

Mrs. Bernice Wheeler &  
Erlene Leonard  
North Montpelier  
March 30, 1988

Mary Kasamatsu  
Eleanor Ott  
Interviewer

MK First I want to say that I am with Mrs. Bernice Wheeler in North Montpelier. It's the 30th of March and this is the Green Mountain Chronicles. Let's start with the beginning, where were you born? Are you a native of this part of Vermont?

BW Yes, I was born in South Woodbury in 1895.

MK I lived in South Woodbury for about five years.

BW Where were you?

MK Just moved last year in fact.

BW We lived on a farm outside the village.

MK Really! Did you know the Tassie family?

BW Oh yes.

MK That's the place we lived in.

BW Yes, Agnes Tassie and I, the daughter were very good friends for years. We did a lot of things together.

MK I know about where you were then. Let's see, one of the things that we were really interested in, in getting some information about was Dewey Day and Eleanor tells me you have some memories of Dewey Day, that you went to Dewey Day as a child.

BW What did we do on Dewey Day?

MK Well, let's talk about what do you most remember about that day? You drove in from South Woodbury?

BW Yes.

MK What was the trip like coming into town?

BW Coming into town? Well of course everyone was so interested in celebrating the day. It was interesting to see the neighbors and so forth and do the visiting back. Everyone was telling about their day.

EO Do you remember about Dewey Day Grammy when they had the big celebration for Admiral Dewey and you went in and you stayed with your relatives in town and they had all the fireworks and the parades and the banners and...

BW It was a great celebration.

EO You told me a wonderful story once about you went in, in the wagon of course and the kids got out always and walked some it, but when you got in there, your aunt, and I don't know which one that would have been, which one of the, two sisters that lived with you, but when she got in she realized she had one farm shoe on, remember this and one good shoe?

BW Yes, that's right.

EO Tell Mary some of that, tell Mary some of that about going in and having her find that and what people thought of that?

BW Of course we got up very early in the morning and put on our best clothes and so forth and this, she really wasn't my sister, but they were like sisters and lived with us and she got all dressed up of course and when she got there and we got out and looked at her shoes, she had on one of her old ones and one of her new ones. (LAUGHING)

MK How old would she had been then?

BW Oh, she probably was something like eighteen. (LAUGHING)

MK That's the age when you really care about something.

BW Oh yes. (LAUGHING)

EO Did she get teased for that Grammy?

BW Pardon.

EO Did she get teased for that?

BW Oh yes, of course she did. We never, ever really let her forget it.

MK Now when you, you were going you were a school child then.

BW Yes.

MK At that point. Had you started to school yet?

BW Oh yes, uh huh.

MK You had. Do you recall whether there was a big deal about Admiral Dewey in your school? Did you, did the teacher talk about what a great hero he was?

BW Yes of course there was always. He was a subject that was talked about so much at that time.

MK Do you remember were there any popular songs or verses or poems that were popular then?

BW I don't seem to remember any especially.

MK Uh huh.

EO What about the fireworks Grammy?

BW Oh the fireworks were, everyone went and found some hill where they could see there, those were very popular.

MK Now there was a *bonfire*?

BW Yes.

MK Do you remember that? Did you see the fire?

BW We saw the *bonfire*, yes.

MK Was it a tremendously...

BW Yes an enormous one.

EO Describe what that was like Grammy.

BW Everyone brought you know, they brought so many things and just had with oil on the fire and they had this enormous *bonfire* and everyone was around it enjoying it.

MK Was there, was it a tremendous crowd, I mean?

BW All the neighbors of course were all there.

MK I had read some place that they laid twelve or thirteen special railroad tracks to bring all the thousands of people into Montpelier who were coming in by train.

BW Probably, I didn't know about that. Of course we were...

EO I heard it was jammed they said.

BW Oh yes, it was.

EO And the parade.

BW Uh huh.

EO You probably hadn't ever seen anything like that. You were still a little kid.

BW That's right.

MK Had you been to Montpelier very often before that?

BW We didn't go too often, but we did drive in from South Woodbury over the hills into Montpelier for, oh to see the dentist and different things like something like that, that we couldn't get done up here.

MK So you were able to tell by that comparison that this was really not the way Montpelier usually looked, many more people and much more activity.

BW Oh yes uh huh.

EO Well you stayed with a relative right on Main Street didn't you?

BW Yes, we had a relative that we would stay with overnight.

EO Well there must have been a lot of activity around the house on State Street, you were right on State Street.

BW Yes, uh huh.

EO Can you think of what that activity was like, what was going on, what people were doing, what the grown-ups were doing or what the noise was like or what some of the things were that you saw or what that parade was like?

BW Well.

EO That was a long time ago.

BW A long time ago and I don't remember anything special about it only I do remember we were so excited to see the parade and everything that was going. Everything was so active, and so much going on, but I couldn't tell anything about especially about the parade. It's so long ago I've forgotten.

MK Do you remember any of the grown-ups talking about seeing Admiral Dewey?

BW Oh yes, uh huh. It was very, a great occasion if you could get to talk to him.

MK Did any of your family get to talk to him?

BW I don't remember that they did, especially.

MK Well his family home was also right down on State Street.

BW Yes.

MK Were you close to his house when you were staying with your family?

BW Yes, uh huh. It's way down at the end of that street.

EO Everybody must have had a good look at him though?

BW Oh yes.

MK I guess for a child to see him wouldn't be nearly as exciting as the fireworks or anything.

BW All those other things were more exciting. He was just a man. (LAUGHING)

MK Just a man and there were fireworks out too. That's great. From what I've read, it sounds like it was the biggest celebration that Montpelier may have ever seen, I don't know.

BW Yes, I think probably it was because you know, a man who had gone up in the world was going to be celebrated, a lot of things were going to be celebrated for him.

MK I mean happening so close to the turning of the new century.

BW Yes.

MK Do you remember whether anybody talked about the fact that this was going to be a new century and was there any kind of special, did people pay attention to that then, I mean I can imagine as we get closer to turning a new century that there will be some kind of, I know the media makes a big difference today, but I would imagine that there will be some kind of reflecting back over the twentieth century and a lot, just a lot of

pronouncements about what it was and what's to come. Do you remember any of that kind of sense how momentous it was to turn to a new century?

BW I don't seem to remember, as you know anything especially that was said, but of course people were talking like that. They were thinking that things would be changed.

MK Did people have any inkling of how much things would be changed or what ways?

EO This was before all those changes happened, so.

BW That's right.

EO We're still talking turn of the century, Grammy was only five.

MK Right.

EO You went from writing 1800 to 1900.

BW That's right.

EO That's a big change.

(LAUGHING)

EO 1899 and then you are in 1900.

BW Then I was a pretty small girl then.

MK Now, when you were growing up in South Woodbury, was there electricity in that community then?

BW No there wasn't. No.

MK What was that like, to have, I mean I have always lived with electricity?

BW We had kerosene lamps and candles, but mostly kerosene lamps and of course there wasn't any telephone. I remember the first telephone that my father helped to string the line so that we could have the telephone and I remember seeing my mother, my grandmother go up beside the wall and turn this crank and call, the operator.

MK How old were you when the family had its first phone?

BW Oh, probably I would, let me see, how old would I be?

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EO You said you thought maybe around ten, Grammy.

BW I think probably I was around, might have been ten, around ten years old.

EO You said once that you were the one when you got old enough that you had to clean the chimneys on the lamps. What did you do when you cleaned the chimney lamps? What was that like?

BW We washed them in soap and water and then polished them as you would any glass because they would get very smokey.

MK Now would a family, how large was your family? Did you have how many brothers and sisters?

BW I just had one brother, but these, there were two, my uncle had two daughters and they lived with us. So it was, we were quite a big family.

MK For a family that size, how many lamps say in a room like this, how many lamps would you have to have light in the evening?

BW We had this big lamp which gave had a round wick and gave an extra, which would be on the table in the middle of the room and then of course if anyone was going to do anything any outside, they would carry a lamp and you had light that way.

MK Did the farmers always try to have their chores done before dark?

BW Well no because we had to go by lantern lights. I don't know whether you see a lantern or not, but it's, it was a, kerosene with a handle and a wick and you could, that was one of our duties to carry this lantern so that the family, the men could see to do their work.

MK So the children would be in charge of taking the light for them, so they have hand free to work.

BW Uh huh.

EO So your father milked the cows in the evening in the winter by lantern light?

BW Yes we did, uh huh.

EO That's a, it's so different today isn't it?

MK It is, it is.

BW Uh huh.

MK I know, I remember talking with one farmer who was so relieved when electricity came in because he didn't have to worry about accidentally starting a fire in the barn during milking anymore.

BW Oh yes, of course fire was very, it was so easily with the lantern it could happen you know. If the lantern happened to be dropped or something like that, it's so easy to start a fire.

MK That was a really big responsibility that children had when they had to carry the lantern?

BW That's right.

MK No fooling around.

EO What was it like when you had your first electric light that you could turn on? What was it like Grammy?

BW (LAUGHING).

EO Where was the first light in your house? What was it like?

BW We didn't have a light until we came to North Montpelier to live. We lived where the Hart's live now and that was our first experience with electric lights, so it was pretty thrilling to come down to the city and be able to turn on the lights.

MK When was that, that you first had electricity then here in North Montpelier?

BW Well probably, actually it would be, let me see, how old would Doris be? The children...

EO They were still pretty small.

BW They were still very small.

EO Because Doris was born up at the farm and then Lucille and Don were born up in Maple Corners.

BW Yes and we...

EO Was it after that you came down.



BW And we came here to this office when Lucille was ten years old. And so it would probably be, that was probably was, Lucille was a very small baby when we came to that house up there.

EO So this is probably after the first world war?

BW Yes.

EO Because Gramp was back...

BW Uh huh.

EO ...from the war and so we're talking four or five years after the first world war, so end of the twenties.

MK How did having electricity change, change the way women lived? I'm really interested in how it changed housework and laundry for instance?

BW It was quite, very gradual, but it was wonderful when we could have a washing machine and just turn on the electricity, but of course most of us didn't have one. But it did, having electricity changed the work for women very much.

EO What other ways Grammy did it change it besides?

BW Well when we could have electric stoves and so and the laundry was done with an electric washing machine.

EO You didn't get a washing machine right away though?

BW Oh no.

EO Did you still use a wringer?

BW Yes, uh huh. Yes, we still had one, a machine that had a crank, and then you had to wash the clothes, then it would wring them out by turning with the wringer.

MK Just in terms of how, how much brighter it made the nighttime, you still had work to do after dinner, did that make a difference?

BW Oh yes, so much difference because rooms were so light then, they'd been so, by the kerosene lanterns didn't give us very much light.

EO People thought about the darkness in a different way then though didn't they, when they didn't have all that light? What was that like?

BW A lot of people did I think.

EO I mean we think about darkness now as if it's dark.

BW Uh huh.

E It wasn't like that for you so much was it? I mean you were more used to that.

BW Sure, we could do more things in the dark because we were accustomed to it. No, our first electric refrigerator was when we came down here and we still had the icebox and the ice was always melting and running down the kitchen floor, (LAUGHING) because we forgot to empty the pan underneath. You're not suppose to do that.

EO Then what about the radio Grammy, when electricity gave you a radio.

BW That was pretty exciting.

EO What was that like?

BW When we could, when we were able to turn on this radio, that was very exciting.

MK What do you remember about those first radio programs? Did you have favorites that you listened to?

EO Yea, what did you listen to Gram?

BW Well let me see, what did?

EO Did you listen to the news?

BW The news, of course those are always very important. We listened to the news. We were always musical programs that we looked forward to seeing.

EO Amos and Andy?

BW Yes, uh huh. And I don't remember just when Lawrence Welk came on, but we were very fond of listening to him.

MK He was on the radio?

BW Yes.

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EO This is not television, he was on the radio first, was he?

BW Uh huh.

EO That's getting up into modern times.

BW That's right.

MK Did everybody in town have a radio about the same time or would people get together at friends houses and neighbors houses to listen?

BW Probably at first there would be a few that had one, and so we'd all get together then we gradually everyone had one in their own home.

MK How did it change the way people spent their time in the evenings? Did it make a difference?

BW Yes I think, I think probably it did. People sat up much later all of a sudden. Before we went to bed I guess because we didn't have anything special to do, but people would sit up a little later and listen to the programs.

EO So people would come and instead of talking to each other, they'd...

BW They'd listen, uh huh.

MK Had your family ever done things like sitting around in the evening and singing together or playing music or?

BW Our family did because my, we had an organ, you know, one of these old fashion organs and my aunt played the organ and we spent a great many evenings singing. The family always enjoyed singing and we'd sing all those old songs.

EO Your father played a couple instruments too didn't he?

BW Yes, he played in a band. He played the drum and sometimes the, he played a horn.

EO And what about and you played the piano?

BW Yes.

EO Grammy plays the piano now.

(LAUGHING)

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MK So really sort of had a family band really?

BW Yes.

MK Were you able to keep that going after the radio was there?

BW The family together?

MK Uh huh.

BW Oh yes, we have always been a family that got together especially holidays and we've, this year we are wondering about our holiday because Lucille has been sick, but usually on holidays, the family has all gotten together.

EO What you are saying, even when you had a family?

BW Yes, uh huh.

EO With your children, didn't you and Gramp and your children and...

BW Oh yes we did. We did a lot of singing.

EO Did you, you didn't have a organ?

BW Yes I did.

EO In this house, did you?

BW Yes I had one.

EO Did you play it?

BW I did and I had a piano and now my piano is over in Lucille's basement. Her children had it to use. That was one of my great desires as soon as I taught school to buy a piano.

MK You taught school?

BW Yes.

MK Now tell me about that? What, did you teach here in North Montpelier?

BW Yes, I came here first. The first time, the first years that I taught after going.

EO Weren't you in Craftsbury Grammy?

BW Pardon.

EO Weren't you in Craftsbury?

BW Yes, uh huh.

EO Didn't you go up there and teach?

BW I did.

EO Before you got married?

BW Yes, uh huh. When Raymond went in the army, I went up to Craftsbury and taught. Up until then, I taught here in the village.

EO What was this, how did you used to get to school in the winter when you were teaching?

BW Sometimes I went on snowshoes.

EO And what about the snow roller, didn't you sometimes go with the snow roller?

BW I often rode on the snow roller, uh huh.

EO And what did you do when you got there?

BW Build a fire. If the old boy that was supposed to build it hadn't built it, I had to build it.

MK So this was a graded, one room school?

BW One room school, yes, uh huh.

MK How many, how many roughly, how many students did you have, would you be responsible for?

BW Probably fifteen. They would be all grades.

MK So each class might, each different level might only have one or two students?

BW That's right, uh huh.

MK You'd have to have something for all of them to do, whatever.

EO How did you manage that Grammy? That must have been a three ring circus?

BW It was.

EO How did you keep all those kids in line and get them doing things and make them learn them anything?

BW Well, I don't know exactly how we did it.

EO Come on now, what is your secret, what did you do?

BW We managed. You know we had to prepare certain things to get done and each one had something that they and either I would write out what they were suppose to do or in some way, give each class something for the day so that they would be busy and as long as you could keep them busy it was, they were okay.

EO People who've gone to schools like that say that a lot of it was that the older ones helped the younger ones. Did you think that happened, huh?

BW It did, yes it did.

EO How did that work out?

BW Very good, uh huh.

EO How would they do it?

BW Well...

EO How did the older ones do?

BW Well these big seats where two could sit in the same seat and the older ones could help the younger ones with whatever they had to do.

EO It sounds like a good system. They ought to put that into practice now.

MK Well I've talked with, not very many, but a few teachers who taught in one room schools and every single one of them says it was the best system going and I've heard children who are now grown up who went through that one room school experience and said oh, it was so much nicer than what they later went onto and a bigger school with just one grade. And it's seems like, I've wondered whether you know, obviously certain things were gained when schools were consolidated and you know the one room graded schools were one room rural schools were phased out, but I think a lot was lost, too.

BW We did lose a lot uh huh, I think we did.

EO What do you think we lost Grammy?

BW Well you see each one had their, there was a certain group that went together before there were more of them involved in whatever was going on. Perhaps they listened to more, to what is going on than they would if there were more people around and doing more talking and things like that. If they are in a small group, they listened to what the one next to them was talking about.

MK I've heard people say that it was more like a family in the one room schools.

BW That's right uh huh.

EO We used to do things at the school, I mean beside school. What were some of the things that the town used to get together and do. The village used to go to the school for things. What were some of those things?

BW Oh they had, they would have different programs, someone you know would be put on a committee and they would get a program and everyone would go and listen to this at night and then they would have, lots of times they would have what they called a promenade or a dance at the school.

EO And box lunches.

BW Yes.

EO Describe box lunches, I bet Mary doesn't know about box lunches.

BW Every lady would have, would have a very nice lunch put up and the lunches were sold at auctions and so of course if you knew, if the man knew the lady who was, he would pay a pretty high price for that certain box.

MK Did they know whose box they were bidding on?

BW Well they didn't always, but they intended to find out if it was possible. Sometimes they were surprised, they didn't get the one they wanted.

EO How did you used to decorate your box?

BW Well with crepe paper and things like that.

EO Crepe paper, bows?

BW Uh huh and sometimes artificial flowers.

EO So you made a fancy lunch inside?

BW Yes.

EO What sort of things would you put in the lunch?

BW Oh, sandwiches and special kinds of cake and things like that. We didn't have, usually the fruit would have to be apples because we didn't have an opportunity to get much fruit.

EO So these things brought the village together?

BW Yes.

EO I mean everybody would go to the school for this.

BW Oh yes.

EO You wouldn't miss it would you?

BW Oh no because when they auctioned off the boxes it was very exciting.

MK Then would the two people have lunch or dinner together. The woman who made the box and the man who bought it?

BW Yes, uh huh.

EO So it was really a little hanky-panky going on?

BW That's right.

EO Well Grammy, why didn't you say so?

(LAUGHING)

EO A little hanky panky in the one room school house?

BW That's right. (LAUGHING)

EO Uh huh, things weren't all quiet and dull back in those days?

BW Oh no, they were much as they are today.

EO You never got into mischief though?



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BW Well, (LAUGHING) you probably better ask somebody else about that? (LAUGHING)

Erlene Leonard arrives & joins in.

EO ...electricity, what a change that made. Did you always have electricity in your cottage?

EL No I didn't. When I was growing up, we never had electricity.

MK Wait a second. I'm going to ask you about that, but I'm going to move this over here. Would you hold that real still.

EL Now what are you going to do?

MK I just want to ask you to tell me about what it was like when electricity came?

EL Growing up in East Calais and?

MK Yea, your very first, you know, the impression it made when electricity came.

EL Now just wait a minute. Don't turn it on yet. I was probably eight and I'll be 55 in June so.

EO So think back, now you're eight now.

EL And I lived by the church.

EO Can we put it on now?

EL I'm about as Grandma, I got to say because when we lived by that church, it was a big farm. Yea, you can turn it on.

MK Okay.

EL There was a big farm there, right by the church in East Calais. A huge farm there that my great grandfather Parker owned and it went to my grandmother and she was married to Earl Leonard. And he ran the farm and my father worked there, my uncle and then they had hired man too. But anyway, when we lived there, we had those aladdin lamps and I don't remember candles. I don't remember anybody having a candle. We had a lot of those lamps and we lugged them from room to room. And when we went upstairs to bed, we'd a, a grown-up always went with us with the lamp. Then the minute you got in bed, the lamp was gone back downstairs and you know, but they never

allowed us to have the lamp upstairs without them being there. I remember that. And then, I don't really remember when the electricity came. I really, you know, don't remember, but all of a sudden there was electricity in the house you know. But we moved away from there when I was eight and a half. My grandmother and I moved to another house in the village which had electricity, but I don't really remember. I always remember going to the barn you know and there was, you know, we had, when I first remember, they had a pump in the kitchen you know, then they put faucets in. When you're eight, you don't really, I remember those lamps and I remember going way out back to the bathroom and freezing to death, running out through this long alleyway out to the back. But I don't really remember the electricity, I really don't.

EO So when you moved in and had electricity, you must have had a radio?

EL We had a radio, yes.

EO What was that like?

EL And I remember the radio.

EO Did it change your life, having a radio? Did you listen to it?

EL My grandmother did, listened to Roosevelt give those, I remember hearing him give his talks on the radio, what did they call "Fireside Chats" or something? I remember and I was quite impressed with him when I was a kid because my grandmother was and I was real impressed with him and another person I was real impressed with was Amelia Earhart, she was always my, I guess it was in <sup>all of her</sup>; I guess. She had her plane down here to Barre-Montpelier, flew in there and I sat in her plane.

MK You did! Woa! God that is great.

EL And we used to have a picture.

EO How did you do that?

EL My grandfather was a plane buff and he, we used to go to all these air shows. He and I and my grandmother when I was like four or five years old. He'd go to Burlington, we'd go to, Montpelier had them all the time, these air shows and she came here and it was when I was about three or four in the late '30's, in the '30's sometime and he went right down of course when she was going to be down

here and he put me up in her plane. But, had a picture of it but, it's got lost. But that was a big thrill to me because I, she was a, and you know I've always liked her. I remember I wanted to write a paper on her once in school. They told us to write a paper on a famous person and I picked her and they wouldn't let me do it because she was a woman.

MK Oh!

EL Oh was I mad, I was so mad. It had to be a man. This was in the '40's. I was really upset.

EO Hell, you can't be famous if you're a woman, that's, I mean come on.

EL I know back then it was nothing, what she'd done was unbelievable, but it was in the schools, they just didn't ever teach you about it.

MK Wow.

EO This is incredible.

EL You know it was...

EO Now what was the school like there in East Calais? You went to \_\_\_\_\_ school?

EL Yes, I went.

EO It's a two room school.

EL Yea, and I had two teachers all the time I was there. Hildred Myers and Charlotte Jackman. I had Hildred in the first four rooms and I only remember when...

MK (This is a continuation with a interview with Erlene Leonard and Bernice Wheeler in North Montpelier. The date on the interview is May 15, 1988 and the first speaker will be Erlene..) You told me that your grandfather, whom you grew up with, at least for \_\_\_\_\_...

EL Earl Leonard.

MK Earl Leonard. Okay are you named for him?

EL No.

MK No.

EL People think that, no.

MK I just wondered okay.

EL A friend of my mother's.

MK Uh huh.

EO Had that name?

EL Yea, in Hardwick, she still lives there. Erlene Atkins.

EO Where did she get the name? Is that from somebody in her family?

EL You mean, my mother?

EO No, no, the Erlene.

EL I have no idea.

EO It's interesting.

EL Mine is spelled different than hers.

EO How do you spell yours?

EL E R L E N E, she has an A in hers. Most people do.

MK Anyway, you said your grandfather was an airplane buff interested in  
early aviation?

EL Yea.

MK Did you go to a lot of air shows with him?

EL We only went to Barre-Montpelier. You know, we'd go down and watch the airplanes a lot. See, I was probably six or seven, so I don't really remember a lot about it. I remember them telling me you know after I was older that, but I know, I remember going down there and watching the airplanes and quite of few people had planes down there and flew them you know. And he used to go up in the planes with them, but my grandmother would never let me go. He always wanted to bring me, but she wouldn't let me off the ground. (LAUGHING) She didn't...

MK Now I remember, now I don't know whether because airplanes were obviously not that much of a new big deal when I was a kid, but still it was a big deal for me as a kid, you know, You still didn't hear that many of them somehow.

We lived in the small town away from a big airport, I remember you'd go outside and you'd look up, you know.

EL I never remember when I was a kid of seeing a plane until World War II. Then we used to see more planes it seemed like.

MK How old would you have been when the war started?

EL Now you are going to date me here, let's see. (LAUGHING) When the war started in '41, let's see, I was eight years old, but I don't remember much about that, but I remember as the war went along, that everyone in the village was very interested in the war and listened, my grandmother listened to Roosevelt in those "Fireside Chats" all the time and I used to listen too. And not that I read much about it or anything you know, but I mean I just remember the day it ended and they rang the church bell and everybody was running up and down the street, really excited.

MK When you listened to the "Fireside Chats", what was that like? Was the, was it exciting to listen to Roosevelt?

EL Well he had a voice that was very, held your attention. It seemed like to me as a kid it was like he was, whatever he said, was it you know. My grandmother she was not political at all, but she really liked Roosevelt and she really liked to listen to him. We used to listen to Gabriel Heeter too. He was another, he used to come on Waterbury, I remember on that station at night, he and uh, Ed Morrow. I used to listen to him.

MK Listen to the war news.

EL Oh yea, from England, right from England with Ed because he was over there and they were getting bombed and he's telling the bombs are falling, you could hear the noise you know. That was exciting.

MK Yea, I imagine, yea. Grammy, do you remember airplanes being a big deal, you know, people hear an airplane coming and rushing out to look out at it?

BW Oh yes, we would listen you know and then we'd all be out there to see them. Quite often, we had a blackberry patch up there and quite often we were in there and that wasn't easy to get out of. (LAUGHING) We wouldn't see it.

MK My children now watch for jet trails and still get very, very excited when they see them.

EL A big thing to me when I was a kid was my great grandmother worked for a man down in Montpelier, kept house, his name was Merrill Lord and he lived down on the Northfield road just past the first bridge out there. The house is still there. It's up on a ledge, sets off from a ledge and the railroad track goes right around under there and we'd go down there, my grandmother and I'd go down there and stay the weekend and the train would come and this was really, I'd go out there on that ledge and wave to the train and they'd wave back you know and that was the great, and it would come back by and I'd run out and wave to it again you know because we never see a train. That was exciting to me to see that train. Trains still are exciting. I still like trains. And the little train that used to go from Montpelier to Wells River, that when I was going to high school, the train was still chugging along at the tracks before they changed the road down below East Montpelier there and it would, we road on that train one time from the East Montpelier station over to into Groton State Forest and I thought we would never get there. Then we stayed over in the forest until it came back and road back. And it's like a, you know it's dark before you got home, the thing took so long to go over there. It was a little tiny train. You could hear it, at my house, you could hear it, a good clear night, you could hear it blowing for every crossing all the way up through there blowing its whistle. It was a nice little train.

EO It had to be a steam train?

EL Yea, a little tiny engine. It took freight mostly. But it did have a car to ride in.

MK Did people use that train for sort of excursions or...

EL Not really, I don't, they might have before I remember about it, but some people used to ride it over to the forest and spend time and then come back. But of course it went clear to Wells River and it took it a long time to get back. You know, you could hear it coming way, way, way off and it seemed like it was never going to get there. But it was a nice train.

MK Certainly it's very romantic somehow, you know, on, especially on a dark night to hear a train whistle.

EL Yea.

EO It takes you back to the old days. You must have ridden the train Grammy?

BW Oh yes, we used to tease our father not to take us with the wagon and horse and let us go in the train instead.

MK Where would you go? Where would you take the train?

BW To Wells River.

MK Uh huh.

BW We had relatives there that we used to go to see.

EO It would take less time on the train wouldn't it? I mean, considerably less time than the horse and wagon.

BW Uh huh.

EO I mean that must have taken days with a horse and wagon?

BW No, we made it with a horse and wagon, but...

EL You went cross lots right Gramma, yea?

BW Yea.

EL So up through the forest?

BW Yes.

EL Yea, you go around it would take you three days.

BW That's right.

EL I'm sure he knew all the short cuts?

BW Uh huh.

EL To get through, of course the forest was really forest then.

BW Yes, there wasn't many roads then.

EL Was that before the CCC went up there or after?

BW Before.

EL Before right. Because they went up and cut all the roads up there. What was the name of that place? Lanesboro, up there in the forest there.

BW Lanesboro, uh huh.

EL A little town there, the CCC had a little town there  
Lanesboro.

MK There's nothing left of that now?

EL No, you can, we used to drive our car over that railroad  
track. They took the railroad track up and...

EO You can still drive?

EL Yea, and we used to drive over there and you could see  
then where it was, but it's all grown up now.

EO Now New Jerusalem is up there too.

EL Yup, that's part of Marshfield, yea.

MK Is that an actual village or?

EL Used to be.

EO It's only cellar holes now. Did you know when there were  
houses in New Jerusalem up there?

EL Oh I'm sure Grammy...

BW I must have, but we didn't go up there, so that I wouldn't  
remember about it.

MK I want to go back again to the aviation. You said you got  
to sit in Amelia Earhart's plane, tell me about that  
again?

EL Well, see, I don't really remember it. You know, I was five  
years old so I don't, I only remember going up there with  
my grandfather and vaguely remember sitting in a plane,  
but whose it was and whose was there, you know I don't  
remember, but my grandmother you know said, and they had a  
picture and we lost it, some lost it.

MK It must have affected you because you said you grew up  
really thinking she was one of your heros?

EL Oh yes, I always did, but that, I think that came from  
reading. I was always an avid reader and I didn't read  
much about it in the grade school, they didn't have, but  
once I got in high school, then I used to go to the  
library a lot and wait for my ride home and I think, it  
just, I was looking for a woman that had done something,  
and you know there just wasn't anything to for women to,



nobody had done anything you know. It seemed that way to me around here. There was nothing. Women, either you were married, you got married and had six kids and lived on a farm and never did anything, in my estimation. My great aunt has always said that wasn't true, but, they used to be on my case all the time, but, you know, I really attached myself to her I guess.

MK Did you discover her by accident? Do you remember how you found out about her? Did somebody tell you to go look her up or?

EL No, no, it was all my own. No I think when she disappeared in '37, the papers were full of that and my grandmother kept the clippings. And as I grew up, that's where I first, I guess that's where I first realized that here was this woman that had done all these things and now she was, you know had disappeared, maybe the government never really told what happened to her. I'm sure she was doing something for the government, but they never really admitted it and the Japs probably did get hold of her or her plane went down or something. Anyway, that's probably why and last night there was a movie on TV about Beryl Markham there. She was quite a flyer too. I read about her before.

MK Now you wanted to do a paper about Amelia Earhart?

EL Yea, right.

EO What was that story about? It's outrageous.

EL Well it was, I graduated from the eighth grade in 1947 and everything was very, you just didn't, there was no women to do anything on. You know, we were eighth grade graduation, everybody was, it was like a play really but, everybody had a certain person they had to get some quotes from them and they had to do this and do that you know. And so I thought I was going to do that, but they never really said I couldn't do it, but they kept saying it didn't fit in with their program, it just didn't fit in and you know, more or less, you know you just say well forget it you know.

MK Discouraged you from...

EL Yes.

EO So you didn't do it on her?

EL No, no, and I don't remember who I did it on. I think I was very upset. I just did, you know skim through. I didn't really put my whole effort into it. I don't even remember what I did.

EO You must have been pissed off?

EL Yes I was, I was quite an independent kid. My, I lived with my grandmother you know. We were alone and we always did for ourselves. Yea I was probably very upset. I know I was upset because my grandmother thought I should be able to do it. My grandmother was a very broad minded person and you know thought I should be able to do it. So but I didn't do it. But I've always, I have every book that is written about her I guess.

MK It must have been difficult to grow up and know that you were looking for women that you could look up to and the didn't seem to be there, you know. Now we know that women have done things that we just never heard about, but.

EL But in those days and like even in the '50's, the '50's was, I mean I, it was a good time to grow up. Things were kind of, you know, we had a good time but it was always, I was always, somebody was always on my case it seemed like because I wasn't married and had three or four kids. My great-aunts, I had four great-aunts. My grandfather's sisters, and they were always were coming to our house and I'd run out the back doors when I saw them coming. I was eighteen or nineteen you know. And the more they said, the worse I acted, of course, because I wasn't allowed to talk back to them. My grandmother would not hear of that, but I just, and as I grew older, then they stopped doing it because I was real close to a couple of them afterwards you know. But you know, they finally decided, I had a stubborn streak too. My grandmother said I was just like one of them so. (LAUGHING) Mabel Burnham, she was a very independent lady.

BW She was.

EL But, no I was just, most of my friends were married you know or did get married when they were real young you know and they are divorced today most of them too, so.

MK Oh I know, I graduated high school as people were grandmothers now, which my youngest child just turned three and a half. My oldest is five and other people my age are grandmothers, Help! You know, it's a little staggering when you think about it.

EL Now I remember during World War II, it was such a time around here. If anybody had a name that sounded German, people were right on their case. It was terrible. We had this minister up in East Calais. Do you remember that? His name was Kuntz.

BW I remember him.

EL Man, all the time, you know, everybody was saying, "I wonder if he's a German spy," you know. It was really, and he boarded at Sadie Bancroft's house and I remember the, I was probably about ten or eleven, you know, and you are always hanging around hearing things you're not supposed to hear and every once in awhile you'd hear somebody say, you know, "I wonder where he was, he was gone for two days." You know you'd hear this and it was, now it's so, but then you think, oh, you know, you are a kid and you get, you believe this stuff you know. And then one time I remember there was this little plane, there was a little plane that used to fly up over Calais once in awhile and everybody said it was Germans and they were landing in a field over in Maple Corner. Oh god, it was really and you know, they'd seen them land over there and they hadn't, you know what can you bring in a piper cub, you know really, you know this little tiny plane. But that got to be a big thing around town. Everybody was talking about that plane over, landing in a field with German spies. You know, why would a German spy want to come to East Calais, I mean really!

MK Great cover.

EL Yea, right.

MK What else happened during the war? Do you remember a lot of patriotic fervor, a lot of     ?     ?

EL Oh yes, it was very, you know you bought your little, I had a book with those little defense stamps in it and every week my grandmother would give me some money and I'd go to the Post Office and buy those little stamps and paste them in the book. And then you'd get so many books, you'd get a bond you know.

MK Little children did that?

EL Oh yes, everybody at school did that. Just about everybody. I seem to remember every Friday when everybody got paid at the mill, there would be a little line over there and all the kids going to get their defense stamps and my one comic book. I used to get a comic book every

Friday. That was a big thing to look forward to. A ten cent comic book.

EO You got company here Grammy?

MK Okay, the defense stamps. Do you remember people...

EL Did Gramma, did you buy those stamps?

BW Yes I did, uh huh.

EO And your kids Grammy?

EL They were older but...

BW They, not the youngsters so much, but I always had them.

MK And did you save up enough to get the bonds then if you filled the book?

BW Yes, uh huh.

MK Do you remember other kinds of things that people did with their scrap metal collections?

EL Tinfoil. Roll up a ball of tinfoil and somebody took it off to do something with.

MK So you recycled tinfoil or something?

EL Yea, tinfoil, string, we used to keep big balls of string. And one time I remember we went and got milkweed pods, tons of them, and some a big truck came and took them away. They said they used them to make parachutes or something.

MK What did, that's what I wondered. Someone else had said that they were using for the flight, not for the parachutes, but the stuffing in the flight jacket.

EL The stuffing in the flight jacket, well something like that. We got tons of those. Us kids were always out there picking milk weed pods I remember that with Charlotte Jackman, you know, teachers would organize all this stuff. We did that during the war. And I remember, you know, things were rationed, like sugar and we always used maple syrup anyway, so the sugar didn't bother us too much, but you had those little books. I still have some at home with ration stamps and the little red token things.

MK How did those tokens work?

EL They were like change.

MK Uh huh, so you needed one stamp and several tokens or something like that.

EL Yea, a real pain.

EO Do you remember rationing Grammy?

BW Oh yes.

EO What sort of things were rationed during the war?

BW Well, sugar was and different things that you would...

EL Gasoline.

BW Gasoline

EL You couldn't even buy any gasoline.

MK Did it make it tough?

EL Not if you're on a farm.

BW Sometimes.

MK What were the tough parts? What were the difficult things to cope with if you lived on a farm with rationing?

BW Well not so much, if we lived on a farm because we raised so much of our...

EO Did you live on a farm during the war Grammy? You lived down here then didn't you during World War II?

BW Uh huh, but we always had, we always had a garden and we raised so much.

EO You still had the farm.

BW That we didn't miss the things that you would miss if you lived in the city.

MK And as you said the maple sugar meant that you weren't, you didn't have to depend on the groceries?

- EL Yea, we didn't live on a farm during the war. By that time, my grandmother and I had moved to where I live now, but I, I don't think as a kid you even realize that things are short you know. My grandmother and my parents, you make do with what you have and you don't complain and kids don't realize it that things are short. Everybody, I think people were willing to go without during the war so you could fight the war you know. This was, World War II was probably the most patriotic war there was you know. People were really, I think, because the Japanese probably bombed you know and got everybody stirred up.
- MK Now do you remember hearing on the radio news, were you hearing news about what was happening with Hitler in Europe and the extermination of the Jews?
- EL See I don't remember that particular thing until I was older and really read about it you know. It seemed like we heard more about the war in the Pacific. That's what I remember on the radio. See I remember listening to it like the names Guam, Guate Canal and Hiroshima and those names stand out in my mind rather than anything in Europe.
- MK What about you Gramma? Do you remember?
- BW I remember those, listening to what was going on in Europe more than over the radio.
- MK More than the Pacific?
- BW Yes I think so.
- EL It depended on what you listened to I guess you know, just like.
- MK Which radio station you heard?
- EL Yea, probably.
- EO There must have been a lot of people from the village off fighting in the war?
- BW Oh yes.
- EL Yea.
- EO What was that like Grammy to have people go off?
- BW Oh that was very difficult. Of course to have everyone leaving.

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MK Did you have people in the village that would, people that hadn't had particular jobs before would move in and take jobs that other people left when they went off to fight or?

BW Yes we did have, uh huh.

EL I don't remember that. I remember there was five or six young men that went from East Calais, but and I remember one came back. It was a Fellows boy and his brother had got killed and he came back. I can't remember what his name was and then as I grew older, then I realized that a lot more people had been in the service that I didn't really know you know like they had been and landed on Normandy, two people from East Calais had and got shot up pretty bad. And had fought in the European theater. I don't think anybody from around here went to the Pacific Theater. They all seemed to go to Europe, didn't they Gram.

BW Yes they did.

EL From around here, I don't know why, but.

EO Were you doing things like knitting for the war or making bandages for the war? What did people do then?

BW I did a lot of knitting and people, and they, we would have little you know the women would get together and we'd make the bandages.

EL Yea, I don't remember any of that.

EO What were they made of?

BW Cotton usually.

MK Would it be, you know, taking bed sheets and tearing them up for bandages.

BW Yes.

EL Probably, I don't remember that. I remember these little signs people had in their window that meant their son was in the service you know.

BW Yes.

EL What did they say Gramma? They said something I can't remember. And they used to put them in their window.

BW And then they had them hanging on the porches.

EL Put a star on it.

BW Saying that there was someone from the home in the service.

EL And then when they got killed, they had a thing that hung there too, with something else on it and they'd hang it in the window.

EO And something when they were wounded.

BW Uh huh.

EL And all different things you know. But everybody had a flag you know and the flag was out every day you know. It was like you know, not just on holidays like now, but we had little flags and us kids, we had them on our bicycles. Little flags stuck in the handle bars of our bicycles.

BW That was one of the first things we did was put the flag up in the morning.

EL Oh yea, yea, my grandmother would always put the flag up. At school we put the flag up.

MK That continued through the whole war then, that everybody would put a flag?

EL Oh yea, right into the Korean war. I, the Korean war wasn't a, of course I was in high school when that started and that was like, it wasn't like a war you know. It wasn't called a war anyway. You know, you know so, I don't think, people, that and Vietnam, of course, total different thing.

MK I unfortunately can't stay very long today because I have to go pick up my son at preschool, but I do want to get, skip back now and ask you about the telephone. Grammy, what do you remember about when you first had a telephone and what that was like in the community?

BW Well my, in order to have a telephone, my father had to set the telephone poles and string the wire himself and then the telephone was, the box had been hung on the wall and of course there was a central operator and you had to call her by ringing, yes and she would call whoever you wanted her to call. And I can, I can remember seeing my aunt when she could first go and ring the telephone.



MK How did they ring it?

BW With a crank on the side of. It was a box see. Did you ever see a picture of one?

EO Describe it Grammy.

MK Describe it anyway because it...

BW It was a box, thing with bells on the top and the crank at the side that you turn.

EO What would you ring?

BW One long and two short.

EO Everybody had a separate ring?

BW Yes.

EO What was that, why was that?

BW Well I don't know why.

MK Is it so you would know when to pick up?

EL You had a certain number of people on the line didn't you?

BW On the line.

EL And then you knew your ring, but you heard everybody's ring. So that's when you picked up the phone and listened, right Gramma? When it wasn't your ring.

MK Did you?

BW Of course not.

EL That's how they knew what was going on in town.

EO What did you do Grammy?

BW We was very, we kept very still in the room so that we could hear everything that was going on. (LAUGHING)

EO Do you think anybody else was doing that Grammy?

EL Ha, Ha, everybody.

BW Everybody was doing it.

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EO Do you think people listened in on you?

BW Oh yes, then there was no preferences. We all got.

MK Did it make you talk any differently? Would you try to say things carefully so if people were listening, they wouldn't know what you were talking about?

BW Yes of course we did, because we knew that they were listening.

EL We used to say things to antagonize them. (LAUGHING)

EO (LAUGHING) You would.

MK That's when you'd talk about when you were sure they were listening.

EL Well we didn't have a phone. We never had a phone, but my mother tended to central office there in East Calais. It was in Slayton's house and I remember going over there you know and it was really fascinating all those plug things you know. You had to plug them in everywhere. We always wanted to plug them in, my brother and I. And she'd have to guard it with her life while we were in there. That we wouldn't unplug somebody that was talking or something you know. But that's, I'd go to my friend's house you know and they had a phone and that's when we'd listen. And then if the phone rang there, and she'd pick it up, then you'd, you could hear them when they picked up the phone. It's like a little click and then you might say something you know and just off the wall and then I'd hear the phone go click back down. Her mother caught us doing that one time. Didn't think that was the right thing to do.

MK Did people ever challenge you if they knew you were listening they would say, I know somebody is on here.

EL Yea, oh yes. And I remember when I was a teenager going up to a girlfriend's house in Marshfield and their folks would be gone for the weekend so we'd play with the phone you know. You always had to call the operator to get every number so we'd call up the store and say something stupid you know and then we'd call, we used to just pick a number and call a number and say, "do you do laundry?" You know, we'd do that. And they'd say, "no," we'd say, "You dirty thing" or something like that. And one time we called up and the woman said, "Yes." We didn't know what to do you know. And finally the operator would say, she wouldn't give us the number. You know she wouldn't give us the number so we could play anymore.

MK So the operator would...

EL She had total control. Yea, she listened to all the conversations. And after about the second time of doing that, we got shut off.

EO Your mother was a telephone operator in East Calais, she must have known everything?

EL But my mother would, you'd never know, because she'd never tell you. You know, my mother was like Charlotte Jackman used to have the phone in her house when during prohibition and her husband was the sheriff and always out chasing bootleggers all over the county and she knows where they are because they keep calling through from Hardwick to Barre all the time and she never told him because that's privileged information you know. She never told him. And he never asked her either. But I thought that was funny because she knew where they were all the time.

MK I wondered whether, if there <sup>was</sup> some kind of codes the telephone operator had... <sup>whether they were selected</sup> according to whether they <sup>could</sup> keep their mouth shut.

EL No, that wasn't, no, I don't think so, but it's just that, I'm sure that gossip went on, you know, I'm sure it did but you know I don't think there was anything very great to gossip about from East Calais. You knew everything anyway, you didn't have to listen on the phone. (LAUGHING) Right Gramma?

BW That's right. You didn't listen.

EL In a small town like that, everybody knows what everybody else is doing, especially in the '40's and '50's because you couldn't get out of town you know. You were, that was it, you were there. Until I got a job you know I never, I went to high school and came home you know. Never get out of town you know. Everything we did was right there.

MK Grammy, do you remember when you got your phone? You said your father had to string it, so you were a little girl?

BW I was a little girl, uh huh.

MK Were you living here or still in Woodbury?

BW No, in Woodbury.

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MK In Woodbury, uh huh. So now where was the operator in Woodbury? Was it Woodbury Center or South Woodbury?

BW I think it was in East Calais.

MK East Calais. Okay.

EL East Calais has always covered South Woodbury.

BW Uh huh.

EL Hardwick starts in Woodbury Center, but East, South Woodbury numbers would be the same as East Calais. The first three digits.

MK I knew they were now.

EL Yup, they always have been I think.

BW Uh huh.

MK How many numbers did you have in those days? If like somebody wanted to call. Of course you didn't have a number. → operators.  
*You went through the ?*

EO Were there three in the beginning?

EL I have no idea.

BW I've forgotten.

MK Uh huh.

EL I know on that switchboard that my mother ran, in order to ring a number, there was a little lever that you pushed, and you pushed it down so many times and one time I remember the lightening hit that thing and my mother, nobody was tending it, and it popped all those sockets right out, those things they plugged in over there to Slayton's. Popped them all off the board, but luckily there was nobody there. Because they shut it down at night you know.

MK Ah!

EO So you couldn't call.

EL You could call but there was nobody. I mean it was in their house, see and they probably would answer it I guess, but nobody really tended it. I don't know it might have been shut right off. I don't know Gramma was it?

BW I think it was shut off.

MK So you wouldn't get a call after what? When would they turn it off?

EL Supper time, they probably shut it off and that was it. Because I remember you know, you know, no there was nobody tending it around the clock I know that.

BW No.

EL You better get all your business done in daylight.

MK So it was sort of, it was a business...

EL You know the phone wasn't an emergency thing like it is now I don't think. It was a convenience thing. And I don't think people even thought about the phone as an emergency thing, not when I was a kid. I don't know about Gramma. I mean I'm sure it was used for that sometimes, but I think it was more or less for.

MK ?...talk to somebody or write them a letter and that was.

EL I don't know, I never remember anybody calling, they might have, they probably did call the doctor on the phone, I'm sure they did, but in an emergency I don't know.

MK Do you remember any people, I was just trying to think of how, it's just such a different way of thinking of it. I mean now, my children do not yet really how to use the phone in case of an emergency, but I had this nagging sense in the back of my head, I really should be teaching them that. You know, they really, this is part of the world we live in, and they really should know about using the phone. But I can imagine there probably were some people that at that point thought this wasn't necessary, or that this was...

EL Oh my grandmother she wouldn't have a phone, no way, you didn't need a phone for anything. You know, you never had one, so you didn't need one. It was more or less like in the village, like then, there was a lot more people home than there are today. If something happened, there was plenty of people around. Like our house caught a fire one time and the mills was there. And all the men came and formed a bucket brigade and put the fire out because a fire department had to come from Hardwick you know and it took them quite awhile to get there, but or if somebody,

some kid got hurt or something you know, there was somebody in the village with a car that would run them off to the doctor you know.

BW Things were done as a community.

EL Yea right. But now there's no one home you know. Up to East Calais, the only people that are home, some of them don't have a car you know, there or something. If something happens now you call an ambulance or something you know.

BW If back there something happened you knew all at once. You told your neighbors and it was community then.

MK <sup>That</sup> must have been sort of an in between time, too, when the phone was still pretty new and the operators were used for everything, where the operator could let people know that so-and-so's house is on fire and they need help, and the operator probably functioned as that..

EL Oh, yea, the operator.

BW Oh, she was very important. If you wanted to know the news, we called her.

EL ... you know, yup.

MK That must have been an interesting job for your mother to have.

EL Well, see, I don't even know because I never. My mother died when she was 37, so I never really got a chance to ask her anything. You know I was eighteen.

EO That is really young isn't it?

EL And my, Gramma's mother died, you know and we never had a chance. I had more chance than Gramma to ask my mother things, but you know when you're eighteen you're not <sup>you're</sup> busy <sup>with</sup> I don't know doing what. You don't care about anything, but what you're doing because now as I think back I know that, but...

MK But also you don't expect your mother to die that young either. You think you've got all kinds of time even if you did have something..

EL No, no. You know my grandmother died when she was about 79 I guess and I never asked her half the stuff I should have or got her on tape or anything you know, my

grandfather or anything and I had two great grandmothers all the time I was growing up and one lived to be 107 you know and I never asked her anything either you know so. Now I've...

EO Makes you cry.

EL Yea when you stop and think about it because my great grandmother had seen her father come home with his leg shot off from the Civil War and seen the first man go to the moon and it was like unbelievable things she'd seen in her lifetime and done. She was quite a crazy woman. Of course she was old when I was a kid you know. She was in her '70's when I was a kid and I remember her, she always kept house for some man somewhere and she'd come and visit us once in awhile and she and my grandmother would get in a fight and she'd leave. She was real, liked to argue with everybody. That's what kept her alive so long I guess.

MK I'm going to have to run, but I wanted to ask Grammy one more question. What's the most, Erlene was talking about the amazing changes that her great grandmother had, had a chance to see, but for you as you think back on your life, what's the most amazing change for you?

BW You mean in...

MK Well just in the world as you look around it now, what the world was like and this community was like or your South Woodbury community as you were growing up and things now?

BW Well I hadn't thought of that. (LAUGHING)

MK It's a hard one I know, but I just was curious.

EL She'll have to think about it and you'll have to come back again. We can do this again.

MK Good.

EL Because I'm down here mowing her lawn quite often, every week I have to mow the lawns now.

MK That's good.