKE: No, unfortunately that's something I've never known. I wish I did. I suspect it was in New York, because my father had Brooklyn Medical School at Columbia University, and then interned as people then did. They didn't do all the fancy residencies that they do now. But he had – so he was in New York from 1904 until 1910, at least, and my mother – who had come from Wisconsin – I suspect that he met her in New York. She had friends

there whom I eventually spent a couple of days with quite a bit later. But I never knew the circumstances of their meeting at all.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: Then she came with him back to Portland [sometime] between 1910 and 1912. I'm not sure even whether they were married there or here, but by 1912 they lived here.

EM: Okay. Can you talk a bit about your earliest memories as a child?

DENECKE: Well, they, I suppose, had mostly to do with where I lived at the time.

EM: Right.

DENECKE: I can't honestly say that I remember living at my grandparents' home, which was the first place that I did live, for about a year and a half. I was, of course, only up to [...] say, eighteen months old at the time, and no, I don't really remember anything about that. I just know that there was a – well, the property originally surrounding the house – [a] very large house – was very large acreage. I know that there were many places to walk with them, and there was a stream that flowed through it. Later, of course, I played in this area, when I was older. I just know that the phrase "rolling ball" and [EM laughs] [...] because that's what I did when I was out of doors. I rolled a ball and I picked flowers.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: That's all I can tell you about it.

EM: When you were a little bit older you did come back to your grandparents' house. How would you describe this house and its surroundings?

DENECKE: Very grand. It is Italianate architecture. It still exists, but it's been made into apartments years and years ago during World War II. It is a very large home if you think of it in terms of being one home. I came to know it well because I did spend weekends or nights out there, because in the meantime my father and mother had moved into Portland itself rather than living out there. They did live there, of course, those first eighteen months or so of my life. Grandfather's idea when he built this home, in about 1914, was that both of his sons and their families would live there. Well, only, you know, only a grandfather or a father could think this kind of thing, and you know very well that the sons wanted no part of it. So my uncle and aunt never did live there, and my mother and father only until I was about eighteen months old. Then we moved into Portland itself, which of course was a lot closer to Good Samaritan Hospital, where my father took all his patients. That's what we did. So the first two places that we lived in Portland were rentals. They were houses that were available to rent. The first was on Arlington Heights, on Kingston? Avenue. The second one was on Westover on Cumberland Road [phonetic]. Only then – by this time I was about four years old – did we actually move into what became our permanent home on Cornell Road. This again is on Westover, very convenient to Good Samaritan Hospital.

EM: I know you were very, very young then, but do you have any memories of those first rental homes?

DENECKE: Oh, yes, very definitely. I can remember very clearly the one on Kingston Avenue. I remember that it had a typical kind of a central hallway and central staircase and you came into it – and it's still standing too, as is the other one on Westover – came into it, and I remember the living room was on the right, and the dining room was on the left, and the kitchen was behind the dining room. There was a fenced back yard. I remember being taken for walks in the neighborhood and meeting neighborhood children and friends of my parents who lived in that neighborhood.

Then, when we moved to the house on Cumberland, that belonged to a doctor who was going overseas for a year, or maybe fifteen months, and wanted somebody to live in his home. He was taking his family and going to live in Europe. So we rented the house, and I remember that house as well, which of course is also still standing. I remember the staircase on the right as you came in. I remember this one had quite a view. The living room would have been to the left. I do indeed remember it – I don't remember too many details beyond that, but by this time I was having little tea parties out in the garden with my dolls and there are pictures that were taken of me doing that kind of thing, so that I do remember.

EM: Do you still have any of those pictures?

DENECKE: I don't think so, at least not where I could get at them.

EM: Oh, okay. Mm-hmm. You mentioned your father had patients at Good Samaritan Hospital. What sort of doctor was he?

DENECKE: He was a surgeon. He and my uncle and my grandfather were all surgeons. Medicine was not nearly as specialized then as it is now, but, on the other hand, there were specialties that were internal medicine and surgery and, um – what am I trying to say – Ob/Gyn. I mean, there were specialties, but not the refined specialties that there are now. So he had an office downtown in the Medical Arts Building across from the library on Taylor, SW Taylor. He would go there in the afternoon, but he would go to the hospital in the morning and either perform surgery and/or go around and make rounds, as they were called, to visit his patients in the hospital.

EM: Hmm. So how do you think your father being a doctor affected your feelings about going to the doctor, or did you feel that—

DENECKE: Not at all, that I could remember. He was not a person who said, “Now, you must have a check up,” or anything like that. I have been a person who has rarely gone to doctors, unless it was demanded – unless I was sick enough to do it. For many, many, many, many years I had absolutely no personal doctor whatsoever, unless I would get something like a sore throat. But he was – well, if I had to have a medical certificate, say, to go to camp or some such, or to go to school – he would just send me to his friend, Dr. Knox [phonetic], who was an internist. Dr. Knox would sit me up there and not examine me at all, but he would look at me with what we used to refer to as his “owl-y eyes,” and say, [serious tone] “Selma Jane, how are you?” and you know, I’d say, “I’m fine,” and that was it. No, I really was not very well taken care of if you want to know the truth. Nobody went into any detail of my physical well-being unless I became ill, which I rarely did.

EM: Since we’re on that subject, do you have any particular memories of the type of ministrations that your parents would give you when you were sick. What that was like?

DENECKE: There were no antibiotics in those days. So the only time that I can remember being really sick was with some kind of a strep throat, which probably is very similar to what I have had now, because I’ve always been plagued with that kind of thing on and off and subsequently, although only if I’m exposed to a cold or whatever. Anyway, I was really sick then. They were very concerned about me because I lost my appetite and I just didn’t eat. They – it wasn’t that they did anything concrete as far as medicines are concerned. It was just constant kind of care – just tender loving care, that’s all I can say.

As far as childhood diseases go, the only one I ever had – and this was not to my benefit – was whooping cough. I did have whooping cough but I had it during the summer – [I] could be out of doors – and I never had mumps, measles, or chicken pox. When I did get chicken pox, I was twenty-two years old, and got chicken pox very severely, which you do as an adult. So that’s because my family was extremely careful with me. They kind of kept me away from, I suppose, other children who might have been ill. I even was what I would - we would now call home schooling. I was home schooled until about the middle of the

second or third grade. That was a mistake from other points of view – not the health point of view – although it might have been done for that reason. They honestly enjoyed me. They liked to have me, which I just, as a mother of five, I don't understand. But they did. They loved me very, very much, and I was the apple of their eye.

So I was kept at home, but for an only child that's a terrible mistake. You don't learn how to – the give and take of playing with other children, and the fact that other children tease and can be mean and cruel. It made going to school hard for me when eventually I went – although I went to Catlin [presumably, Catlin Gable School], which was my total schooling until college, and also it was the neighborhood school for me because it was on Westover in those days. So that's [trails off].

EM: Well, I'm going to ask you some more about the home schooling, but right now I wanted to ask you if you could talk a bit about your, how your mother and father complimented each other in their roles at home, or differed?

DENECKE: Well, they were very compatible, happy people – extremely so. They were gentle. They were happy. They had lots of friends. They entertained people at dinner at home, and they went out to other people's homes for dinner. They were very careful as to who they left me with. My grandmother had domestic servants, and one of them – well, yes, I guess only the one – did what we would now call babysitting. It wasn't called that then. But if Daddy and Mother were going out for dinner and I was not included, then I would – Mary would come and stay with me. Sometimes her brother, Patrick – they were Irish people – would come and stay with me.

Then, Mother had, for her clothing, a dressmaker who came twice a year. This, you know, sounds awfully fancy, which it really wasn't. I don't know why she didn't buy clothes in a store. My grandmother did; my grandmother bought very expensive clothes. Mother could have done that but she didn't. She wasn't outsized or anything like that, she just enjoyed having this dressmaker, whose name was Rosalind Robbins [phonetic], come. Rosalind Robbins was a lovely lady – just a lot of fun, and probably what we would now call middle-

aged. She lived out near Oregon City, but during the week she would come to her various clients' homes and stay there, and maybe sew for a week, and then go home for the weekend and then go to somebody else's house. She was accompanied by an older woman – a Mrs. Forsythe [phonetic] – who did some of the simpler stitching that was required of these clothes. Mother and Rosalind Robbins would pour over the pattern books and, you know, choose patterns depending on the seasons of the year. Then mother would go shopping for the fabric. Then if pleating was required, pleating could be done professionally in a pleating store. Buttons could be covered, and belts could be covered. Those were all done and brought to the house where Rosalind Robbins and Mrs. Forsythe held forth a couple of weeks each year in the spring and in the fall. While they were sewing, I sewed doll clothes and just had a marvelous time sewing doll clothes.

EM: Did they make clothes for you as well?

DENECKE: Yes, they did. They did make clothes for me – both when I was young and also when I was older. Yes.

EM: Do you remember what the experience was like of having them work with you? What did you think of the clothes that they made?

DENECKE: Yes. Of course, I didn't like having to stand there and stand still while they pinned up hems and, you know, that kind of thing. They were very meticulous about what they did. But I can remember some of the fabrics and the colors. It would be – as I said, depending on the season, it either would be fall or it would be spring. It really was fun. What was most fun was while they were in residence, so to speak, mother would see to it that they had an especially nice lunch. We got things like pineapple upside-down cake and wonderful food that we didn't normally get for lunch.

I should also add that my mother and father always had a domestic servant who, unlike many of the servants of their friends, did not live-in by Mother and Daddy's own choice.

They preferred to have this person live at home and come during the day. So both – first Anna Bolstrom [phonetic] and later Wilma Nelson [phonetic] came, not at the same time. They lived at home, at their respective homes, and they came by the streetcar every – well, five days a week, not every day, five days a week. They did the washing and the ironing – this was done by hand, thank you, not by machine – the washing, the ironing, the cleaning, and getting, [and] maybe preparing, something for dinner, like peeling potatoes and having them ready to go.

EM: Mm-hmm. Backing up a little bit, you said that Rosalind Robbins and the older lady were in residence there. Did they sleep at the house?

DENECKE: They didn't at our house. But Rosalind Robbins did at the homes of some of the people for whom she sewed clothes. I loved to have her tell me about these people. She was very funny about it, too. I guess some of them were characters that were difficult to work with and work for, and she would regale me with these stories of these people. I never met any of them, but I certainly heard about them. Of course if she was babysitting me and my parents were out for dinner, then she would spend the night.

EM: Mm-hmm. Who did you most enjoy – of these various people, who did you most enjoy taking care of you?

DENECKE: Rosalind Robbins was a real favorite of mine. So was Mary Lynch Creebin [phonetic], who was my grandmother's maid, if you will. In fact, she only died within the last few years and was a lifelong friend whom I just adored.

EM: Can you talk to me a little bit about how your parents' treatment of you differed?

DENECKE: You mean one from the other?

EM: One from the other.

DENECKE: I don't really think it did.

EM: How did they show affection to you?

DENECKE: Oh, I don't know, just – they just were warm and inclusive of me in everything they did that they could include me in – trips that they took, and those trips were limited, by their own desires, to the Pacific Northwest. First, the beach, where we went to Seaside – no, the very first beach was [indistinct]. That was one time only, and I was an infant then and do not remember it.

EM: What was the beach called?

DENECKE: Neahkahnie.

EM: Okay.

DENECKE: You know Neahkahnie, I think. Anyway, very soon after that we started to go to Gearhart. We went to Gearhart every year for a number of years. The Knox family – whom I've mentioned – and their daughter, Anne, would go and rent a house, and we would rent a house. We'd be neighbors at the beach and be there for a whole month because you didn't just drive to the beach, you know, for a day or part of a day, the way you can do now. It was a day's drive to get there because you went by way of Astoria, and the highway was very twisty and lengthy. There was no Sunset Highway. That wasn't built until during World War II and right afterwards. So it was a real journey to get there. Daddy would take a month off and go, and you cannot believe the equipment that they took with them. I mean, here was a nice home that they rented down there, and it was furnished, of course – including kitchen furnishings. They took boxes of kitchen utensils, and boxes of

books to read, and boxes of everything. It was a real expedition. But you went for a month. You didn't just go for a weekend or a day.

EM: That's a long time.

DENECKE: Yes, and we would always go in September because the weather is best in September.

EM: Do you have any special memories of the beach?

DENECKE: Oh, yes. When Anne and I were old enough to play in the sand dunes in front of our respective houses, and the sand dunes had green, reed-like grass that grows – well it still does, but the difference now is that the sand has gone farther and father to the west, out in the ocean. The beach is much wider than it used to be, and it presents a slightly different picture than it used to, although the houses – I mean the dunes – immediately in front of the row of houses that overlooks the ocean at Gearhart is still kind of the same. Still, reed-like grass grows there. It was fun. We just loved being at the beach. Anything to do with the beach was very special. There was something about driving down the Columbia River Highway that you first felt that you were close to the ocean when you got to Astoria. Of course, you didn't really see the ocean until you got around the corner and came down Clatsop, the Clatsop Beaches. But you could smell it and feel it and knew you were at the beach, and when you only did it once a year, it was very exciting.

EM: Was – of all the places you were taken as a young child, was that your favorite?

DENECKE: It was until [coughs] – oh, I should inhale a bit [coughs] – it was my favorite until we went to Victoria [coughs], which we did soon – well, I shouldn't say soon. I should say probably by the late 1920s. We started in – the Knoxes and we started to go to Victoria every summer, also for a month. We – and of course that was exciting because not only

was it a much longer drive to Seattle, or sometimes to Port Angeles, but then you had to take a ferry over to Victoria – which you still do – and that made it seem very special. But my parents and the Knoxes liked British Columbia, and they liked the atmosphere of Victoria, which is very laid-back and very un-American.

EM: What was your impression of Victoria as a child?

DENECKE: I loved it – absolutely loved it. To this day, I love it. It is my second home in a way. I learned to swim there. Eventually, I first drove the car there. But where we would stay for the first several years was in what you would call a residential hotel. It was a hotel out at Oak Bay – I don't know whether you know Victoria at all.

EM: Yeah, a little.

DENECKE: Well, it's – this is not downtown. It's facing the state of Washington – facing east. Oak Bay is a beautiful residential area. In it, at the time, was the Oak Bay Hotel – not to be confused with the present Oak Bay Beach Hotel, which was built probably in about maybe the early 1930s, although I realize that was the Depression. But the old Oak Bay Hotel – which has long since been torn down – was where I described it, and right across the street from the water – the Puget Sound – with a beach and a park. It was just a wonderful area. We could even go in the—

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

Tape 1, Side 2
1999 March 17

EM: This is Elizabeth Meyer talking with Selma Denecke, side two of tape one. So, you were talking about the Oak Bay Hotel.

DENECKE: The Oak Bay Hotel, which was probably three stories high, had all Chinese help. It was owned and/or managed by a man named John Virtue. John Virtue was a character. My father and Dr. Knox liked him very much. Probably the interesting thing about him and the hotel was the fact that Rudyard Kipling had stayed there [EM laughs] and knew John Virtue. As a matter of fact, the apartment house that has been built – occupying the same piece of property where the hotel used to be – is called the Rudyard Kipling, and that's why it's called that – because Kipling was there. This is typical of a Canadian – or, let's put it this way, a part of the British Empire Background noise]-- much more closely than it is now. In other words, because Canada is so much independent now, you don't associate the British-ness of it quite as much as was certainly the case in those days.

EM: So you really had the sensation of being in a foreign country?

DENECKE: Oh, very much so – and this Chinese help, Anne Knox [Look?] and I just were terrible. We just bedeviled the life out of the Chinese help. We'd follow them around and get out into the kitchen where we had no business to be, and run around the hotel. We just had a marvelous time with the Chinese help. We would eat all our meals in the dining room and have things like Damson plum pudding, and consommé – which I did not care for, you know, just a dumb old clear soup. It had nothing interesting in it. Then you would get a tiny bit of fish as a true entrée. Then you would get your main dish, which was probably some kind of meat, and probably tended to be overdone, as the British tended to do, and the vegetables, as well. Then you would get some kind of a pudding. I can remember Damson plums, which are a variety of plum. My grandmother often went along. She was a widow by then. She would – she liked to eat early. So she and Anne [Look?] –

Anne Knox as she then was – and I would eat early. Our parents were upstairs having cocktails and enjoying themselves. They would come down at the last minute, but we were sort of taken care of in the meantime. The hotel had a wide veranda around it and it was just delightful. I just loved it.

At least a couple of years during that period of time, instead of actually staying at the hotel, we rented an apartment just about a block away – within walking distance – and we would have dinner at the hotel. But we had an apartment, a furnished apartment, in which we lived. It was called the [Dempster?] Apartments. I can remember that. It was right there about a block away. Anne and I – well, the Knoxes and we – both would do these things together each year. So that's what we did, and I loved Victoria – every inch of it.

EM: Were the Knoxes the people that were closest to your family outside of your relatives?

DENECKE: They were equally close along with some other friends who were called the Goddells[?], and the Patricks, and the Morrows. Those people all lived over in the Alameda and the Irvington districts of Portland. The Knoxes lived on Portland Heights, and the Knoxes were not particularly close friends of those friends. But we were equally close friends of all of those people. The Goddells' and the Patricks' and the Morrows' children were a bit older than I, and some of them to this day are very, very good friends of mine. More of them are gone than are here, but – well, somebody who works here at OHS – and I don't know whether she just works as a volunteer, [Lanie Patrick?] – I don't know whether you—

EM: [indicates no]

DENECKE: Well, to tell you the truth, I probably wouldn't know her if I saw her, but her father is one of these friends. That brings up a whole other vacation thing, if you want to know about it.

EM: Oh, I'm sure. I'll ask you about it. Well gosh – you're describing such fun times. I hesitate to ask you about this, but I was going to also ask you about how your parents handled discipline in the family?

DENECKE: Daddy was – well, first of all, I was not spanked. I think I should have been, but I wasn't. Daddy tended to be very – uh, professorial, I suppose you would say, and lecture me about things. Well, I just mentally took off when he did this. I just didn't take it in at all. I can remember his, you know, just thinking that he was getting through to me. But I don't think he was getting through to me at all. I – there was no discipline in the sense of, as I said, in the sense of corporal punishment whatsoever. I can remember, I think, having broken a vase in the house on Arlington Heights. Now, I would have been very young then, and I'm sure it was accidental. I just remember that they were not very happy about it, understandably, because I'd broken a beautiful vase. I suppose you could say I was pretty spoiled because they doted on me so much that I was not – I mean, I was treasured rather than anything else. They loved to include me, and very often I would be taken to dinner at their good friends' homes – these same people whom I've just talked about. I would be taken to these homes for dinner and sometimes get to play with their older children, and sometimes not, because maybe the older children were gone.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: And also this thing gets into more of junior high age and high school age.

EM: Let's wait a little bit on that one. How did your mother – if your mother caught you acting up, how would she handle it?

DENECKE: I really don't know – probably just say [slightly stern], “Selma Jane,” and you know, I didn't respond very well to any kind of admonishments, and still don't. [laughs] So I don't think that too much was accomplished by that. [indistinct]

EM: Well, it doesn't sound like a very authoritarian atmosphere.

DENECKE: [adamantly] Oh, far from it – far from it. In fact, they didn't like authoritarianism. They very definitely did not.

EM: So how would you describe the rule setting in the household – time to get up, time to go to bed, how to conduct yourself?

DENECKE: Oh, well, those things of course were determined to a great degree by school, and what time you had to be there and what time you got home and doing your homework and all that kind of thing. The only thing I can remember about going to bed is in the spring when it began to be light late, I didn't want to go to bed before it was dark. I was usually forced to go to bed before it was dark by the time it, you know, got to that point. I didn't like that a bit. I can remember looking out the window from my bedroom, and maybe it was just beginning to get dark, and not liking to be there at all. I did not like that.

EM: Did your parents adhere to any particular religion?

DENECKE: They were Episcopalians – but as they would have said, or as they did say, “nominal Episcopalians.” That's what I am, too. I don't go to church. They didn't go to church. But by the time I was in high school, my best girlfriend at the time, her parents were very active with the Episcopal Church – with Trinity, to be precise. Mr. Smith was on the Vestry, and Mrs. Smith taught Sunday school, and I went to church because Claire went to church, and that was fun. My parents were very pleased that I was doing that. I was confirmed at that time in the church. It meant a lot to me, probably mostly because there

were a lot of other young people, young teenagers, at church. They were friends of mine and I thought it was fun to see them. [I prayed?] I just looked at this as a social event.

EM: Did you, when you were very young, remember any sort of church-going or discussion of god or religion?

DENECKE: Not at all. Not at all. I was taken to a few weddings, but that was the extent of it. In fact, this Mary [Lynch Kreegan?], who worked for my grandmother, was married sometime in the 1920s. That's the very first wedding I ever went to, and of course that was a Catholic wedding, at St. Mary's Cathedral in Northwest. That's the first wedding I ever went to.

EM: Did you take part in it in any particular way?

DENECKE: No. No, I just was taken to it.

EM: Can you talk about the other people – the Goddells, the Patricks, and the Morrows – that you were, your family was close with during your early life?

DENECKE: We just loved all of them. They were just wonderful, and as I say, their children – with the exception of the youngest Patrick daughter – were older than I. In fact, by the time I was in, let's say, junior high, their oldest children had gone away to college. But I knew them, and I loved them. I had crushes on the boys – on Dave Goddell and Jack Patrick. The Morrows only had daughters. But, they were wonderful people. They were wonderfully close with my family. They – I just loved going to their homes. It was very special. Once in awhile I'd get to spend the night at either the Goddells' or the Patricks' and that was really special.

EM: Can you tell me about a particular fun memory that you have of any of these folks?

DENECKE: Well, yes. The Morrors – Ben Morrow was the City of Portland water engineer. Part of Bull Run water supply – the lake up there is called Lake Ben Morrow because it was named for him. When I was – oh golly, I don't know, let's say eleven or twelve – I remember that he took my parents and me up. Now that's a locked-up situation up there. It isn't open to the public. But he took us up there, and I got to see the source of our water supply and the dam. In fact, I even made a picture of it, which I wish I had now, but I don't. I haven't seen it in many, many, many, many years. But I drew a picture of it – all in color, and just loved it. But we went up there, and I got to see, you know, the headwaters of Bull Run and our water system. So I've always been very interested in that because of him. He was just a sweet person, just a wonderful person.

EM: Do you remember what the Goddells and Patricks did for professions?

DENECKE: Yes. Lane Goddell was in the insurance business and Charlie Patrick was in the lumber business. His son Jack is still – it's Patrick Lumber, and Jack is still running it as far as I know.

A story about the Goddells?

EM: Yes.

DENECKE: All right. When the Rockys[?] came to Portland in 1891, having come out from Iowa, we arrived – they arrived. I wasn't there. They arrived in October. Daddy was eight and Uncle [Gene?] was five. Grandfather was already a doctor, and he had made the decision to leave the comforts of the Middle West, where he was from, and come out here. They came by train. They came with a whole freight car of belongings which included a horse, and a dog, and all their furniture, and the hired man to take care of the dog and the horse. His name was Patrick [Flannigan?]. They arrived and stayed the first couple of nights at the Portland Hotel, which was only about a year old at that time. Then from there they

moved into a boarding house, which would be similar to [?] if you've read any of James Beard's books, other than his recipes. His mother ran a boarding house. Boarding houses were very acceptable places for people to live, unlike what we might think of as a boarding house now. So my family, apparently, moved into a boarding house, and then found a home in Northwest Portland which they moved into, I don't know how soon after that. Well, the Goddell family arrived from, most directly from Wyoming, although they had been New Englanders to begin with. Wyoming had been subject to boom and bust kind of economy. Mr. Grandfather Goddell, whom I never knew, had gone broke, more or less. They came to Portland also in 1891 and also, I'm sure, by train. They had two sons who were just the age of my father and uncle--David Goddell and [Lane?] Goddell. Almost immediately they became very ill. Whether they had typhoid or what – because people got typhoid in those days – and I'm not quite sure what they had. But whatever they had, Grandfather was ready to help to take care of them since he was a doctor. Although my grandmother was not a nurse, nevertheless, she had a great feeling of compassion for people who were ill. As I understand it, she just kind of moved in and helped to take care of them. They were very ill. As a result of that, friendship arose, and they became lifelong friends on the grandparents' level, and then on my parents' level, and then on my level. It has continued like that. In fact, Lane Goddell's son, David Goddell, was named – he unfortunately has died, but he would have been six years older than I – his name was David Rocky Goddell because he was named for my family. That's the kind of thing, the closeness of the friendship. Then the Patricks were good friends of the Goddells and lived within a block of them in Alameda. I think that's how we got to know the Patricks. But this was lifelong friendship.

EM: That's amazing.

DENECKE: Yes.

EM: Do you know anything about the Patricks' background?

DENECKE: Mr. Patrick came from Iowa and Mrs. Patrick came from Kansas. Aside from that, no I don't. I remember meeting her sisters, who lived back there but would come out here once in awhile, and his sister, who I think actually lived out here.

EM: What about the background of the Morrrows?

DENECKE: I don't know as much about them, although she had a sister who lived here. Ironically, Ginger – our oldest daughter – in high school went with the grandson of that sister. That was interesting – just kind of, you know, just coincidental. I really don't know that much about the Morrrows background but I was very fond of them. They were just always people who were warm, wonderful people.

EM: Do you have any photographs of these folks?

DENECKE: No, not at all.

EM: Okay.

DENECKE: I don't. Then of course there were all kinds of peripheral friendships among my parents' friends – I mean, people who were not as close as all these people whom I have mentioned, but who nevertheless, played a part in my parents' group of friends, because they had lots of friends. They were very warm people. Oh, one couple I should mention, because they were equally good friends of the Knoxes and of us, were the [Allens?]. They had a ranch up at Parkdale in the Hood River Valley. Now, they were a bit older, and their son was considerably older. In fact, I really hardly knew him until many years later, because he was that much older. But, the ranch house where the Allens lived – they only lived there basically during the summer months. They did not live there in the winter. They would usually have an apartment down here in Portland during the

winter. They raised apples, as people did, but Harry Allen also was in the insurance business. We used to go to the Allens' for weekends. Usually around Easter was the favorite time to go, and once in awhile for the Fourth of July. What's really ironic is a man who lived upstairs from me in the Sylvan Heights Condominiums where I now live – this was several years ago – he was about to be married, which indeed he was. His brother had a ranch at Parkdale and I said, "I want to come to this wedding." So I was duly invited because he and I had become good friends. He's a Portland policeman, incidentally. So I went to the wedding and, sure enough, it was at the very same house where I had stayed at the Allens' time after time. His brother and sister-in-law, who have bought it, have just rejuvenated that house beautifully. It still has this fabulous view of the north side of Mt. Hood – which is not the side you usually see, but it is what you can see from the upper Hood River Valley, like Parkdale. It is just an unbelievable view with a beautiful garden around this ranch house and that's where this wedding was. For me to be able to go back there – and they have a photograph of the house as it was when I can remember it. Although they have added on to the back of the house, the rooms still are pretty much basically the same, although they've decorated very nicely. But isn't that amazing? I mean, that's the kind of thing that happens when you stay in the same community.

EM: That's incredible. Do you remember how the Allens got to Oregon?

DENECKE: No, I don't. I will say that there was a large, large group of eastern people who settled in the Hood River Valley previous to World War I. Some of them were artistic people. Some of them were sort of idealistic people. The Hood River Valley is a beautiful place. Granted, it has real winter up there, and also very hot summers. But some of them made a living – a successful living – raising apples, or pears, or both. And some did not. The Allens were eastern, I believe, and I don't know whether they were really part of that migration of people who came before World War I, but they had come from the east. As I say, there's quite a group. They have remained very loyal to the Hood River Valley, to Parkdale, and to that area, because it is beautiful.

EM: You mentioning artists coming here reminded me of your later interest in art and life. I wanted to ask you about your first memories of art, and perhaps music, in your home.

DENECKE: Music really not. I mean, my parents liked music, but it wasn't anything that they spent any great amount of time on, although they did have a collection of records – of the old Victrola kind of record. That would have been opera singing and that sort of thing, which, frankly, I did not like, and still am not very keen on to this day. Music was not a high item. Neither was art, but my – when I talk about this drawing that I did of the Bull Run Dam, that was just typical of what you do in school. I mean, you know, you draw and you paint pictures, and I did all that kind of thing. You made things – what was called manual training in those days. I made things down in the basement with, you know, nails and paint – things like a hat stand and, oh, they just – they're dumb things, but it's what you do.

EM: Do you still have any of them?

DENECKE: Oh, no – heavens!

EM: [laughs]

DENECKE: But they were, you know – it's good for kids to do things like that. I spent a lot of time as a child doing those kinds of things. But if you want to know how my interest in art developed then that is a very--another story of coincidence. When I was at Scripps College, in the end of my first year we were supposed to say what we wanted to take in our second year. So I signed up for a course in economic geography, which I thought would be very interesting. Well, the professor who was going to have given the course just walked out on Scripps during the summer. The college was very annoyed with him. He went to another college. But anyway, I didn't particularly know him. This was just a course

I was going to take. So I got back to school and I had this big hole in my program. What am I going to take? Well, it was Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at eight o'clock, or something like that, and there was a course called The History of Art and Architecture which was given at that time. I thought, well, why not? I mean, I'll sign up for that. So I did, and I fell so in love with it, and also with the man who taught it, because of course Charles [Matune Brooks?] was everybody's sweetheart. So I went on to major in the history of art and architecture. Because of that, when I came home from college in 1941 and a very good of my father's, Dr. Otis White – now there was a peripheral friend – a wonderful, wonderful man, who was at the time president of the board of trustees of the art museum. I was thinking, well, you know, I really ought to go to work – not that Daddy would have cared if I'd gone to work or not, but I wanted to go to work. It was important to me. So anyway, Otis White said, "Well, there is this vacancy at the art museum, and there's nobody for the front desk and it would be five and a half days a week." You see, in those days they didn't charge to go into the museum, so there was no money involved. It was simply a matter of keeping track of the number of people, doing some typing, answering the phone for the whole museum – because it was connected to the telephone at the front desk – and sort of being the lifeguard, I guess you'd say, at the front desk. That's how I got the job. I worked there for four years, which happened to be the years of World War II.

EM: Well, we'll definitely get back there. Can we veer back to the distant past?

DENECKE: Oh, yes, sure.

EM: I wanted to also ask you about your memories of holidays at home.

DENECKE: Oh. Well, you know, I think that my family now – you know, my children and my grandchildren – we make much more of holidays than was made for me. Now, the one that I do remember is that my parents idealistically, at least for some years, would put up a tree on Christmas Eve.

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

Tape 2, Side 1
1999 March 17

EM: This is Elizabeth Meyer, and I'm talking with Selma Denecke on March 17, 1999, in the Jefferson Room of the Oregon Historical Society. This is tape two, side one. So, we were talking about holidays in your home, and you were talking about how your parents put up the Christmas tree on Christmas Eve.

DENECKE: I don't remember anything in particular about, say, a Christmas dinner, or Christmas Eve dinner. Now, later I can go into some detail about some Christmas Eves, but not when I was little. Eventually, I went out and trick-or-treated on Halloween like all kids do, but not when I was tiny. I don't remember trick-or-treating, people coming to the door and that kind of thing in those days. I do remember one, and at least one Thanksgiving, maybe two, where we went to my grandparents' home, but probably that must have been before my grandfather died. He died in the 1920s so it would have been when I was quite young. Also, I should add that my uncle and aunt and my mother and father were not close socially and did not do anything together. So it never would have included them. The only way that I played with my cousins – because my aunt and uncle had four daughters, whom I'm quite close to now – the only way that I played with them was at Grandmother's house. Since they lived in that same neighborhood they were at my grandmother's house all the time. One or another of them was probably spending the night there every night. But Grandmother was alone by then – I mean alone as far as her husband having died, although this domestic help that I speak of was there – but that's when and how I played with them. I've come to know them far better as we are adults than I did when we were children.

EM: Do you have any particular memories of individual Thanksgivings or Christmases, one that pops into mind because of whatever special thing occurred on it?

DENECKE: Not when I was a child. No, I don't.

EM: Do you – have you carried over any of the traditions in particular that your family engaged in for those holidays?

DENECKE: No. They were prolific gift givers to their friends – and these were not exciting nor expensive gifts, but like a carton of cigarettes or a bottle of liquor or whatever – but early on I was allowed to wrap all the gifts. I've always enjoyed wrapping gifts because I was allowed to do this early on, having learned from my mother how to do it, and so I would – and then I could go with Daddy as he would deliver these gifts to the different friends, family friends.

EM: Well. [SD laughs] So can you tell me a bit about your first friendships, and how you played together, and what you were most interested in, in your play in your early years?

DENECKE: I suppose that as far as playing is concerned – well, it depends with whom it was. With Larry [Rosenthal?], who was my neighbor – what we did, we played with little cars that were like Tonka Toys, I guess they're called, and we made roads and bridges and castles – I don't know about castles, but anyway – in what Mrs. Rosenthal's flowerbed would have been if we hadn't always been playing there. But we also played in my yard. We concocted all these things for the little cars to play on. That's what I did with Larry when we were little. It was fun. It was just lots of fun. You see, I enjoyed that just as much as dolls. Now at Anne Knox's house, I can more remember putting, trying on her mother's clothes and things like that. I don't know that we ever played dolls particularly. I played dolls a lot, and I played dolls with some people that I went to grade school with – several girls that I went to grade school with. But it was, dolls were something that I did, but not with Anne. I think it was more playing around in her – I don't know how her mother stood for this, because we just made a mess of her mother's room. But I think we tried on things that, you know, clothes, hats, whatever – did things like that.

EM: Was that Anne's favorite thing, or what else do you remember her enjoying?

DENECKE: Oh, I don't know. You see she was two years younger than I. At that point that made an awful lot of difference. She used to get extremely unhappy because I would be allowed to do things that she wasn't allowed to do. She [laughs] sometimes we didn't get along too well. We are very devoted friends now and have been for many, many years. But there was a time when that two-year difference made quite a difference.

EM: Mm-hmm. The other kids that you've mentioned – what sort of play did you have with them?

DENECKE: Well, the Goddell and Patrick and Morrow – they were all so much older than I that there was no play involved. I just, you know, I just was there, but I didn't play in that sense.

EM: You've said how much you enjoyed playing with dolls. Did you have a particular favorite doll?

DENECKE: Oh, yes. The doll that I think preceded the Barbie doll, called a Patsy doll. A Patsy doll was a much more recognizable child, not a would-be teenager or whatever Barbie may be. In fact, Barbie just came along at when I think some of my own children were maybe – well what did they say, forty years for Barbie?

EM: Right.

DENECKE: Well, see, Annie will be forty in December, and she didn't really care for dolls anyway. So Barbie never entered our lives. But the Patsy doll, which was a doll preceding that, and there were various sizes, like a [Patsykin?] and a [Patsy Ann?] and a – and then

there was Skippy, who would have been the Ken of that, you know, bunch of dolls. They were very realistic. They had things that you could buy, like roller skates and clothing – but I mentioned that I used to make doll clothes while Rosalind Robbins would be there. Well, I made most of my doll clothes.

EM: How elaborate did you get with the doll clothes?

DENECKE: Oh, not very elaborate. But I would do things like, you can buy biased lining and you can, you know, put it around the neck of something. Well, I – oh, and I learned to run the sewing machines. It was all done on the sewing machine, because the sewing machine was there when Rosalind Robbins would come. So I would make, you know, out of scraps of cotton I would make dresses, and learned how to put biased lining on, and things like that. They weren't very fancy but they were colorful.

EM: Just out of curiosity, did you grow up to make clothing later on, your own?

DENECKE: To a small degree.

EM: Uh-huh.

DENECKE: Not anything extensive. I used to make cotton skirts that would be like dirndl skirts – you know, kind of full. I don't think – I never learned to put in a sleeve in a garment. But I did make – yes, I did do sewing. Very simple sewing.

EM: Well, back to the earlier time. Can you talk to me about your favorite books?

DENECKE: Well, my favorite books were certainly the Dolittle books and the Little Men, Little Women – all the Louisa May Alcott books, every one of them under the – well, whatever their titles were, and the Oz books. I loved every one of those series, and read

all books in each of those series, and gave my family and immediate – the domestic help in my grandmother’s house – the names of various, of the characters – especially in the Dolittle books. My grandmother was Pushmi-Pullyu, and Elizabeth – one of the maids – was Polynesia. Polynesia was the name of the parrot, I believe. Mary was Chee-Chee, who was the monkey, and don’t ask me why. But anyway, those were the – what I as a younger child, what I enjoyed tremendously.

EM: How did people take to being called Chee-Chee or Pushmi-Pullyu?

DENECKE: They were so wonderful to me that they – whether they enjoyed it or not, they certainly acted as if they enjoyed it.

EM: Mm-hmm. What about the fantasy books drew you, do you think, the Oz and the Dr. Dolittle?

DENECKE: Well, I could see that – at least in the case of the Oz books, I could see that there was a real little girl who got to do these things. Certainly in the case of the Little Men, Little Women – I mean, those were real people and I enjoyed that. Now in the case of the Dolittle books – I don’t know, I suppose because he was a doctor and he was in England and he talked to the animals. He had great adventures, you know, just great adventures – probably on the marshes where he lived. It’s funny because when you mention the word fantasy, I kind of get turned off. I’ve never been a sci-fi person. I don’t really enjoy fantasy because I can’t see it as being something adaptable to my life. But those books were, to my mind, so I enjoyed them. I loved them.

EM: Speaking of animals, did you have a pet or pets?

DENECKE: No, and I wanted very much to have had a dog. My parents thought that because we lived on Cornell Road, which even then had a remarkable amount of traffic –

certainly nothing compared to what it has now, but it did have a lot of traffic. They – although my father had always grown up with a dog in the family – they did not. We did not have a dog. Both the Goddells and the Patricks had each an Airedale – Sergeant Goddell and Peter Patrick – and I adored Sergeant Goddell. I absolutely loved him. At least on one occasion – and maybe more than one – we got to take care of him while the Goddells were going somewhere. He came to our house and I just adored that dog, and I wanted a dog. Now, my family seemed to be dog people as opposed to cat people. I really have become almost more of a cat person myself. But until we were married and had children, I never had a dog or cat that – you know, that lived at my house that was mine.

EM: Mm-hmm. That's a long time to go without one.

DENECKE: I know it. I know it, and I think it's terrible, I really do. I think it's awful. Our kids have all had dogs and cats.

EM: That's great.

DENECKE: Anyway, I didn't – although that didn't prevent my loving them.

EM: Mm-hmm. Do you remember any particular adventure with the dogs?

DENECKE: No, not particularly – except that Sergeant Goddell and Peter Patrick were brothers out of the same litter. They lived two blocks apart, as I had mentioned, in Alameda. If they got together, they fought fiercely because – well, dogs do that. Eventually, we had a dog who had litter brothers – this is down in Salem – had litter brothers living in the neighborhood, and they fought also. It's territorial.

EM: Yeah. I was going to ask you if you remember your first sense of your parents' expectations for you within the family – being given chores, taking part—

DENECKE: Not in that respect, but in the respect of doing well in school and aiming toward college and that sort of thing, yes, very definitely.

EM: Were you not given chores?

DENECKE: Not really, and I should have been. You see I was very spoiled.

EM: [laughs] Uh-huh.

DENECKE: Because there was this help that was there five days a week. They did all those things. Then you see, when there's only one of you – one child – there isn't that much to do. No, I'm not typical of the average child in that respect.

EM: Do you remember going to kindergarten?

DENECKE: I didn't go to kindergarten.

EM: Oh, you told me—

DENECKE: Should have gone to kindergarten. Anne Knox [Look?] went to kindergarten. I didn't get to go to kindergarten. She went to Miss [Barnheisel's?] and I didn't get to go!

EM: What did you think of other children being able to – or having to – go to school and you staying home at the time?

DENECKE: Well, I suppose I just accepted it then. But as I say, in retrospect – and looking at what you ought to do, especially with an only child, that is a poor thing to do.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: But my parents didn't worry about what anybody thought about them or – they just lived their life and with their friends. They didn't – I don't think they really understood that a child needs a child's or a peer's – uh, somebody to play with and somebody to have some give and take with.

EM: Right.

DENECKE: They – those things just didn't seem to bother them.

EM: What memories do you have of their first sessions of teaching you, or – maybe not the very first one but—

DENECKE: Oh, well Mother got a series of flashcards with the alphabet and – I don't know, they're – I mean these would be manual things that you use. I can remember sitting there in the kitchen, and this display was on the wall and she would use these flashcards and – anyway, I learned to read, you see. The one thing that I was kind of behind in when I went to school was arithmetic. So for one summer, at least, Mother hired a teacher to come – I suppose every day, or three days a week, or whatever – and sort of bring me up to speed on arithmetic and on writing, because I learned a manuscript of printed writing but not cursive writing. So she brought me – I mean this, Mrs. Hokamp [?] was her name – she taught me cursive writing.

EM: What did you think of this lady?

DENECKE: Oh, I liked her. She was nice.

EM: Mm-hmm. So she was as close as you got, though, to a teacher, outside of your parents?

DENECKE: Yes. Yes – until I went to school. I think I actually ended up going to school in the middle of a school year. I don't quite know why. Maybe finally my parents decided it was time to send me to school. As I mentioned, Catlin was a neighborhood school then for me. It was just a few blocks up the street from where we lived. I remember going with Mother to meet Miss Catlin, and you know, being accepted at the school, and then going to the school. Then Daddy would drive me to school and then take off for the hospital.

EM: What was your first impression of Catlin Gabel – or was it just Catlin then?

DENECKE: Just Catlin. Well, it was a very different school in those days. It was Miss Catlin's School, to begin with. Then, actually, beginning the very next fall it became the Catlin School, with the Hillside School being what we called the Lower School – in other words, for the little kids. It was coeducational through – I mean it was beginning in that fall – coeducational through the sixth grade. Then seventh and eighth grade were in the upper school building where the high school part of it was, but previously everything had been in the older building, and it was just a girls' school.

EM: You said you arrived at school between the second and third grade?

DENECKE: I think so. It could have been between third and fourth. It was either one or the other. I think it was between third and fourth.

EM: How did you take to it?

DENECKE: Well, I didn't understand sort of the discipline of school. I think that I was apt to interrupt or ask questions or, you know, not understand how a child should behave in a

school when they were that far along. I guess it went all right with the work, but I don't think that I was very adept at adapting to a school situation – not to begin with.

EM: Do you remember any particular difficult moment that your parents helped you through?

DENECKE: No. I don't think they saw difficulties as I might have seen them. No, I don't.

EM: How was it when you came home from school and talked to your parents about what was going on there?

DENECKE: I don't know. I have no idea. I don't remember at all.

EM: [laughs]

DENECKE: I really don't.

EM: Okay. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about your memories, if you have them, of your first dreams or ambitions as a child?

DENECKE: None at all.

EM: Never?

DENECKE: I really – I was not a person who was going to be this or that or the other thing, not at all. No, I really don't. I always was – it's funny, if I would go shopping with my mother – like at Meier and Frank or Olds, Wortman and King or, you know, one of the big department stores, which is where you went – I always thought, I want to work in the housewares department, the kitchen department. That's really kind of what I had in mind.

You have to remember, too, that people that long ago didn't – women, that is, girls and women – did not have the careers in mind that they would have now. As to occupation – I just assumed I was going to get married and have children. I mean, what else?

EM: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Do you remember what you particularly enjoyed about your new school, whether in subject matter or what you did during the course of the day?

DENECKE: I don't think I was very keen on school to begin with.

EM: Really?

DENECKE: I did enjoy what we would think of now as history. For instance, we were taught things in [coughs] in the Hillside School [coughs] about the trade routes [coughs]. [tape cuts off and then resumes] The Lower School – is it on?

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: [coughs] The Lower School was a combination of an existing [coughs] – I'm sorry. When the Catlin, Miss Catlin's School merged with a couple of existing schools – they were on the grade school level, Miss Jewel's [?] and Miss Quiggs [?] and the Music Education School and the Cady [?] School – these were all little private schools that couldn't exist by themselves, apparently. So they combined with Miss Catlin's. Because they included boys, which Catlin School had never done before, the Upper School part – high school and middle school – became The Catlin School, not Miss Catlin's School, and Lower School became the Hillside School. Well, teachers that came with Hillside School [coughs] – I'm going to have to stop again with that – were into some very interesting kinds of teaching. For instance, they taught the trade routes in Europe, and ancient history – the Fertile Crescent, the Tigris and the Euphrates. Now all of this meant a lot to me. I have a lasting interest in history, and I think it started right there.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: The literature, likewise, was – oh, an Irish writer named Patrick Column [phonetic], I think his name was, and – we really had some remarkable teachers. But that was, that did interest me. Some of the rest of it I really didn't care for. I tell you, I think I'd better stop now.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]
[Tape 2, Side 2 BLANK]

Tape 3, Side 1
1999 May 19

EM: This is side one of tape three, and this is Elizabeth Meyer talking with Selma Denecke on the 19th of May in the Jefferson Room at the Oregon Historical Society, and we are continuing to talk about her teenage years. At the end of the last tape you were saying that you and your friends, even though it was the beginning of the war, were living rather lighthearted lives and—

DENECKE: That's exactly right. We were.

EM: Well, I was going to ask you a question that maybe you thought about at that time anyway, and that is, were there any political figures or literary or artistic people that you especially admired?

DENECKE: Well, speaking of politics, it was kind of interesting – this was all the Franklin Roosevelt era, from '32 on. I may have mentioned earlier that my father – although he had been a Republican all his life – was very much in favor of FDR, where his friends – who likewise were Republicans by and large – were not a bit in favor of FDR and they felt very strongly about this. I lived in the midst of the kind of people who to this day are Republican and who are pretty conservative and who were very down on FDR. My father, because he was a doctor, didn't have the conflict with FDR that involved business. Businessmen were not very favorable to FDR because he seemed to be promoting this, what they might have referred to as a socialistic point of view, or a government wherein a lot was being done for those who couldn't do for themselves, this being of course the – what turned out to be the tail end of the Depression. There are a lot of people who would tell you to this day that if we didn't do so much for people they would get up and have to do for themselves. There was very little concern, seemingly, about those who were poor and those who didn't make it financially in the world. FDR had pretty much an answer for all of these things, as you

probably know. There was the alphabet of social welfare kinds of things that he set up – alphabet because they all had acronyms that were alphabetical. My father believed that FDR was doing a good job, and most of his men friends did not.

EM: What did you think?

DENECKE: Well, I was at a point in my life where I followed, kind of followed along what my father felt, at least as far as politics were concerned. I thought that FDR was great. But now for instance, I remember one of his opponents – probably for his second term in office – was Alf Landon from Kansas. I just thought Alf Landon was for the birds and [was in FDR?]. I can remember some of the arguments that would go on amongst my friends and me about that, just as an example. But I, you know, I thought Daddy had the right ideas, and so I was all in favor of the Roosevelt administration. Although like a lot of other people, I made a lot of fun of Eleanor because [mimics voice] she had this little high voice, and she was not very attractive, and she was nosing around into everybody's business. [normal voice] In those days, ladies just didn't do things like that so much. I'm ashamed of myself now because, of course, I came to appreciate Eleanor Roosevelt in her latter years, because she showed – and I was mature enough by then to understand – what she was doing and that she was a very worthwhile person. But I too made fun of the column that she wrote for the newspapers, "My Day by Eleanor Roosevelt," in which she told about the different things that she was doing, and of course she was eyes and legs for her husband, since he couldn't get around. Anyway, I came to appreciate it in later years.

EM: Were there other folks that you remember looking up to at that time?

DENECKE: Oh, you mean in the public world as opposed to my friends or my parents' friends?

EM: Or artistic people, or—

DENECKE: Oh, artistic? No, not particularly. Well, except of course, excuse me – whatever was popular music. I mean the bandleaders of the day – Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, and into World War II, Glenn Miller – yes, those people I did tremendously. But I liked that kind of music and still do to this day. But not classical – now if you can talk about classical music, no. [EM laughs]. I wasn't much into that, and I'm not really that much into it now.

EM: Uh-huh. Did your family enjoy a lot of that kind of music? Did you play it in your home?

DENECKE: No, they didn't. There really was not much in the way of music, and that's too bad, because although we did have a piano, and I did take music lessons again, like in about the eighth grade, that's much too late. My interests had – were elsewhere. It was pretty boring, and I didn't like it, and it was classic music. I still to this day maintain that if a child enjoys popular music then he ought to be able to learn to play popular music, and music teachers in those days were strictly classical – Chopin and all that, and I did not like it. Anyway, that's just my, you know, my approach.

EM: Did you have other sorts of – when you were in high school – extracurricular activities?

DENECKE: Yes.

EM: Drama, or—

DENECKE: Well, first of all, at Catlin we always had some kind of a play each year, if not more than one. Or – and now if I say a musical, I'm talking about Gilbert and Sullivan, and we did a lot of Gilbert and Sullivan. That kind of thing we did. Also clear back to grade

school, the May Fete – in other words, May Day – and its celebration in the typical British way was something that was recreated by the kids at Catlin each year. So, our knowledge of what you would call classical entertainment was instilled in us from the beginning. But now, something that my parents saw to it that I did – and this was good – in those days there was a traveling opera company that came to Portland each year called the San Carlo Opera Company. It was pretty badly done. [EM laughs] But, my mother did indeed see to it that I went to Aida and Carmen and Madame Butterfly – and they're still my favorites among operas. That was my introduction to opera, and it was – by anybody's standards today it was not very good. But it was, nevertheless, opera.

As far as drama was concerned, there was a local drama company, the George Baker Company [phonetic], that produced plays. They would frequently bring in a star to play the star role – in other words, somebody from Broadway or even from Hollywood. But these were plays that, I suppose you would classify them now as wholesome. My parents would sometimes take me on a Friday night to these series of plays, and also good movies – and when I say good I really mean entertaining – well for instance, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and that kind of thing – good musicals. There were a lot of them in those days, and I always got to go to those, so that I saw the – I think the best of what Hollywood had to produce at that time, and at least a taste of real live theatre and a taste of opera.

EM: Mm-hmm. Do you remember favorite actors and actresses from that time, besides Fred Astaire?

DENECKE: Well, I suppose any that you would mention that would be, that would have been starring at that time were usually somebody whom I, you know, thought was pretty wonderful to be able to see their movie, whatever it might have been. But, you know, almost anybody that was alive in those years.

EM: Do you have any favorite films that you'd like to mention from your young years?

DENECKE: Well, I think all the Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers kind of thing, and any sort of dramas that I was allowed to see – but there were some that were, I suppose, considered not – I mean, beyond my, what should have been my understanding. I didn't – I wasn't allowed to see those maybe, but nevertheless I saw quite a few movies. When I was younger, movies like Tarzan and Peter Pan – the first Peter Pan that ever was in a movie. Now, that's when I was very young, before there was sound in movies. Then very soon sound and color came.

EM: What did you think of that change?

DENECKE: Oh, it was exciting of course. I mean, anything that was shown that had sound and color was naturally something you wanted to see.

EM: Hmm. How did your parents react to your growing independence when you were a teenager?

DENECKE: I don't know how they reacted to it. I mean, I didn't have any particular battles with them, I don't think. I was very much aware always of the fact that I was an only child, and I was a very wanted child. Anything to protect me and, on the other hand, to do well by me, was what they wanted to do. Let's see now – oh, I know one thing I didn't talk about. My mother took me in – let's see, I was just fifteen so I'd just finished my freshman year in high school – took me to the Chicago World's Fair in 1934. That was the second year of the fair. She had come from Wisconsin, and had not been back there in I don't know how many years, and so we went by train to St. Paul – where there were family friends – and we visited. Then we went on into Chicago and stayed there the better part of two weeks, maybe ten days. We stayed for the first five days in downtown Chicago, right near where the fair was – within walking distance. Then we moved up along the North Shore to the Edgewater Beach Hotel, which was pure glamour, right on the beach, with its own swimming pool and its own – in the summertime – outside dance floor with an orchestra. I

could hear this from my room, and oh, it was just lovely. Then we went to Wisconsin – to Watertown, where Mother had been born, halfway between Madison and Milwaukee – and stayed there, oh, I don't know, four or five days, with these about third cousins, whom she was very fond of, and whom I became very fond of. We visited there, and then took the train home, Canadian Pacific, home through Canada – Banff and Lake Louise. Stopped over there, spent the night at Lake Louise at the hotel, and then came on to Vancouver and Victoria, and stopped to visit friends who were there, and then home. So that occupied pretty much the rest of June of that year.

EM: Backtracking a little bit, can you tell me what the World's Fair was like?

DENECKE: Oh, it was fascinating to me. I mean – like any fair – lots of rides, lots of exhibits. I can't be specific about what all was there, but there was a lot to do. It was of course – being Chicago in June – it was hot. I just kind of cringe when I think about it now, because I'm not that wild about big crowds and fair-type things, but it certainly was appealing then when I was just fifteen. Of course the big thing of that trip – aside from visiting the wonderful cousins in Wisconsin and staying at the Edgewater Beach – was when we got to Banff and Lake Louise. Maybe I mentioned this before. There was a boy on the train, who was a year older than I, who was traveling with his grandfather – very nice gentlemen. They were from Modesto, California. They also, by sheer coincidence, were doing the same thing we were doing – that is, getting off the train at Banff, going over to Lake Louise by bus, spending the night there, and then going on the following day. At Lake Louise there was an orchestra and, naturally, there was dancing. So I danced with this boy. Then we went out and walked around the, not around the lake but by the shore of the lake. Then – and of course this was a train romance, and it was just the most exciting thing in the world. Then of course he went back to California, and I was living in Portland. We did correspond for a while, but then – and I've always wondered what happened to him. When I went to college and the train went through Modesto – which it did, Southern Pacific – I always would – and it was always night time when we went through – but I would

look out my window of my berth, and I would look at this Modesto and I would think, I wonder where Harter [?] is. I never knew whether he went into World War II, whether he was killed. You know, I have no idea – very curious. His name was Harter Wickman [?], and his grandfather was Mr. Harter [?], and they were just very, very nice people.

EM: You sound like you were a pretty relaxed teenager when it came to meeting a person of the opposite sex. Was it easy for you?

DENECKE: No, it probably wasn't, because remember I had not gone to school with boys except from the fourth grade – fourth, fifth, and sixth grade – and only in that period. Those guys I knew well and still do – well, Richard Ritz [?], whom you may know here, is an architect, and he's in and out of OHS a great deal. We have his book down there. Well, he's one of the ones who was in school then with me. But there were a whole bunch of them, you know. But I – no, I did not know how to deal with boys very well at all. That's – you see, I have a lot of – not a lot, but I have some criticism of the way I was brought up. I should have, in my point of view, first of all gone to school right away – not wait until the third grade. Then I should have had some coeducational education, and I didn't – I didn't in high school, and I didn't in college. So it took me a long time to feel comfortable with boys – [a] very long time.

EM: Do you remember your parents talking to you about interactions with the opposite sex?

DENECKE: No, they didn't. People didn't talk about anything in those days. They really didn't. No way. Uh-uh, not at all.

EM: Did you get suggestions and help, or information, from your friends?

DENECKE: Oh sure, although mostly I just ferreted out things for myself. But – oh, parents didn't talk about much of anything of importance in those days. They just didn't. Maybe some did, but not people I knew.

EM: Mm-hmm. When you eventually got around to having dates, did your parents – how did they acknowledge that?

DENECKE: Well, I didn't – I really wasn't very popular, and I didn't date. I mean, all the dances that I went to were arranged. Dates were arranged by a friend, or I, as the girl, had to do the calling, or – you know, because they were sponsored either by the sororities that I talked about. In the case of Catlin – like the senior prom – you know, it was sponsored by the school. Or these subscription dances that I talked about, which were that a group of boys and a group of girls was invited to these dances. It wasn't a date affair.

EM: Can you talk a little bit about the feeling of peer pressure, or lack thereof, or societal pressure, when it came to these situations?

DENECKE: Oh, yeah. I was envious of my girlfriends at Catlin who were cute and popular and who did go out on dates. Yes, I was very jealous of them because I didn't. You know, nobody made an effort – well, because I didn't think, I don't think that my parents thought that that kind of thing was important. Therefore, they made no effort to make me look better or, you know, wear better clothes or wear makeup or anything. Of course, we were not allowed to wear makeup to school – absolutely no lipstick and no jewelry – so at three o'clock when school was over people would put on lipstick and go out. But we were not allowed to wear it to school and no jewelry.

EM: You mentioned that your parents didn't encourage you to dress better or—

DENECKE: Well, Mother bought what she considered were nice things for me, and I did have some nice things. I really did. I had a fur jacket, and you know – I really had some nice things. But more could have been done with makeup, and nothing was done with makeup, because she didn't wear any and so why would I? I took all of that upon myself to do as time went on, and I became more aware of it.

EM: Did you have conflicts with your parents about clothes, or—

DENECKE: No, not about clothes.

EM: Or music, or political issues?

DENECKE: No.

EM: Or school, or – you had a very smooth time?

DENECKE: Yeah. I think so. I mean, I was – I know that I was spoiled and belligerent in some cases. I would come home and I'd say, "I'm going to do thus and so," you know, as if – as if they were saying that I couldn't do it. I was pretty – I wasn't very tactful I'm sure. I was pretty self-centered – which I still am – and kind of spoiled because everything was done for me. I've forgotten whether I've mentioned this before, but my parents always had somebody who came in to clean, do the ironing, the washing, and not do the actual cooking, but get ready, get things ready for dinner – like peel potatoes we'll say. Nice ladies – only one at a time. I don't mean that there were [laughs] ever two. But most of my family friends had live-in help – not all of them, but some did. But my parents didn't particularly want to have somebody living in, and I understand that. I feel much the same way. Even when I had five children, Arno and I talked quite a bit about, you know, would we get somebody who was maybe going to school and would like a place to live and to help with the kids? I really didn't want somebody living in. So neither Anna Dalstrom [?] nor

Hilma Nelson [?] – the two women who did for us, one after the other – neither of them lived with us. They would just come Monday through Friday on the streetcar and, you know, do the cleaning, the washing, the ironing. This was hand washing because there was no washing machine – and hang up the clothes – no dryer – and all that kind of thing. I mean, it was labor intensive. Mother loved to cook so she did the primary cooking, but they would just kind of get things ready.

EM: What did your mom cook? What did she like to cook?

DENECKE: Oh – in those days you always had either a roast, or maybe chops – you know, lamb chops, pork chops, whatever – and vegetables and meat and potatoes. We weren't so big on salads, and we didn't do desserts. [an aside] Ooh – I forgot I shouldn't do that. [perhaps in reference to touching microphone] Weren't so big on desserts – but, just good, solid food, and always plenty of it. Here again, I realize that this was the Depression, and what I'm talking about it not typical of what a lot of people my age were brought up with, because they were affected – many of them – by the Depression. The affectation of my friends was just a matter of degree, not of definition. In other words, my father didn't believe in buying stocks on – oh, he bought stocks, but always, he paid for them. In other words he didn't buy them on credit. Well, it's the people who bought them on credit who lost – [on margin?] is the word I'm trying to use – and it's they who lost lots of money. Since he wasn't very rich to begin with he just was comfortable and sort of remained that way. I know this isn't typical, because so often you read about people of my age – maybe who have died or who have achieved prominence, whatever – and it will say that “so-and-so lived through the Depression and vowed that never again would he go through anything like that.” Well, it didn't affect my family that much. I knew about it. I was fully aware of it. I knew that there was a Hooverville – in other words, a place where people who were on the dole lived – over there in Sullivan's Gulch, where the Banfield Freeway is now. I knew all about those existences. But, fortunately, or unfortunately, it didn't affect us.

EM: Do you remember friends whose families fell upon hard time?

DENECKE: No. I have to say that most of the people whom my family knew – and they had lots of friends, they were very outgoing, warm people – were not visibly affected by it, by the Depression.

EM: During your teenage years, do you remember any – I know that you said your parents weren't very chore-oriented as far as you went.

DENECKE: They weren't.

EM: Did you feel any kind of increase of responsibility in the home during your teenage years, or were you [indistinct] as we talked about, by the maids?

DENECKE: Yes, I did, and particularly – well, first of all my mother became ill during my high school years, and died in the fall, late fall of my senior year in high school of cancer – don't ask me what kind because I don't know. There again, you see – those kind of things were not discussed. They just were not. My children say, "Well, you must have known." Well, no, I didn't know. Anyway, I did take on to a greater degree some kind of responsibility. I could, for instance – well no, that was later. But anyway, I mean I knew how to cook. I could cook perfectly adequately. I did take on some more responsibility.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: Even though there was always help in the house.

EM: Yeah. Did you take it on because your mother was becoming ill?

DENECKE: Yeah, I think so.

EM: Can you talk about how that affected you?

DENECKE: My children ask me that, and I have to honestly say it did not affect me terribly much. It affected me to the degree that she wasn't able to do much of anything, as time when on, with me – or with anybody as far as that goes. You've got to remember that there weren't treatments for cancer as there are now. There was no chemotherapy. There was no – you know, none of this stuff that you read about constantly now even existed – even in people's thoughts, I think. I mean, if you got cancer that was it. You lived through it, and then you died. I have to say that I was in my usual little teenaged world. I was spending all my time down at Claire's house – which was only about a block away – and that – I mean, no, I have to admit that I was not particularly affected by it. I should have been, and I wasn't.

EM: When did your mom become ill? How long was it before she died?

DENECKE: Well that's a little hard to say. I mean, probably she might have developed cancer as long ago as – oh I don't know, a couple years before that. But it wasn't seemingly apparent for a while. I don't have any clear memory. I can't tell you.

EM: You might give me a negative answer to this as well, but I thought I'd ask you if your mother ever, knowing that she was going to die, talked to you?

DENECKE: Oh no, not at all. Not at all – neither did my father.

EM: Really?

DENECKE: They just weren't – they didn't do things like that. I don't know whether other parents did or would have. They didn't at all. They lived their lives, and Mother did whatever

she could do socially for quite a while. As to what they thought about it, or what ultimately would happen to me – nothing ever was said, not at all.

EM: I was going to ask you, during your teenage years frequently the circle of [your] friends expands – you have friends coming in and out of the house.

DENECKE: Mm-hmm.

EM: I was wondering how your parents welcomed or treated your friends?

DENECKE: Oh, well they were always very nice to my friend. I had a reluctance to have my friends come, because I felt that I didn't know really how to entertain them or, you know, to make them feel that they were having a good time. I didn't like to be the hostess; I liked to be the guest always. To a certain extent I'm still that way. I'm a pretty good guest, and I don't think I'm very good a hostess. Although I did a lot of it while I was married. But I – oh, they thought it was fine. I mean, anytime I had any friends they were delighted to have my friends come.

EM: What did your – I know that—

[End of Tape 3, Side 1]

Tape 3, Side 2**1999 May 19**

EM: This is side two of tape three. Elizabeth Meyer, I'm talking with Selma Denecke on May 19 in the Jefferson Room of the Oregon Historical Society. Selma is continuing to tell me about her teenage years. We were talking about your friends' reactions to your parents.

DENECKE: By the time that I was in college – and I particularly remember this the first Christmas of my college year, when I came home from school for the first time. It was pretty exciting. There were two girlfriends who came on the train who lived in Walla Walla. They had to wait over until evening to get their train to take them up there. So they were with me pretty much all day at my house. By then it was just my father and my grandmother – and they enjoyed my father very much, more so than I think that I would have thought they would have. But he was a very gentle, kind person who had a true interest in everybody. He enjoyed talking to them. I just didn't have enough confidence in myself and in him as a father to think that he could interest any friends of mine.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: And also I've been away, and in retrospect I'd looked at my own house. You know, I thought, [disapprovingly] oh, I don't like all those pictures that are up on the wall. I'd just like to do the whole thing over. You know, I was kind of seeing it with different eyes. So all of that was in my mind. But they seemed to enjoy themselves very much.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: As for the teenaged, or high-school aged, friends I had at my house – again, I lacked the confidence in myself, and therefore reflected in my parents, to think that they

could possibly enjoy themselves at my house. So I was reluctant to have friends in. I did every now and then, but not with any great enthusiasm.

EM: Can you talk a bit about your parents' sense of humor?

DENECKE: Oh, they, I think, had a pretty good sense of humor. They were not jokers, jokesters at all, and they did not tease. This was another thing wherein I suffered. Since they always took me at face value, and they always gave me their face value, people who teased me were – as kids do tease each other, unmercifully – I was the subject of a lot of teasing because I couldn't take it. I didn't understand it, and I couldn't give it back because I didn't – I'd never been exposed to that kind of thing. Daddy and Mother were just very straight, straightforward – oh they had a lot of fun. Don't think they didn't. They had lots of people in for parties, and they went to lots of parties – not fancy things, just to people's homes. They enjoyed having people for company. They were [a] very nice host and hostess. I got to set the table, and I learned how to do that, and you know, it was pretty fancy. I mean, there were always little things of salt and nuts and there was just – it was well done. I learned how to do all that. But it was on a very quiet, low-key scale.

EM: Mm-hmm. So you felt a lot of respect from them?

DENECKE: Mm-hmm. Oh yes. I was always respected – shouldn't have been but I was.

EM: How did you pick Scripps?

DENECKE: I didn't pick it. My father picked it. I wanted to go to Stanford. He had gone to Stanford, had had a marvelous time. My oldest cousin had already gone to Scripps, and in fact she graduated the June before I came. Then, not my next oldest but the one who is closest to my age, a year ahead of me, had finished her first year there. Daddy, although he was not very close to Uncle Gene as I think I mentioned, nevertheless he appreciated

whatever Uncle Gene had to say about Scripps as a college. It was pretty brand new then. I mean, I think that I was probably – I think my class might have been about the tenth class. My cousin – the oldest cousin – had gone there when the school was very new. Anyway, he picked it, and it was very much a continuation of Catlin in all ways. By that I mean being an all girls' school, although Pomona College – which is coeducational – was right there, and there were trading back and forth in classes. In other words, you could take classes down there, they could take classes at Scripps, and that has continued with the Claremont Colleges. Only now in addition to Pomona and Scripps, there's Harvey Mudd, and there's Pitzer and there's Claremont McKenna. It's just a large – it's like a university, but each college is separate. It's like Oxford, I guess, in that regard. Each college is separate but you can take classes at the other colleges. Scripps will always remain, as far as I know, a women's college. They believe in it because they think it gives women an opportunity to excel without the possible competition of males. Yet, on the other hand, you're not isolated as a women's college. It's just, you know – across the street are boys. So it wasn't quite that way when I was there, but it was pretty close to it.

EM: Well, you talked about—

DENECKE: And it was an excellent school.

EM: It sounds it.

DENECKE: Yeah, it was. Still is.

EM: You spoke about wishing that you had had more coeducational experiences.

DENECKE: Mm-hmm. Right. I think it would have been good for me.

EM: How did you react to your father's decision that you should go to Scripps?

DENECKE: I accepted it. One did. One accepted that kind of thing, where now [laughs] – I know my grandchildren and I know that, you know, they make up their own minds, and we let our kids make up their minds as well. We did not say you must go here, here, here and here. We did not, because we didn't believe in it. Daddy was very gentle about it. He just said, "I think Scripps would be a good place for you to go." So I went.

EM: What drew you to Stanford?

DENECKE: Well I was brought up by the Stanford tradition. My father – who as I mentioned, went there from 1900 to 1904. That was his class, "nineteen aught four" as he would have said – I mean, he had his yearbooks. I loved those yearbooks. I poured over them. He would tell me [proudly, cheerfully] stories about Stanford and all the kind of wild things that they did and he did. I just loved it. I was brought up on a Stanford tradition. So of course I wanted to go there. A couple classmates of mine did go there – not particular friends but people whom I knew.

EM: Remind me what you started studying when you went to Scripps.

DENECKE: Oh, the basis – and then it was much more predetermined than it is now – the basis for the curriculum was the Humanities. It was – for the first two years it was like a double course. It was a – it was given by staff of professors. I would say that the basis of it was history and literature, but always science and the arts – which, after all, comprise the humanities – were brought into it. So you were given--with the historic context of the beginning of civilization as we know it in the West at least – the history of Egypt, and the holy lands, and the Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent, and all of that. Then later, as the Romans – well, and then of course the Greek and Roman – well if I didn't say Egypt I meant to – then followed by the Greek and the Roman civilization as it spread around the Mediterranean – just the logical progression of Western civilization. But with all aspects of

it included – history, literature, the arts, science and religion – all of which played into it. That’s what it was all about. And then some elective courses that you could take in addition, of course.

EM: Do you remember what electives you took?

DENECKE: Well, I certainly do beginning my second year because that determined my whole life. I don’t particularly – oh, yes, I do, too. In my freshman year I took art – not one specific kind, but what you would call a kind of an overall approach to art, including learning about the color wheel and doing some metal work and doing some weaving. Oh, I wove fabric for – that was later made into a suit for me, and I wove placemats for the table – yeah, I did all of that and enjoyed it. But I had signed up at the end of my freshman year for a course in economic geography, because geography has always fascinated me, and I thought that would be interesting – maps and all that. Well the professor over the summer just up and left Scripps. It made Scripps furious because he just went away and went to another college in the Middle West. So all of a sudden I was left with a hole in my program, which happened to be Monday, Wednesday and Friday at eight am. I’d never taken a—

EM: I think we talked about this, but continue and—

DENECKE: Well anyway, so I took the history of art and architecture. That began what became my major, which was the history of art and architecture. I took the first year of it my sophomore year and the second year of it in my junior year. Then I did applied architectural design down in the art building, and consequently, when I graduated, got the job at the art museum. Otherwise I wouldn’t have got that job and I wouldn’t have met Arno. So it was a very pivotal point in my life when that man went away somewhere else, leaving me to figure out another course to take my sophomore year. I fell in love with the subject matter and the professor and I just, you know, couldn’t have done anything else. I loved it.

EM: It sounds like you adjusted pretty easily, but this was your first time away from home, wasn't it, living away?

DENECKE: Oh, I didn't have any problem with that. I did miss my father because he and I were very close, and always remained close. I did miss him, and you know, I sometimes thought when I went to bed at night it would have nice if he'd been there to kiss me goodnight. But I just did fine. I mean I certainly was not homesick. I missed my girlfriend Claire, and what she was doing – she went to Reed. I missed, you know, all the things that we used to do I missed very much. But aside from that it was just great. I enjoyed being away.

EM: What was the living situation like for you at Scripps?

DENECKE: Very pleasant. First of all, the four original dorms – and there were only those in those days, because the total student body was between two hundred and two hundred and twenty-five – there were four dorms with about fifty girls in each dorm. They were all single rooms. I mean you just can't get anything nicer than that. The food was very good as college food goes, it really was. For dinner each night we were expected to put on stockings and heels. We had candlelight at the tables, and it was very nice – very nice. It cost a thousand dollars a year for the board, room and tuition. Then it went to twelve hundred at the beginning of my junior year, so the total value of my college education as far as money is concerned was four thousand four hundred dollars. It's now about thirty thousand a year. That's what's happened in the interim. But it was a very nice living, let me tell you.

EM: It sounds it.

DENECKE: It was.

EM: Do you – can you tell me about the first friends that you remember making at college?

DENECKE: Oh, gosh. I don't know about the first one. I can certainly remember people who were important to me in my first year.

EM: Sure.

DENECKE: Some of whom never came back, some of whom graduated or, you know, were older than I, some of whom remained good friends all the way through. In fact there's one in Tucson, Arizona, now – who didn't live in Tucson then – whom I'm in close touch with all the time. I can't, you know, I can't pick out particular ones, but I just – we had a lot of fun. I mean, it was a fun place to be. Also we had to work. But it was fun.

EM: What was the name of the person that you've remained in contact with?

DENECKE: Oh – Mary Welch [phonetic].

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: In fact I had a message on my phone machine when I returned from my trip that she had called and that she would call again. She'll probably call this weekend.

EM: Do you have any favorite memories of professors?

DENECKE: Yes, Charles Mattune Brooks [phonetic] – who of course was the art and architecture professor. Oh, gosh, what a – well, I think I can kind of place him now better than I could then, but he was just neat. He was a bit sardonic, and he was relatively young

– probably in his thirties – and he loved art and architecture and was just a great teacher, I thought. I think everybody who had him thought that. Then there was a particular professor that had a lot to do with our second year of humanities, Jordon was his last name, and I – we had one professor who went on to become president of Harvard. I think that was a different one – although Jordon might have also. But he had the ability in giving you the historic background of what he was talking about, of making the end of the lecture to the point that it was so exciting that you just couldn't wait for the next installment. I mean it was almost like a continued story. He just had that ability to impart – to do a beautiful lecture.

EM: Any other [thoughts?]?

DENECKE: Not – I mean I certainly can remember names, but not people that made that much of an impression on me, I think, or that were that influential in my thinking.

EM: Mm-hmm. Do you remember thinking about the greater world much, what was going on politically?

DENECKE: Oh, very much so because of what was happening in Europe. I mean that was—

EM: That was continuing?

DENECKE: Continuous. Although again we had no television – we had radio – and the news was just full of it. The popular pieces, many of them – musical pieces – related to what was going on in Europe, as they continued to do certainly during World War II. I mean the wartime pieces are very sentimental to me and they absolutely totally related to what was happening in Europe. After all, we were studying the historical background of exactly what was going on between Germany and the other Western countries.

EM: I know that a lot of people in the states chipped in to the war effort, and I was wondering if you or your friends were doing this?

DENECKE: No. Those who were in college during the war did. But you see, I was out before Pearl Harbor. I graduated in June of '41 and Pearl Harbor was in December. So therefore the "war effort" was not in existence yet. Now we were affected by the fact that there were guys in uniform already and there were some air training – it was the Army Air Corps before it was the Army Air Force – and there were some training areas right there near school. We had exchange dances with them and that kind of thing. They were in uniform, so they were ready to go already in early '41, maybe even late '40.

EM: We talk about men going into the Army. Did you remember any girlfriends wanting to join the forces?

DENECKE: No, I didn't. I personally didn't; I'm sure there were some. Naturally that, as you know, came along, but after Pearl Harbor happened. Well, one of my cousins – my youngest cousin – became a WAC and was in England. In fact that's where she met her husband, who's from Texas. He was in the Air Force. But I personally didn't know any who were looking to do that, at least as early as before graduation.

EM: Mm-hmm. [sound change on tape] This is Elizabeth Meyer and I'm talking to Selma Denecke, on June the 23rd at the historical society. [aside] The switch was switched back. It's ok.

DENECKE: Oh. Good.

EM: Well, let's start out this way: there was some time between your college graduation and your marriage to Arno Denecke.

DENECKE: Mm-hmm.

EM: Tell me what you did during this period.

DENECKE: Well, that was one of the most fun periods of my life. It was four years, from 1941 to 1945. It was from the end of college – well actually, August of '41 'til the first of July of '45. I worked at the Portland Art Museum, where I was the “meet-er and greeter” at the front door. The museum admittance was free in those days so I didn't deal with money. But nevertheless, I greeted people as they came in, and I counted the number of people who came in on a little clicker. That was part of my job. I did some miscellaneous typing, which was really rather funny because I arrived at that job without knowing how to type. Now that's a terrible mistake that my father made in my education, because he thought that I should devote my school time to learning academic subjects, which is all very well. But when you don't know how to type and you are sent to one week's worth of typing at a business college after getting the job – which is what happened. I went to Bankey Walker [?], which was the business college of its day, located only a few blocks from the art museum, and I – in the period of a week I was allowed to go from the very most elementary class of typing, which had to do with just working your fingers on a table, to the most advanced class in typing. You can imagine how much I learned – not very much. [EM laughs] To this day this is a detriment in my education, because now that computers have arrived with us they are still based on the same old keyboard as a typewriter, and I – since I'm way out of practice doing any sort of typing these days, I'm equally awkward with a computer, because it's the same keyboard and the same fingering. So anyway, leave that aside. The job was absolutely wonderful. I loved it. Robert Tyler Davis was the director of the art museum – Bob Davis – and the staff was very small in those days. They made do with just the most minimal number of people. There was an assistant director, who because of the war and the drafting of men, was frequently – I mean the person holding that job was frequently drafted and taken away from Bob Davis. Eventually he ended up hiring a

young woman who became one of my very best friends, and who ultimately was responsible for my meeting Arno Denecke, my husband. That's a story which I will get to in a minute. But it was such fun to be there by the front door where you saw everybody, because there was only one door to the building in those days. So the school, the students and the staff of the art school came in and out of the front door. The students were basically people my age and I got to know some of them quite well. Likewise the staff, who included people like William Givler who became dean of the art school, Charles [Vrois?] who taught painting – a whole lot of people – oh, Hilda – well, she was married to Carl Morris – Hilda Morris and Carl Morris, who came to teach there while, during this period of time – a lot of people who already were or became extremely well known in the art world of that period of time in the Pacific Northwest. I really loved that job. I worked five and a half days a week – 'til one o'clock on Saturdays – for which I got paid the munificent amount of sixty dollars a month – how about that – nonprofit organization. In those days, social security had just come into the picture, but because the art museum was a nonprofit organization it was not eligible – I was not eligible for social security, and could have cared less. It didn't [laugh] make any difference to me. I wasn't interested in that kind of thing at that point. I was living at home with my father and had no expenses, and, in fact, the sixty dollars was just spending money, and it went a long way in those days. Milkshake and a hamburger at the hostess shop where Nordstrom's now is, next door to the then Orpheum Theatre on Broadway – you could get a milkshake and a hamburger for twenty-five cents for both of them. Well, you can see that I didn't have to pay very much for lunch. Even when I went to nicer [laughs] restaurants than that, still wasn't very inexpensive. So I enjoyed a wonderful life with a whole lot of people of my own age whom I either had known, or came to know, while I was working there. It was pretty much party time the whole time. [EM laughs] Of course as the war progressed, more and more service people – Army and Navy – were in and out of Portland, where they would be stationed maybe briefly, or maybe for longer. Many of them came by the art museum if they had nothing else to do. So I saw service people. The only thing is, I did feel a bit of a shirker because I wasn't involved in any particular war effort directly – indirectly I was, but not directly. I wasn't working in the

shipyards – such as many people I knew were – and I wasn't doing anything that was directly involved. But, nevertheless, I had a wonderful four years. Peggy O'Brien Lucas, who became the assistant director at the art museum, arrived in the summer of '43, I believe, she had graduated from Smith College in '41 – as I had graduated from Scripps College in '41 – and she had gone ahead to take a class, or rather a year of classes, at the Art Students League in New York in the meantime. She was from New York. Then she came out to Mills College, where she got a master's in art. Bob Davis was a good friend of somebody on the faculty down there who recommended her to come to Portland to become the assistant director, because she would not be drafted as the men were being drafted. So Peggy came to Portland and we immediately – friends of mine and I – just loved her. She was Irish and cute and fun and just a wonderful person. She ultimately, and during the remainder of the war, married a man who was a West Point graduate. His first post of duty was Camp Adair, Oregon – right outside of Corvallis – where he and my future husband were in the same battalion in the artillery. So that is how I met Arno and why we're married.

EM: Hmm.

DENECKE: But that four years was really fun. I really enjoyed it. I think I probably took too seriously Bob Davis' admonition when he hired me, which was that he wanted me to “counteract the cold marble of the foyer of the art museum” and be friendly to everybody. I took that very seriously and was friendly to everybody, had a wonderful time.

EM: What was your idea of fun in those days? What sort of trouble did you get into?

DENECKE: [laughs] It was always, as always, just being with friends with people, and just interacting with people both on the staff – in the case of the job – on the staff at the school, and also with my friends who lived here in Portland. There were lots of them, especially

women, of course, because most of the men were gone in the service. But periodically they would come through Portland and then there would be big reunions and so forth.

EM: Can you talk a bit about your closest friends of that period?

DENECKE: Well, one of them was Sue Grout Chilton [?], who—

[End of Tape 3, Side 2]

Tape 4, Side 1

1999 June 23

EM: This is Elizabeth Meyer, and I'm sitting and talking with Selma Denecke on June 23rd, 1999, in the Jefferson Room of the Oregon Historical Society. Selma, you were just telling me about the friends that you made after college.

DENECKE: Well, Sue Grout had been a friend a little bit previous to my finishing college, although we never went to school together. She had gone to Lincoln to high school, to Vassar for – oh, to Wellesley, I'm sorry – for two years of college, and then finished at the University of Washington. But the art museum needed an assistant in the library – in the art library – and Sue was perfect for the job. So she came to work at the art museum, and then she would take my place at the information desk when I went out for lunch. That's what we did for the last couple of years that I was at the art museum. She became Sue Chilton because she got married during that period of time to a man whom she had met while she was at the University of Washington who was in the Marine Corps – who was an officer in the Marines. In fact the wedding was one that I participated in at her house in about 1944. She has remained one of my closest friends ever since, she and her husband. Also, of course, my friend Claire Smith – whom I had mentioned earlier – who was my very good friend, and who by this time had finished Reed College, where she had gone to school, and was working in her father's law firm office downtown. So of course I still saw a great deal of her. Then Peggy O'Brien [?], who became Peggy Lucas [?] also during that latter couple of years of working at the art museum when she married Johnny Lucas, whom she had known in the East, and who as I mentioned had graduated from West Point, and whose first post of duty was Camp Adair. So those two, and then [T.D.?] – actually Mary Lee, but never known by that name – [T.D. Frye?], who became [T.D. Snell?] during that period of time, also having graduated from the University of Washington and having been a sorority sister of Sue Grout's. That's how I got to know T.D., and she also became one of my very best friends. Unfortunately, she has died, but her husband – her former husband

– is still a very good friend of mine. Let's see, who else – well, there were just myriads of people around at that time.

EM: Sounds like you had a very broad, cast a very broad net when you were gathering your friends.

DENECKE: I did. I did – and probably always have.

EM: That's neat. Do you remember the very first time you met Arno and what your impression was of him?

DENECKE: [amusedly] I certainly do. We met at the apartment that Peggy and Johnny Lucas had – that is when he was here in Portland, most of the time he was at Camp Adair – which was in the old [Stelwyn Apartments?] – which have burned now and have been replaced by another apartment building – on West Burnside, almost directly across from the Ringside Restaurant. They had an apartment up on the fourth floor which overlooked West Burnside. They had long talked about bringing this Arno Denecke whom they had met at Camp Adair to be a blind date for me. Finally in May of 1944 we met at Peggy and Johnny Lucas' apartment in the Stelwyn Apartments. Their apartment was on the fourth floor, which was the top floor of the Stelwyn. It looked north and it was a great big room, one room – living room, dining room, bedroom combined kind of thing – and Peggy and Johnny and T.D. and Bill Snell and Arno and I all met and had dinner there and had a wonderful time. We all just hit it off together very well. Well, of course, they were all old friends of mine except for Arno, but he fit in as he always had the ability to do just beautifully, and immediately was a good friend of everybody there. I think that was a Friday night, and I think that maybe we went to Jantzen Beach the following night. I'm not sure about that. But then in the first weekend of June was Bill Snell's birthday, and we were invited to brunch up at his and T.D.'s apartment, which was up at Sylvan. We did that, and there were three weekends in May and June of '44 in which we were together. This just

sounds utterly ridiculous. It's the kind of thing that nobody should do, is to base a marriage on being together three weekends and one week spread out over half a year's worth of time. But that's the way it was because of the war. By the summer of '44, Arno and his division were being sent back to Missouri. He went to Missouri, and then in November of '44 took his last leave of absence from the Army and flew out to Portland to spend Thanksgiving week with me. Then from there he was sent to Boston, which was Port of Embarkation for Europe – this being, really, the end of the war, or almost the end of the war. Of course the end didn't come until 1945. But he was sent to Boston, where by the end of [that] week in November we were together here, we talked about – well we talked about not wanting to lose track of each other, and that we would certainly see each other again, but didn't get to a serious discussion about marriage until he had returned to Missouri. He called me on the phone and said, what would I like an engagement ring to look like? Well, I was – I remember very well, I was at the home of the woman who was then secretary to Bob Davis at the art museum, who herself had just got married. I was at their house for dinner, and I guess my father had the call forwarded to where I was. I remember sitting there and saying, [diminutive voice] “Well, I don't” [sounds like a glitch in the tape] and saying that I would like a simple, single diamond, set in gold. Because he was going to Boston, I could put him in touch with [Jenny Nelson?], who was one of my good college friends. She took him to a jewelry store in Boston and she bought the ring in December, and sent it to me in January just before he went overseas.

EM: It sounds like you took this pretty well. You weren't in shock that he was asking you?

DENECKE: No. No. I wasn't. I guess it's just my nature to just sort of approach things in a very matter-of-fact way.

EM: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. When did you get married?

DENECKE: We were married in October of 1945, as soon as Arno got back from overseas. Now as I mentioned, he had wanted very much to be sent overseas much earlier than he was, because he felt he was missing the war. It's maybe hard for you to understand, but a lot of people in those days felt that they – that is, servicemen – felt that they wanted to be involved in the war. They wanted to be where the action was. The army kept keeping him as an instructor in artillery, because he was very good as an instructor. Finally, when he was sent to Camp Adair, he became part of a division which was bound for overseas – the 70th Division, which was Oregon organized and called the Trailblazer Division, having nothing to do with the basketball team [laughs], because it much preceded the basketball team. Anyway, I can't remember what I was going to say. [tape cuts off then resumes] So finally he was sent overseas in January of 1945, sailing from Boston directly to Marseilles. Then landing, and the division moving up the Rhone River valley 'til they got to what was the Saar Basin, where they actually went into combat. But even marching up the Rhone River Valley it was winter and it was miserable conditions, weather conditions. There were German planes in the area that did fly over. It was no fun and they were really in the [clears throat] in the war. But they actually went into combat when they were up in the Saar Basin – S-a-a-r Basin – between France and Germany. That is where they were in real combat. But that combat, as you can see, did not last very long, because the war was coming to an end, and the war of course was over May 7th or 8th of 1945. By that time, Arno was – had survived well, as most people in his division had – not all – and he'd had what I suppose would have been a minimal amount of combat. But nevertheless, he was actually in a combative situation with the war. Then he was kept during that summer still overseas – as most people were who were there – and [laughs] he had a marvelous summer. He managed the baseball team for the division, and it was all kind of fun. They had a really good time from May until October. Then when he was sent home it was with the thought that we would still be fighting the Japanese. But of course in the meantime, the atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That really put an end to the war, and we were married within a few days after he had arrived from overseas, because that's what he wanted to do. His parents and his sister came out to Portland – they came of

course by train – and thought they'd come to the end of the world, because they were used to Illinois and they couldn't imagine that it took three nights and two days to get out to Portland, and where in the world were they going? They arrived a couple of days before he arrived. Then it was literally less than a week after that that we were married. However, he had been in touch with me by telegram because that's how you did things in those days. His telegram, which was sent in September, said "Get Trinity" – that is, Trinity Episcopal Church – "Get Trinity ready. I'm coming." So I did indeed, and went and bought a wedding dress, and chose bridesmaids' dresses for my bridesmaids, and secured the University Club for the reception and got everything organized, so that by the time he got here it was all ready to go.

EM: Hmm. So you had your courtship by telegram?

DENECKE: Well you might say that, yeah. [laughs] You might say that.

EM: Did he – do you feel like talking about any other kinds of things that he did before you got married that made you feel like this is a romantic person, or—

DENECKE: Well, this is funny that you should ask that. The Oxford Book of Poetry, English Verse – what is it? I can't remember now. Anyway, it includes a whole lot of poems. But one of them was, "I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my way." I remember his reading that to me, and you know, he never read any poetry to me after that. [laughs] That was not like him at all to have read any poetry at all. But he did at that point, which is really kind of funny. Because Arno was a very practical, sort of down-to-earth kind of person, and not given to flights of fancy nor poetry nor anything romantic. Oh – one [laughs] – back in February of '45, after I had received the ring and we were formally engaged, as one did in those days, I of course was going to have a tea to announce this to my various girlfriends. Peggy had been with Johnny, her husband, and he had also gone overseas – though with a different division – by that time. Peggy had come back to work at the art museum and I

decided that the time to have the tea would be in February, as close to Valentine's Day as we could get it. So, Arno wired me some flowers. Now he was overseas, and I don't know how he accomplished that. But anyway, he wired me some flowers, which were supposed to have been red roses, but they turned out to be red tulips. Well, I much prefer tulips to roses, so I was very happy with that. Then it turned out that we couldn't have it on that day for some reason that had to do with something here, which I can't now remember. But I do know that Arno said that that night – overseas where he was in France – he instructed the [?]- because he was in [fire direction center?] for the artillery, in other words in the headquarters of it – he instructed a night barrage, that was just a humdinger of a barrage, against the Germans, and it was all to celebrate our engagement.

EM: Oh, boy.

DENECKE: So that's kind of neat to think about. [laughs] Germans didn't know what was going on.

EM: That's amazing.

DENECKE: Oh, and I should add, talking of this short period of time that we were together before we were married – I was twenty-five and Arno was twenty-eight, so we weren't kids. The other thing that I didn't mention, was that when I left the art museum at the beginning of July of 1945, I left to go back to Illinois to visit Arno's parents and his sister in Rock Island and took the train and went back there and spent a month, had a wonderful time. I enjoyed his parents, and I particularly enjoyed his sister, who is still one of my best friends. She lives here now, and has for many, many, many years. So that in visiting his parents, even though he wasn't there, and meeting some friends of his who were not in the service, I got to know him better than probably I would have under any other circumstances because I was living in his family's house.

EM: How typical might that have been in those days? It sounds like—

DENECKE: Very typical. Very typical, I would say.

EM: [How really unusual?]

DENECKE: Because a lot of my girlfriends and acquaintances were married during that period of time, or even before that during the earlier part of the war, usually to people – not always, but sometimes – to people whom they didn't know very well, and were married under circumstances very similar to that. In fact thinking of the wedding itself, I mentioned that I had selected bridesmaids' dresses for my bridesmaids, of whom there were three – well, and Arno's sister, who was of college age, and came out, of course, to be in the wedding as well. I also had to line up as ushers for the wedding some fellows whom I knew who were already back from the service, because Arno didn't know any fellows his age here. His father was his best man, but for ushers it had to be friends, people that I had known. So that was rather typical. Arno was married in his uniform – his officer's uniform – and looking very elegant, I thought. That's another thing – I never saw him in civilian clothes until after we were married.

EM: Oh.

DENECKE: Because he had nothing but uniforms of various kinds.

EM: This might be a different type of military wedding, but did they have to go and do the crossed swords?

DENECKE: Oh, no. No, no – nothing like that. That's really West Point or Annapolis.

EM: What kind of reactions did your families have to your impending marriage?

DENECKE: Oh, well my father just thought – I mean when he got to know Arno, which he did rather briefly during the period of time that Arno visited, the three weekends and particularly the Thanksgiving week where he stayed at my house – my father got to know him well and liked him very much – very much. They got along just beautifully.

EM: How – I guess you already said that you got along with his family, so—

DENECKE: Oh, yes. Yes.

EM: Everything looked like it was going smoothly.

DENECKE: Yeah, exactly. Right.

EM: What was his – a sort of out of the blue question here – but what was his sense of humor like?

DENECKE: Oh, he had a good sense of humor. He had a good sense of humor. He liked funny jokes – I thought they were rather corny jokes [laughs], and as the years went on I thought they were more corny. Yes, he had a very good sense of humor. He was a very outgoing person – a person who met people easily and chatted with them easily and all that kind of thing. Laughingly, his children and I have always said that he was very typically a Middle Westerner, very much so – a churchgoing – his parents had been Methodists. Originally they had been Lutherans, but they even found – and they were much more conservative than we – found that the Lutheran church was too conservative for their tastes, and they became Methodists. But I was an Episcopalian, and so Arno became an Episcopalian the first year that we were married, when we lived in Eugene, where Arno taught law at the University of Oregon Law School from January 1st of '46 until Christmas vacation of '46. It was a good beginning for him to get back into the field of law, which he'd

been away from for four years while he was in the service. In the process of teaching he could bring home to me every night what he was refreshing his own mind with – by being a professor.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: That's what he did.

EM: I do have questions about that. I was just wondering before we left this area if you would like to tell me anything more about your wedding – the wedding ceremony, how it went—

DENECKE: Oh – it was performed by Bishop Dagwell of the Episcopal Church of that time – Bishop Benjamin Dagwell, who was one of the sweetest people that ever was, a very short little guy who was just wonderful, very warm – and it was at Trinity, which if you've ever been to it is a very large church. I [laughs], I still – you know I think of myself going down the aisle in that huge church. It was in the late afternoon, and then the reception followed at the University Club, which also was rather typical of the times. It was just a neat reception where all of my family's friends and my friends were. Then we left from there to drive to Gearhart, where my friend Claire Smith's family's beach house was, and which we were using for our honeymoon. We went down to Gearhart. It was of course dark by then, being October. Also the Sunset Highway was not completed by that time, so that the part from Portland out to Gales Creek and Timber was a series of country roads that went at right angles, like this, following farm borders then only beyond that was the Sunset Highway itself completed. So it was pretty late when we got to Gearhart. Then, and for many years thereafter, the Oregon Bar Convention was held at Gearhart. They were wonderful conventions because they were fun. Friends of ours owned the Gearhart Hotel at the time – very good friends, Elaine and John Osburn [?] – and we got there late and were hungry. So we went right to their apartment which adjoined the hotel. John went over

to the kitchen and pulled a couple of dinners out of the kitchen that were for the bar convention – how auspicious that was! – and brought them over to us. We ate dinner and talked with them and then went to the house, which was back in the meadow – the Smith’s house was back in the meadow behind the golf course. So that was where we spent our honeymoon. We spent a couple of weeks down there – or maybe it was ten days. Then we came to Portland and spent another week in Portland, and then we went by train to California – to San Francisco – to catch up with a very good Army friend of Arno’s who – Don Boyd, whom we – was a good friend then for many years thereafter. Then we took a train from San Francisco to Rock Island where we spent Thanksgiving with Arno’s parents, and spent about a week there, and were able to buy a secondhand car and set off for Fort Sill, where Arno was to report in for duty, not being sure what that duty might be – whether it would be occupying the Japanese country or what. But instead of which, when he arrived at Fort Sill, and they looked at his records, they said, “You’ve been in the Army four years – over four years – and we’re through with you.” So he was – as the term was used – separated from the Army at Fort Sill. We had a week there in which we – I met a lot of his old Army friends who likewise were there for the same reason. Again, it was just party, party, party all the time, and it was fun. Then we left from Fort Sill and drove to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, which is San Antonio. There Peggy and Johnny Lucas were, with his father who was a general and was stationed there. We spent several nights with them in San Antonio at Fort Sam Houston. Then from there we drove west and spent several nights with T.D. and Bill Snell. He was in the Navy and they were in San Diego. So we did that. Then – so we didn’t get home until just before Christmas of 1945, having had a marvelous time, as you can see.

EM: Sounds like a marvelous time.

DENECKE: [enthusiastically] It was. It was great. [aside] Now don’t tell me we were disconnected. I hope that we were not. [laughs]

EM: We're fine. I know I asked this question already, but just to make sure: is there any other thing you'd like to tell me about the wedding or the people that participated in it?

DENECKE: No, I don't think so. It was just a great wedding reception, just as I say, over in the University Club in the corner room, which is on the lower level.

EM: No strange mishaps?

DENECKE: No. No, nothing like that.

EM: [Everything went smoothly?]

DENECKE: Yeah.

EM: Okay. Great. After you married you lived in Eugene.

DENECKE: Mm-hmm, for the first year.

EM: For the first year.

DENECKE: Including the summer. They ran law school during the summer because there was so many guys who'd been in the service who wanted to finish law school. Their law school had been interrupted, and they were in a hurry to finish up. So they ran it during the summer, which usually they wouldn't do.

EM: Mm-hmm. What was your first impression of Eugene as a place to live?

DENECKE: It was okay. I had never spent any amount of time there. I'd barely been there, and didn't go to school there, so it was – it was kind of fun. I never was wildly

enthusiastic about Eugene and never wanted to live there. As Arno's year of teaching progressed, he came to the conclusion that what he wanted to do was practice law in Portland. Therefore he was not going to be teaching beyond Christmas of '46. So he was in touch with some law firms here in Portland, one of which of course hired him. I think – well again, it was a friend of my father's who was one of the men in that—

[End of Tape 4, Side 1]

Tape 4, Side 2

1999 June 23

EM: This is Elizabeth Meyer, and I'm speaking with Selma Denecke on June the 23rd 1999, in the Jefferson Room at OHS – um, excuse me – Oregon Historical Society. So, you were talking about your husband's job at the University of Oregon Law School.

DENECKE: He enjoyed teaching very much, and I'd say particularly enjoyed getting to know young lawyers who would ultimately be very good friends and fellow lawyers from all over the state, because there were so many of them who had had similar wartime experiences to Arno's. We shared a lot of fun times together with the students, who were basically my age, and somewhat his age, but more so mine – there being three years difference in age between us. It was just – it was a lot of fun being in Eugene. It really was. But on the other hand, as I said, he wanted to practice law. So he was in touch with various law firms, and one in particular where Harry Beckett – who was a friend of my father's – was a principal partner. So Arno made a contact with them, and they hired him to go to work the beginning of January of '47.

EM: So this was back in Portland though?

DENECKE: This was in Portland.

EM: Okay.

DENECKE: Right.

EM: I wanted to ask you though, when you were in Eugene, how you busied yourself while he was in school.

DENECKE: Oh – well I did a lot of just sort of puttering around, I guess you'd say. However, eventually – well, I should back up and say that for the first six months, we lived in a basement room which we called “the fox hole,” and it was at 11th and Mill. It had its own outside entrance and its own bathroom, and we entertained people there and had a marvelous time. But the second six months we had the upstairs of a house and that was really nice. That was at 13th and Pearl, across from the Episcopal Church. So for a while, I worked at the Episcopal Church in the office, answering the phone, and I don't know what I did – nothing very important, but I did work there for a little while.

EM: Do you remember any friendships that you made, personal friendships?

DENECKE: Well, many among the lawyers who were students of Arno's and their wives, because many of them were married – most of them were married. We had lots of parties and potlucks and that kind of thing.

EM: Do you think people got married earlier in those days?

DENECKE: No. Well, yes – yes I do think they did. I think now the trend is perhaps to be married later, partly because people tend to live together before they're married. I think that – in fact I felt that I was among the last to be married as far as the age was concerned. I think Arno felt the same way – where many people had been married more in their early twenties, or right out of college – or not even out of college.

EM: Would you care to talk at all about some of your expectations of married life and how that matched with reality?

DENECKE: No, because there wasn't anything. I mean it just did what I thought marriage was supposed to do. In other words, I was Arno's wife and it just – in that I was not going to be going on working as I had been before. That was something I did when I was single.

I wasn't trained, really, to be or do anything – other than being a glorified receptionist at the art museum, which I still can do very well. But I'm not trained to do anything else. Then besides which, at the end of the time that we were in Eugene I was pregnant and in – well, first of all I should say that we had decided since we had not known each other very long at all that we would not start a baby until we had been married at least a year. That's exactly what we did, was to wait for a year. So Ginger, who was born in August of '47, started in November of '46, while we were still in Eugene.

EM: I'm about to ask you about Ginger, but I was wondering how you got used to running a household.

DENECKE: Well, my mother had died when I was a senior in high school, and although we had – although my grandmother came to live in the house – my father's mother – and although we had Mrs. Nelson, who had worked for my mother, who came every day, I was used to cooking and. Then my grandmother died during World War II. I – it was just something that I did. I knew how to do it – cooking, and – of course I was lucky because I had somebody to do the cleaning, and the washing, and the ironing, and all that kind of thing. But as far as cooking was concerned, I knew how to do it. So it was no big deal.

EM: How did Arno take to married life?

DENECKE: He enjoyed it. He was a very domestically [laughs] oriented person. He liked to be at home and he liked, you know, friends to come in, and to entertain people – and to go to people's parties. He – it's what I think he'd always been looking for.

EM: Well, the subject of Ginger has come up. Well, actually, you came back to Portland.

DENECKE: Portland – well, where we were lucky was that the house in which I had grown up – on Cornell Road Northwest – was our house, which my father gave to us.

Friends were living in it while we were in Eugene, and then those friends moved out and we moved in.

EM: So unusual.

DENECKE: Well, we were very lucky because again, housing was so difficult to come by right after the war – extremely difficult. So, you know, we started off with – really being very, very lucky – having a house to return to, and it was furnished and everything else.

EM: Well, I know earlier I asked you about your house and neighborhood, so maybe we don't have to go into that right now. But tell me, do you remember what you felt when you first found out you were going to have a child?

DENECKE: Oh, terribly excited – terribly excited. Very excited – thought that was just terrific, and so did Arno. I mean it was just, you know, it was what we had planned to do.

EM: Is there anything that you'd like to tell me about your first experience at pregnancy?

DENECKE: No, not particularly. I was extremely lucky in all pregnancies. I was – I felt well, you know, I had no problems. It was very, very normal, and I was extremely lucky.

EM: You don't have to go into this, but I was wondering what prenatal care was like then.

DENECKE: Oh, it was kind of routine – remember now that one was anesthetized, because one expected that, wanted it – I certainly wanted it strongly. This natural childbirth thing – I have often thought that if I were young and having children now, would I want that? I don't think I would. But maybe that's because that's the way people did things and the way I was brought up. It just appalls me, the idea of natural childbirth, and you know, all these classes that you go to and breathing exercises and all that kind of thing – never

been heard of in those days. At least not among people I knew. My obstetrician was a younger doctor that my father knew. I would go and see him maybe once a month, and probably not do much of anything [laughs] that he told me to do or not to do. It just all happened just very, very normally – extremely so. I was very lucky, and especially because they were all healthy children and did not have any physical or mental problems. I realize more and more how lucky we were – five children that are just all remarkably wonderful and arrived safely, easily, and so forth. I tell you, when I found out I was for sure having twins – and it's funny, T.D. Snell had had twins, and she thought from the beginning of my pregnancy with them that I was indeed having twins because she said, you know, I was so much bigger and earlier and all that kind of thing. But it was the third child, so I thought well, that might happen anyway. That was pretty overwhelming, and also because they were induced, because they were due in March during what was then spring vacation. The obstetrician wanted to deliver them himself, and he was going away to ski. Otherwise, if it had been a single child he probably would have had his resident deliver the baby. But instead, he wanted to do it, and so they were induced. Now, most twins tend to come early. They were induced, and I chose a Wednesday. That was the day that my cleaning woman came – because I knew she'd be there with Ginger and David – and that's why they were born on March 11th. How about that? [laughs] Isn't that amazing?

EM: Do you care to comment on anything else about the delivery?

DENECKE: No, because I mean, as long as I was put out of my misery as early as they would do it that was just fine with me. I admit that it certainly takes you and the baby a little bit longer to recover because of the anesthetic. I mean with natural childbirth you don't have that anesthetic to – the effects of which to get over. But it's what was done. Now previous to the war, mothers pretty routinely stayed in the hospital for two weeks. After the war it was down to five days. I was not out of bed in that period of time. That's the way it was. Which – and I am appalled at the idea of mothers coming home at the first and second day. I think that's just absolutely wrong. But that's my opinion, and I don't think that

five days is necessary, but I think three would be nice. But anyway [pauses]. No, and it's kind of fun – the night that Ginger was born, which as I mentioned was in August, August 14th, the Beavers – our old baseball team – was still at Vaughn Street, at the park there, not in the stadium. Where we lived up on Westover we could look down – albeit at a distance – to Vaughn Street and see the lights in the park, and hear the cheers if there were homeruns or whatever, and listen to it on the radio at the same time. So I was listening to this ballgame, which was going on – maybe it went into over innings, I don't remember – but anyway, I mean, I was beginning to have pains, and you know, was going into labor. But I didn't want to leave until the ballgame was over. So I didn't leave – I mean Arno and I didn't leave for the hospital, for Good Samaritan, which wasn't but you know, about ten blocks away – until the ballgame was over. Then Ginger was born at four something in the morning, I think.

EM: Did you notify Arno what was happening?

DENECKE: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. Yeah. I – there were contractions and, you know, I was going into labor.

EM: You must really like baseball.

DENECKE: I did, and it's funny – I had not been a baseball fan until I met and was married to Arno. Then – partly I think because he had managed that Army baseball team during the summer of '45 in Europe – I really became quite smitten with baseball, and particularly when it was at Vaughn Street. I never carried the allegiance over to when the team moved to the Multnomah Stadium.

EM: Well, how did Arno react upon seeing his new baby girl?

DENECKE: [happily] Oh, he was just so excited and proud and happy. [laughs] He was writing out some checks for some bills, and he put the – and we had milk delivered in those days, because one did – and he had put the check for the milk in the – we'll say electric, and the electric in the milk envelope and – I mean that's how excited he was. Oh yes, he was very excited, very happy.

EM: Did he take kind of a hands-on approach to the baby?

DENECKE: Very much so. That is one thing that he did much more so than a lot of men of his age who maybe were also fathers at that time. He participated in everything to do with the baby – changing her, feeding her bottles – yes he was wonderful with all of them. He was a very hands-on father. Not only that, he cared about what – I mean when they got older and were involved in activities and that kind of thing in school – he cared very much about going to their games, or whatever they were involved with – very, very much, yes.

EM: How did you decide to name—

DENECKE: Ginger? She's named Virginia for Arno's sister, who's name is Virginia, but from the beginning we would call her Ginger.

EM: Did you mostly trust your instincts in raising children, or did you look up advice in books?

DENECKE: I trusted my instincts because I had no experience. I had never babysat. You see I'm an only child. I had never babysat. I had never done any of that kind of thing. I knew really pretty nearly nothing about being a mother. It just was instinctive I guess.

EM: What's the age difference between Ginger and David?

DENECKE: Just a little less than two years.

EM: Is there anything that you'd like to tell me about your pregnancy with David and the birth?

DENECKE: Well, the pregnancy was the usual normal thing and so was the birth. It's just that David is a boy, and it was a total different situation. Ginger had been just the ideal baby girl, just so pretty and so easy to take care of. [good-naturedly, emphatically] David was something else, and so were Will and John. In fact when I found out that I had – and remember there was no way of knowing in those days what sex your child was going to be beforehand, before the birth – when I found out that I had twin boys I said, “Two more Davids? No! This is terrible!” Well first of all, I wasn't pleased a bit to be having twins. That was not what I had in mind. I remember that – see in those days they took an x-ray to determine this. The x-ray - the radiologist, sorry – called me and said, “We shouldn't be telling you this, we should let you doctor tell you this, but we think you'll be so excited to know that you're having twins,” and I stamped my feet and said, “Not two more! Not two children! No I do not want this!” Well, anyway, so they came [laughs] and they were hell on wheels. They really were. Well, soon they – I mean to begin with, when they got to the point that they could move around they were in a bedroom which had been my bedroom on the main floor. Before you knew it they had taken down the doors. They'd taken the hinge pins off the doors, and they climbed out the windows – it was ground floor level – but this is the kind of thing they did. We sawed the door to the hall in half horizontally and made like a Dutch door out of it, because they could quickly climb over one of those fence-like things that you put up to keep a baby in a room. But with the solid bottom of the door they were pretty well incarcerated in their room. That's were I – now, this also brings up something else. I kept my babies in playpens. Nobody does that anymore. My children, when they had their children, let them crawl all over the place when they got to that point. I kept mine in a playpen where I had them under control. That was the way I thought you should bring them up. Anyway—

EM: The twins were John and?

DENECKE: William, Will.

EM: How did they compare to David?

DENECKE: [sighs, exasperatedly] They were just two more Davids – they were boys and there’s all a world of difference between boys and girls, don’t tell me there isn’t. They were physical, and first they connived together, as I mentioned, to pretty much destroy the room in which they were living – and I mean they destroyed it. But then, when they got loose and could be out and around, then they began to fight. They fought endlessly until they were, really, toward the end of teenage – but they were so competitive. They wanted, each of them wanted to be the first, the most, and the best – and they’re not identical, they’re fraternal – and therefore they’re no more alike than any two brothers would be. They – and then David lorded it over them, and they didn’t like that, and Ginger was kind of bossing all of them, and they didn’t like that – none of them liked it. They were a wild bunch. Let me tell you. They’re very good friends now.

EM: Great. How much later did John and Will arrive after David?

DENECKE: Four years.

EM: Four years. Okay. How did you choose David’s name?

DENECKE: Just one of my favorite names, my most favorite name I guess.

EM: Okay, and John and Will’s names?

DENECKE: We thought Denecke was an odd enough name, and Arno and Selma were odd names, and we would choose just very normal first names.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: And it's funny about Annie, who came six years after the twins. We had named her – that is, if she were to be a girl – we had thought we would name her Lori [?]. It was even in the newspaper that she was Lori. For whatever reason, I can't tell you, we just didn't fit. It didn't seem right. So we renamed her. We named her Anne – Anne Elizabeth. That's now known laughingly as Anne Elizabeth Alice Louise – which is the Princess Anne's total name, Princess Anne of England's total name – Anne Elizabeth Alice Louise. But anyway, that just [indistinct]. What's ironic is that had she been a Lori, she would have been, I believe, the sixth Lori in her grade school class in Salem. It was that popular a name at that time. But it wasn't for that reason that we didn't name her Lori. It just didn't feel right.

EM: Did you just get lonely after six years and decide you wanted another child?

DENECKE: Oh no – that was a big mistake and a surprise, as Annie well knows. It was before the pill had really been developed. So I wasn't on any pill, birth control pill. The Junior League, of which I was a member, had a fabulous fashion show at the old Multnomah Hotel before it became an office building. As you know it's now a – what do you call it suites? – Embassy Suites. Anyway, in its last days as the old Multnomah Hotel it was the scene of this Junior League fashion show – which was a fund raiser, as we now think of that kind of thing. Instead of just clothes from one store, we had clothes from every principal women's store and department store in Portland. Those of us who were models were taught how to walk, and taught how to make-up, and taught everything. It was very professional, if you will, [with] an afternoon version of it and an evening version. So I was one of the models, and I looked as, probably as good as I can ever look, which is not saying

much. But anyway, Arno just thought I looked so lovely that he made love to me, and that – and Annie came as a result of that. The thing that happened – Will and John were in the first grade, and they came home with the three-day measles. So I – you know, I thought, ah-ha, I could have a legal abortion. This is what I want. Because I was only about maybe six weeks along or whatever, wasn't even sure I was pregnant. I went to my pediatrician first. He was pretty blasé about it. He didn't think there was much to be worried about. Then I went to my obstetrician. Neither of them thought that this was anything to be too concerned about. So I went through with the pregnancy, and that wonderful girl is the result of it. She knows all this.

EM: Wow, what a story there.

DENECKE: I had my tubes tied after that.

EM: Mm-hmm.

DENECKE: No more babies. But above all did not want another boy – and that's just – and not only didn't I want another boy, didn't want twins, another set of twins. After you've had a multiple birth, you're perhaps more apt to have another one.

EM: Really?

DENECKE: [dramatically] Oh, yes. But by this time Ginger was twelve and could be really helpful and you know, in babysitting and helping to take care of Annie. So you know, it really worked out very well.

EM: Well if you can remember, how did each of the children react to the next child or children as they came along?

DENECKE: As I have mentioned, they wanted to boss them around. They didn't react very well to them – except Annie, because she's so much younger that she was no competition. She was no bother to them.

EM: Were they pretty delighted, generally, to have a baby sister?

DENECKE: Yes they were. They really were, yeah. Because she was, you know, so much younger – twelve years younger than Ginger, ten years younger than David, six years younger than Will and John.

EM: Sounds like you'd have a lot of babysitters.

DENECKE: [laughs] Yeah, right.

EM: How would you describe your husband's style of parenting as opposed to your own?

DENECKE: He was probably more – oh, I don't want to – authoritarian isn't the right word, but I was more permissive. I was definitely more permissive. You know, sometimes he would say, "We're not trying to be friends with them, we're trying to bring them up," because I was pretty laissez-faire.

EM: What did you think when he said that?

DENECKE: Oh, I just, you know, it was just Arno. You don't – I don't know. It was no big deal. It was probably what I would expect. [laughs]

EM: Well, you mentioned your own parents' laid-back approach to discipline.

DENECKE: Right.

EM: How did [indistinct] go down in your house, as far as yourself and your husband, as far as disciplining?

DENECKE: Well, as I say, I think I was very – too permissive and too laid-back about our children.

EM: But if the children did something bad, they acted up, how did your husband deal with it?

DENECKE: Oh, I don't know, talked to them. This was not a hands-on beating kind of thing ever.

EM: Which is good.

DENECKE: No, it wasn't.

EM: Well, actually, we're about to run out of tape, so it might be a good time to pause.

DENECKE: It probably will be because of the parking meter.

[End of Tape 4, Side 2]

[End of Interview]