

Voices from the Past

“A Life Sketch of Jacob Spori”

By Elizabeth Spori Stowell, and Annie Spori Kerr

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Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

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Harold Forbush: Oral History of the Upper Snake River Valley. The date is October the Seventeenth and the place is at the home of Sister Annie Kerr and Libby Stowell, daughters of Jacob Spori who live here in Rexburg. And our purpose today is to chat and reflect on the, oh as it were, the life story of their father who was outstanding in the early development and growth of what is now called Ricks College. Sister Stowell, since you're the older of the two, would you kindly state your full name and the date and place where you were born?

Elizabeth Spori Stowell: My name is Elizabeth, ordinarily called Libby, Spori Stowell and I was born on July 6, 1888, in the old tithing granary on the lot where the Adam's School now stands.

HF: Here in Rexburg?

ES: Here in Rexburg.

HF: And Sister Kerr, will you state your full name and your date and place of birth?

Annie Spori Kerr: My name is Annie Spori Kerr, and I was also born in Rexburg in a log cabin on the corner of 1st East, no,

ES: No, 1st West and 1st South

AK: 1st West and 1st South, where the Alex Latham home now is.

HF: And on what date?

AK: On November 1, 1889.

HF: Our purpose today is to consider the life of your father. Now in doing this, we would like to, I guess, start right at the beginning. And Sister Stowell, would you indicate when and where your father was born and give his full name and the spelling of his name if you will?

ES: My father Jacob S-P-O-R-I Spori was born in Oberwil, Canton Bern, Switzerland. On March 27, 1847

HF: And I am assuming that he was a convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

ES: Yes, he was a convert. But he was in his middle thirties when he first embraced the church.

HF: And do you know who first taught him the gospel?

ES: Well, it came in a roundabout way because he was at Heidelberg where he first met Karl G. Maeser--who were students at that time at Heidelberg University in Southern Germany. And they often conversed about religious matters, but they were not quite satisfied with the religion that they both belonged to, the Lutheran Church really. So Brother Maeser had a Book of Mormon that he showed Father, and he thought that here was the church. But it was some years later, after Father was teaching at the University of Weimar that Brother Beissinger and another elder, I've forgotten now what his name was, came to Father and introduced him to the gospel.

HF: But actually, his first exposure to Mormonism had occurred through the Book of Mormon which Brother Maeser had in his possession?

ES: Yes.

HF: That's very interesting. And now Sister Kerr, can you tell me about what year your father immigrated to America?

AK: That date is not quite clear in my mind. We've really searched to find out just what date it was--father was married and had a family.

ES: Four children.

AK: Four children: one boy and three girls. And mother couldn't see the light of the gospel and her father and mother and sisters were very antagonistic. And it became necessary for father to leave because they took his positions away from him, his teaching position. He was also the treasurer of the little town in which they lived and all of these means of making a living were taken away from him. And so he decided to come to Utah and investigate for himself the possibility possibly of living in America. And it would be in the very late '70's.

ES: About 1879.

AK: 1879 that he first came to America. His wife's father came and took her and the children to his home at Bruck Matte. That was the name of the ancestral home where Mother had lived.

HF: In Switzerland?

AK: In Switzerland, In Bern. It was also in Bern. And father stayed in America about five years during which time he and his wife corresponded regularly, but they were separated during that time.

HF: Now he had no inducement of employment when he came to America did he?

AK: Not that we know of.

HF: Not that you know of?

AK: No.

HF: Now upon arriving in America he went right to . . .

AK: He went to Logan

HF: To Logan?

AK: Where the BYC was established to get English Methods. He was qualified as a teacher, you know, for his work. So he wanted to get English Methods and then possibly find a position where he might teach. But he did all kinds of heavy physical labor: worked on the railroad grades and things of that kind when he was not in school. He was a man of big physical proportions and great strength so that he could do heavy work besides teaching school.

HF: Now that you have brought up something about his stature, can you girls give me a recollection and description of your father, his approximate height and weight and general characteristics.

ES: He was a big man; he stood six foot two in his stocking feet. I remember him telling that he stood that in his stocking feet because ordinarily, in those times, men wore boots and that raised them a little. But he was a big man; he weighed about two hundred pounds which is not a low weight. And he was dark, but he was balding as I remember him. But he had a heavy beard and mustache and he had twinkle in his eyes. I can remember that we always looked at Father's eyes to see just how serious he was, and we knew just how far we could go. If his eyes twinkled, why we were just like kittens. And he was so tender and sweet with us, and I do want to say that he had big hands and quite big feet. But his hands were delicate because he was a musician; he used to play the organ. We had one of the first organs in the valley, and he played--we could always tell the mood that father was in by the things he played. He would sit in front of the organ by the hour without any music, but he'd improvise and we'd know then, how he felt.

HF: Was he quite soft spoken?

ES: Yes.

HF: As a large man, he was still quite soft spoken?

ES: Quite soft spoken. But he could put iron in his voice when he needed to.

AK: The word he used was "here." "Here" if we were too noisy and we'd calm down.

HF: Did he have quite a heavy accent, German/Swiss accent?

AK: Yes, it seemed that he couldn't overcome that. Now he could read and write thirteen languages and speak nine, but he always had this heavy German accent. And some of the earlier students have often told us, you know, that they always could tell when Father was in the room because of his accent.

HF: It wasn't enough to interfere with good communication though, was it?

AK: Oh no . . .

HF: I mean one could always understand what he was saying?

AK: Soon after he came, he was interviewed by the state superintendent of public instruction in Idaho and was asked to serve on the examining board for teachers so that he knew the language and he used excellent English. We have books where Father has made notations on the margin correcting the English of the author.

HF: Now he had acquired this in Heidelberg, at the university?

ES: Yes, everyone, Mother could speak three languages too, because they came from the upper-class, highly educated people. And there, it was customary that even children learned another language.

HF: Very interesting. Sister Kerr, tell us a little about your mother, her maiden name and a little about her background?

AK: Mother came from a very fine home well to do people, much more so than Father's family. In her family there were just three children, three girls. Her name was Magdalena Roschi, and she was a descendant of the French Huguenots who had been driven out of France and came over the Alps into the vastnesses of the mountains for the sake of religion. Her father's name was Michel Roschi. Mother was born the 6th of February, 1852, the middle child of these three girls. And as my sister has indicated, she spoke French fluently. And I remember as a child when father would write us letters, the letters began in English for all of us and then in German for Mother and the older children--probably about money matters and things of that kind. And then the very last paragraph or two were in French for Mother's benefit only.

HF: Isn't that interesting? That's very interesting. Now, your mother's family earned their livelihood in what manner?

AK: Well, they were farmers and cattle people. In the summer time, the stock was driven high up on the Alps, and someone sent with them to take care of making the cheese. It had to be made where the cattle were. There were no refrigeration in those days and they made trips up to where the cattle were up in the mountains in the summer just like here in America they'd make their trips up to the sheep camp. And my older brother--who was one who often went up to see how they were getting along and take supplies to the men who were taking care of the herds. But they were, you would say, farmers. Their land

wasn't big enough for what you might call ranching, but they did have cattle and made the cheese.

HF: Now according to your understanding of your father's economic backgrounds, Sister Stowell, what were his people, how did they make their livelihood?

ES: Well, they were a family, as so far back as we can trace, the Spori's have been college professors. They were teaching and as everyone knows, a teacher never makes a great deal of money. They centered their energies and their funds on education, and so father was a professor. His father before him and his father before him--for generations they were school teachers.

HF: What particular study or courses of education was your father trained in?

ES: Well, Father, music, he took his first doctorate in music. But philosophy and education and then later in life he took out a degree in metallurgy and in economics. So that so far as education is concerned, I think he was one of the most highly educated men that have ever come into the church.

HF: That's very, very remarkable.

AK: I'd like to say here that father came from a large family, and the school teacher's wages wouldn't spread over eight or ten children. Most of the children were girls; there were just two boys in the family and his other brother, his brother died rather young.

HF: Now after he arrived in America as you pointed out in 1879, did he obtain employment at the BYC at Logan?

AK: No, he went there as a student.

HF: As a student? I see. Did he ever teach there?

AK: No.

HF: Then his first teaching actually took place up here in the Upper Snake River Valley?

AK: His first teaching in America.

HF: In America? Now what were the factors that brought him into the Upper Snake River Valley?

ES: Well, it's interesting to us and always has been, while he was at the BYC, the church presidency learned of his linguistic ability, and that he was familiar with the Mediterranean languages. And so it came to their attention that they felt that it was time to open the mission, the church's mission they called it, at that time and into Palestine. And so father with a Brother Nadeley and James M. Tanner and the three of them were

sent from Logan to open the church's mission and their headquarters was to be Constantinople which is Istanbul now. And so Father left here, left Logan, in the fall of 1883 to form this mission. And when the three of them got to New York City--why Brother Tanner was put in a pest house because he had small pox. And so the booking was already made, so Brother Nadeley and Father set sail leaving Brother Tanner to follow later. And they went as far as Genoa, Italy together. And by that time their funds were pretty low, and because Father could speak the Turkish language, Brother Nadeley stayed in Genoa and worked. And Father went on to Constantinople alone, and further to Palestine. And he was in Palestine six months before the other elders caught up with him.

HF: Did he perform his mission, Sister Kerr as you recall it, there in Palestine? Was most of his time spent in Palestine?

AK: Yes, and he performed the first baptism in the latter-days in Palestine, in the Holy Land, the first baptism in the Holy Land in this dispensation. And this man who he baptized, his name was Johann Grau, G-R-A-U. And he made the trip from Turkey, from Palestine to Rexburg, Idaho to visit the man who had baptized him. And I saw this man and talked with him personally. And I think that's interesting, the first baptism in this dispensation.

HF: It is. Now, was the convert a Jew or a Christian?

AK: We think he was a Jew; G-R-A-U is a Jewish name. And he went back then to his home, but he was with us possibly a couple of weeks in this old log house where I was born. I also want to mention that on Father's way to his mission, he took a side trip to Switzerland to visit his wife and four children there. And of course she knew all the time what he was doing, and where he was going.

HF: Uh huh.

ES: I'd like to add this that Professor Stucki at the college, his mother was the go-between. She was Father's youngest sister, and she was the go-between, between Father and Mother because Mother's father wouldn't allow her to correspond with him. He had disgraced the family and they wanted nothing more to do with him. That was all, and they tried their best to keep her from having any communication with him. But Aunt Clara, she was so sweet. She received Father's letters and then personally delivered them to Mother. And Mother wrote her letter to Father and Aunt Clara took it and posted it, mailed it. And her parents knew nothing of this correspondence that went on for all these years.

HF: Now, at the time this happened there in Switzerland, was your Aunt Clara, in other words your Father's sister, a member of the church?

ES: No, she was not; she was a single girl and quite well off because she had taken care of an old aunt who left her a considerable fortune. So she had been in Italy for a season and had returned when father came back from his Turkish mission. And she decided that

having her own money and being free, that she would come with the family and see for herself just what the Mormons were like, and what America was like.

HF: And so as I understand it Sister Kerr, after your father completed his mission in Turkey and in Jerusalem, in Palestine, he went back and did get his family and brought them to America?

AK: Yes, that is true. And the reason he came back just when he did was because he had had this call from President John Taylor to establish an Academy in the Snake River Valley.

HF: Now, once he obtained his family your mother was willing to come to America as a new convert?

ES: She had been baptized.

AK: She had been baptized while he was on his mission. Now that's an interesting story. The oldest daughter, Katrina, had been injured in an accident in the swing and had fallen and broken her hip and finally died. And when Mother wrote to Father in Turkey and told him of the death of this child that he would never see again, he had the opportunity then of explaining to her our belief in the family being united in the hereafter if mother would join the church and had the child sealed to them. And so she was baptized before father returned from Turkey. Now how that was done we don't know, but it must have been in secret that she crept out late at night with the missionaries and was baptized in the Simme, which is the name of the river which is in that area. And the two older children were also baptized when Father could return from Turkey.

HF: Now tradition has it I suppose in the family, that your Mother's mother and father weren't too anxious to see their daughter and family come to America.

ES: Oh no, they were very unhappy about that. Mother tells about her father going with her to the garden gate, and standing there and telling her how much he thought of her and her good judgment. And then he said, "It's hard for me to let you go, but perhaps if you find out that it is really true, you can do something for me." And that's the last I remember, but I have discovered since, in the records, that he, himself, was baptized in Switzerland when he was eighty-three years old.

HF: Well isn't that interesting.

ES: Mother may have known that, but I was too young for it to register with me. And we've done his work over and over again.

HF: Well now, in the Spori family were others of the family baptized?

ES: No.

HF: Or since the time?

AK: Just Clara.

ES: Not that we know of, just Aunt Clara and of course she was baptized and later married in polygamy to Brother John Stucki who is Ezra's father.

AK: And Wendell's grandfather.

ES: And Wendell's grandfather.

HF: Isn't that interesting? Well, having gotten to America then, they, that is to say your parents, knew that a call would be here for them to come to Rexburg.

AK: They came directly to Rexburg; they never did go into Utah.

HF: I see.

AK: Of course the railroad was running then, and they came to Roberts.

HF: And when did they arrive in Rexburg?

ES: The 20th of June, 1888.

HF: And as I understand from you, he was invited by the church to come to Rexburg and to be affiliated with the Bannock Stake Academy.

AK: That's true. By that time, Brother Wilford Woodruff was President of the church. His first call came from John Taylor. But President Woodruff was the President of the church when the school was established in November 12, 1888.

ES: You see, they came then in June. They got here on the 20th of June, 1888. And it was always interesting to me because I was involved in it. That President Ricks sent two of his sons to Market Lake with a stake rack wagon and four horses to bring this family up to Rexburg. And mother used to tell us quite often that the hardest experience of her whole life was riding up through those lavas in this big old wagon, no springs under it or anything. And they jolted all the way up from Market Lake to Rexburg, which took probably a whole day. And when they got here they drove up to President Ricks' home which then was right where the Gentle's home is built on Main, on East Main, below the hospital. And they stopped there and the boys, the Ricks boys, got out and asked their father where he was to take this family. And President Ricks says, "Well I don't know." He says, "Brother Flamm has charge of the immigrants." So they drove down in front of the little old mercantile store of Henry Flamm's. And Brother Flamm wasn't there. He was in Utah. So back they went, up over the rough road to President Ricks' and he sat and pulled his beard a little and he says, "Well," he says, "The tithing granary's empty," he says, "It's got a good roof and good walls, take them there." And so the family was

taken to the tithing granary where I was born on the 6th of July, just a little more than three weeks later.

HF: That is interesting.

ES: And mother used to tell us how she was lying there in bed and would take the kernels of grain out of the cracks of the bin where the bed was set up. Some of it was primitive for her, but Aunt Polly Ricks, who was the wife of Thomas E. Ricks Jr., who was the Bishop then of the ward, the Rexburg Ward, she came over. She could say no word of German, and she couldn't understand Mother's English, but those two women were the best and sweetest of friends. And she taught mother to bake bread and how to take care of—how to cook really and how to wash, all these Pioneer arts mother knew nothing about. But Aunt Polly, we always called her, Aunt Polly Ricks, she taught them to Mother.

HF: Very interesting. Now Sister Kerr at the time your parents arrived with their family in June of 1888, let's see there were three children?

AK: Yes, Jacob, Magdalena, and Louise . . .

HF: And their approximate ages were—were they pretty well grown up?

AK: No, they were early teens: fourteen and twelve and ten. Jake was fourteen and Magdalena twelve, and Louise ten. And then of course Aunt Clara was with them, was with the family, Father's youngest sister.

HF: Now, did the family continue to live in the old tithing granary for quite a little while?

AK: No, father bought a half a block, a block in Rexburg is ten acres. And he bought five acres from this block on First West.

ES: It was owned by Joseph Morris.

AK: He bought it from Joseph Morris who, I don't know at that time but when I was a girl and knew Joseph Morris, he was our city marshal. A cop as we call them now.

HF: I see.

AK: And father bought this land from him, and it had on it this log cabin. Now the log cabin, in which I was born the following year, consisted of two rooms and then they built on the room that we always called auntie's room. And it was a special room on the north. And then they also had a lean too on the back. Now, the roof of this building was made of dirt and in the springtime we would watch the weeds grow on that. Now we call it our roof garden because we had a roof garden when we were children, but it was weeds growing in the dirt on top of this log house.

HF: Do you recall some of the very earliest neighbors who lived next to you?

AK: Yes, the neighbors with whom we associated most closely were the Watson's. Mr. Watson, this would be a few years later, late enough for me to be playing outdoors with the Watson twins: Saurel Watson was one of the twins and his brother Cyrus. And they were just between Libby and me in age. And we played with them constantly. They had older sisters who associated with my sisters, and Mr. Watson had a house on each corner of his half of the block. His first wife lived on the northwest corner and his second wife on the southwest corner of that block. Then our corrals were in the middle of the block where we kept our cows and pigs and chickens. And then we—all the families then had gardens because that provided our food, a great deal of our food both in the summer and what we were able to dry and preserve for winter. They were our closest neighbors.

HF: Do you recall as the years went by, and this would be we'll say when you were maybe nine or ten or eleven, of having quite a lot of association in your home with, we'll say with William F. Rigby and his family?

AK: The Rigby's didn't live near us, and of course there was no transportation except walking in those days. So my first recollection of the children of W.F. Rigby, he had several large families, was when they came to school, when they came to the Academy.

HF: I see.

AK: And that's where I met the Rigby children, and later I taught a good many of them when I was teaching school.

HF: Now another family, the Thomas E. Ricks family. That is President Ricks' immediate family? Any association there as you recall as a girl?

AK: Not as a girl, not in my childhood. Our association with them—by that time there were several wards here in Rexburg. And we spoke of the first warders, and that's where President Ricks' families lived.

HF: Now that was down in the area where this granary and the tithing office was located?

AK: And my recollection has always been with the Second Ward in Rexburg, and our Bishop there was T.J. Winters, Timothy J. Winters. And they were very dear friends of ours, and of course we knew their children very well. T.J. Winters and his brother-in-law Charles Derns had a store, sort of in competition to the Flamm Mercantile Store. And he was farther west.

ES: And our sister worked there.

AK: Our sister worked in that store as a clerk, Louise.

HF: Now this is in the ZCMI?

AK: No that is where John T. Smell had the ZCMI and it was up east of there. She worked in both stores first in the ZCMI and then in Flamm's.

HF: She first worked in the ZCMI store, and this was the one, what, by—where the courthouse is now?

AK: On the south side of the courthouse

HF: On the south side of the courthouse. Didn't the original ZCMI burn down and then they replaced it or is this correct?

ES: I don't remember that, but Derns', Derns' and Winter's Store burned down on Christmas Eve. We'll never forget that because we all stood out shivering in the cold and watched those tremendous flames and nothing could be done.

HF: Now where was this store located?

ES: Well, that's where, right now, where Emm's Dairy is. You know, down on Main Street?

HF: Yes.

ES: The original—some of those rocks in that wall are the original walls of the old Derns and Winter's Store.

HF: But the ZCMI Store founded, I suppose, originally by President Ricks?

ES: Yes, it was branch of the church then.

HF: Branch of the church, was located just south of the courthouse?

ES: Yes, just across the street.

HF: And it was in this store that your sister Louise worked as a clerk?

ES: Yes, she was bookkeeper and buyer both at the coop store and at the Flamm's'.

HF: Now, Flamm's' was another store?

ES: Yes.

AK: Flamm's' is where the Bank of Commerce is now.

HF: And you sister also worked there?

ES: Yes, she worked there until she was married.

HF: Uh huh. And when she worked at the ZCMI, who managed?

ES: John T. Smell was the manager

HF: How long did your sister continue to work at the coop store?

ES: Well, until the coop store was closed. You see, after a while the church decided that it was unprofitable. And by that time Derns' and Winter's Store had opened, and so the co-op was closed by the church. They were all over the settlements—the co-op stores were closed.

HF: And is it your understanding that Mr. Smell continued to manage the store up until the time of its closing?

ES: Yes, uh huh. And then he was called or went with the colonizers to Canada. He left here and went to Canada. Now Sister Ruth Ricks, you know, is his daughter. She could tell you more about her father's life.

HF: Well now, let's consider now the responsibility that came to your father once he arrived in Rexburg. And at this time when he arrived in Rexburg, it was known as Rexburg wasn't it?

ES: Yes.

AK: I think so.

HF: There was a time when, perhaps real early, when it was referred to as Ricksburg and then it was modified to Rexburg, is this your understanding?

ES: Well, I don't know.

HF: How that came about I don't know.

ES: I don't either.

AK: Wasn't it once called Kane Tuck?

ES: Our post office was Kane Tuck because I can remember going through some of Father's letters that were address to Kane Tuck. And a man, by the name of Dwight was it had the post office clear down in the other end of town more than a mile away from the center of town. But he was an outsider, and boy we had in those early days, the Mormons had a hard time even getting their mail because it was mailed to this Kane Tuck Post Office which nobody knew.

HF: Now of course, this is one reason why the church found it necessary to establish the Academy wasn't it?

ES: Yes, it was.

HF: Just elaborate a little on that if you will.

ES: Well, all I can say is that it was such a disappointment, I couldn't say that really, but it was really a trying thing for Father because he understood from the letters he received from the church that he was to come here and establish an academy. And he was thrilled about it because in the sense, in the old country academies were established for special students who were working on their doctorates. And so he thought he was coming to Zion to establish a school for students who were advanced and when he came, they were all the way from five year olds to fifty year olds, none of them with any schooling. And it was really a trial for him at first because he just couldn't adjust himself because he'd been in this academic influence all his life and to start out from scratch. But he learned to swing the axe with the boys; he'd have then all come on Saturday and they'd all chop wood so that they'd have enough wood to burn in their stove all during the week to keep them warm. And he went to the canyon with them to bring down timber, and he learned to be janitor and roust about. He did everything that he could to help the school. And of course, the bigger boys helped him.

HF: And where was the first school instruction held, which building?

ES: It was in the old First Ward Church, and that was right where the pump house is right down here.

HF: Now wasn't there some instruction given over in an upper room or upper floor of the ZCMI?

ES: Yes, but that wasn't until after Brother Todd came.

AK: Ten years later.

HF: I see. And so in November of '88, the first instruction was given in the log church, First Ward Church

AK: The First Ward Log Church, yah.

HF: And school instruction, of course, was given in the—during the week days and on the Sabbath day you held Sunday school and church there? And that continued perhaps ten years would you say?

ES: Well, maybe not quite that long. I think Brother Cole and Brother Watkins followed father, Brother Watkins and then Brother Cole and then Brother Todd. But I know that my sister went to school under Brother Todd, and that was up in the ZCMI, up above the

store there was a hall there. And they had school up there, although the children, the little ones, were still in the First Ward Church.

AK: It might be a good idea to mention here that there were three teachers who started when father first started the school in November, 1888.

HF: Now your father was considered the principal?

AK: The principal, yes.

HF: I see.

ES: And Sister Sarah A. Barnes had the small children, the beginners up through third or fourth grade if they went that far. And then there was a man named Axle Eckle Nellson, a convert from Sweden, who had the intermediate grades. And then father was to teach the older ones. Now some of those were grown men who really hadn't had opportunity for school, and it must have been rather individual work with them. To take them from where they were, and give them instruction as long as they could stay. Of course, they'd have to leave school early in the spring because of the farm work.

HF: Was it your understanding then, that the school did convene in the fall of the year and tried to hold school right on through the winter months?

AK: Well, they tried but just the smallest children could stay on through the entire time.

HF: Did the school receive some financial assistance from the church in Salt Lake?

AK: Very little.

HF: Very little?

AK: And the tuition, you know, the individual students as they do now had tuition to pay. But it couldn't be paid in money because they had no money, so they brought farm produce; they brought meat, and wild game, whatever they had. And that's what we used in our home for our food was father's share of the tuition that came in kind. There was also what they called script in those days or store pay. And it was just on a scrap of paper written how much you could go to Flamm's Store or to the co-op and trade out so much. I had an interesting experience as a child taking eggs to the store. We used that for money to buy some sugar. And Flamm's store didn't have any sugar, and I hated to go home without the sugar so I went up to the co-op to see if they would take Flamm's Store pay. And they wouldn't, but Sister Mary Collettes, who was clerking, told me to go back to Flamm's and buy eggs at her place and then take the eggs to where the sugar was. It was .

..

HF: Quite an interesting way of exchanging?

AK: And after that, I didn't ever want to carry the eggs in a bucket because when I carried them from one store to the other I did it in a paper sack. And I thought that was better than carrying the eggs in a bucket.

HF: Well now, to you two sisters, did the both of you attend school at the First Ward Church?

ES: Neither of us.

HF: Neither of you attended?

ES: You see, we were just babies.

HF: Uh huh. But you did attend at the—but you mentioned that it perhaps continued until up close to ten years or somewhat less.

AK: We went to what you call a public school by that time.

HF: Did you attend school over the ZCMI.

ES: No, our first year was when the administration building was new. I remember so well that I had a little part on the program of the dedicatory service.

HF: Now this is the first building on the present campus?

ES: Yes, the Spori.

HF: The Spori Building which was named after your father?

ES: Yes.

HF: And this would be in 190--?

ES: Nineteen and three.

HF: 1903.

AK: That's the year after father died.

HF: And so you were fifteen years old?

ES: Yes.

HF: Now you had been attending school prior to that?

ES: Yes, that was public school. Well, we attended a school, it was a brick school, and nice we thought, right where the 2nd 5th Ward Church is now. And . . .

HF: Now this would be a public school?

ES: It was a public school and Francis Higbee was my teacher. And many of the old settlers will remember Francis because she was a very wonderful teacher and nearly all of us went to her school.

HF: Now this would probably incorporate what we call the elementary grades from one to eight, something like this?

ES: Yes, from one to eight.

AK: They didn't eighth grade yet at that time.

ES: They called them readers.

AK: Readers: fifth reader and sixth reader.

HF: Now this would have been, just calculating quickly, you were born in '88. And so, this could have been what about '95?

ES: '95.

HF: And you probably attended the same school, didn't you?

AK: Yes, we did. We were in the same grade, and my sister tells me that she was so shy that she didn't go until I went. I don't know the truth of that.

HF: How long did your father actually serve as principal of the academy when it was there at the first ward?

AK: It was about three years more or less. Because during the latter part of the last year that he taught, he asked for leave of absence in order to go out and work on the railroad and earn money to keep the other two teachers on the job. And I don't know exactly whether it was three or parts of four years. But that was the last that he taught at the school was when he asked for this leave of absence in order to earn money to pay the other two teachers: Sarah Barnes and Axle Eckle Nellson.

HF: And this would have been in '92, maybe '91-'92. And was this employment done locally or did he leave to go to some distant town or community?

AK: Well, the railroad then was being laid between Idaho Falls and Butte, Montana. And I presume that's where he worked because he did work on that either before he went on his mission or during that time when he asked for this leave of absence. He did work

there at that time, but that was the nearest railroad where he could have worked, so I presume that's where he was.

ES: But it was necessary. The church was bankrupt at this time, and they couldn't maintain the school, and the people in this town were poor. Everybody donated all they could, and still, they didn't have enough. And so it was proposed in Salt Lake that the school be closed. But father would have none of it; he felt that it was organized under inspiration, and that it was dedicated to persist. And I can remember so many times hearing him tell that he knew that this school was divinely inspired, and that it would forever stand. And when he used to say that the day would come when the hill would be covered with buildings, people would tap their heads and think that he was just a dreaming professor and he didn't know where of he spoke. But his prophecies are coming true every day.

HF: Had the church acquired quite a lot of the property then upon the hill by that time?

ES: No, but they were negotiating for it, but they had no money.

HF: I see. And it was envisioned that that's where the real development and growth would take place.

ES: Would take place.

HF: Now, can you recall approximately how many students there were attending the academy in those years that your father was here? Do you have any idea about how many? That's a tough question of course.

AK: It is a difficult question and there's—apparently the records were not kept, I don't know what happened to them. Father was very prompt in writing things down, but whether they were kept or destroyed when the school moved from place to place. But students did come from a distance. There were, the very first year of school, there was Mary Black from Wilford and Elizabeth Beibe Poole from Idaho Falls or Iona. They came from a distance, and the people of course had to house them in their homes. And we always had crowds in our homes.

HF: Now these girls would have been adult persons, at least teenagers any way, wouldn't they?

AK: Yes.

ES: Oh yes, they were sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, some of them twenty years old. But the thing that I have always been happy about is what Sister Garner, Sister Minnie Black Garner, told me once that she was a member of the first school. And she enjoyed it so much, and she thought father was such an excellent teacher. And she wanted to be a teacher herself, and so he gave her some private instruction and let her go as fast as she could. And then, the next fall when school started, she couldn't come back. They didn't

have any money. She had to stay home and help with the family. And Father met her on the street here in Rexburg, and he shook hands with her and said, "Sister Minnie," he said, "Why aren't you in school?" And she says, "Well, my father just couldn't send me, we just didn't have the money." And she said Father put his arms around her and he says, "Minnie, you belong in school, you come anyway because you don't need to pay."

HF: Isn't that something?

AK: She used to come to our home to practice the organ. He gave her lessons on the organ and we got quite well acquainted with her because she come nearly every day to practice. We had to keep quiet while she practiced.

HF: Is it your understanding that while your father was principal at the school, some religious courses also was given to the older students?

ES: Oh yes, that was the big thing. In fact, they tell about father being so impressive about his religious teaching that if the kids misbehaved, he sent them out of the room while they prayed because he felt like devotion should really be devotion and not given to people that didn't appreciate it.

HF: Well now, after his leave of absence and this turned out to be that he did not return . . .

AK: That's right.

HF: . . . to the school. Who replaced him?

ES: Well, it was . . .

AK: Charles N. Watkins was the man. We don't know much about him.

HF: Uh huh. And he was here just very briefly?

ES: Yes, uh huh, and then George Cole.

HF: George Cole, C-O-L-E. Now would he be a relative to the Coles that . . .

AK: Blacksmiths, no.

HF: Uh huh, I see.

AK: He moved to California. I met him in California years later after I was married, and he and his family had gone down there on a colonizing trip.

HF: Now, probably under these brethren, the school instruction was mainly given I suppose above the ZCMI. Would you assume this to be so?

AK: Yes.

HF: And it continued to be—school continued to be held at this place above the ZCMI until the fine Spori Building was constructed in 1901?

ES: Well, it was 1903 when it was completed.

HF: Oh, it was in 1903?

ES: When the first classes were held.

HF: I see. And who were some of the students that attended the first classes at the sight, at the college sight?

ES: Well, I can just remember my own classmates. Now by that time, I think that the year that I went there, we had more than two hundred. We had about two hundred and fifty students.

HF: And this—what groups would this include Sister Stowell, at what age did you start with?

ES: Well, it would start with eighth graders, you know, and then including the four-year high school students.

HF: And you were one of the members of that first group in eighth grade?

ES: No, I was one of the first, but there was a class that graduated ahead of me. That was 1907, that the first four years, 1907, and that class included people like Eric Johnson and Cedar Cheney and . . .

AK: Irene Anderson

ES: Irene Anderson. Irene Anderson Clements, I think she's the only one that's still alive of that class.

HF: Of 1907?

ES: 1907, uh huh.

AK: David Smith was in that class.

ES: David Smith was in that class.

HF: The David Smith that is . . .?

ES: The doctor and he's been, you know, from Driggs. And he's dead now, he died last year.

AK: He was a prominent doctor in Salt Lake in the later years.

HF: Oh, that's interesting, and he was from Victor I think?

ES: Yes.

HF: Yes, well that's interesting. Now in the class of 1908 . . .

ES: That was my class.

HF: That was your class?

ES: And we've kept track of each other for sixty years. We had our last reunion in '58, in '68.

AK: '68.

HF: '68?

ES: And they were all alive but two.

HF: And who was present, can you name some of those who were present there?

ES: Yes, there was Clarence Stevens who was the president of our class and his wife Lydia Anderson and Louie Pincock Johnson and Ed Johnson her husband and Florence Bowles Davidson from the basement and Melissa Smith Morris, and May Ricks Baumann, and Alta Kerr Lowe and Leary M. Cochran and myself.

HF: Isn't that amazing, this is really remarkable. Now Sister Kerr, which class did you graduate in?

AK: My class was the next year, '69 and just a year ago now we had a reunion. And there were only two of us there; Andrew Nielsen who lives down on 2nd West and I were the only ones there. There are several others of the class who were alive, but for personal reasons were unable to come.

HF: Can you recall their names?

AK: Vera Kerr Remington from Portland and Helen McAllister Smith from Logan. Fayette Stevens who later became a professor at the University of Utah, he's in Kaysville. And that's it, there were eight of us.

HF: It's interesting to realize, and this is the impression that has come to me, that the people of Teton Valley, the basin as you refer to it, have been pretty loyal supporters of this institution?

ES: All through the years.

HF: And some outstanding students have come from there?

ES: They surely have.

HF: This is kind of close to my heart, of course, having been born up there and practiced law and lived up there all these years. It's very warming to me.

ES: Well, I remember among the group that was there. Now our classes weren't too sharply divided you know, there were many in our English class that weren't in the regular class, and the same way with the missionary class. And I remember some of the Green boys from Driggs and the Drigg's boys: Lynn Driggs and his sister Vida. And then the Wilson's: Ross and Cliff. Cliff was in my class until the last year. Oh, so many of them were from the Basin.

AK: The Price's.

ES: Yes.

AK: And the Rigby's.

ES: Dan Price. And then there was . . .

HF: Ella Rigby?

ES: And Eva Rigby, and Eva died, here, I remember we had her funeral in the church building at the college. And those two sisters were twins, and they could sing so beautifully. Oh, they had the loveliest voices.

HF: These are lovely recollections that you people are presenting.

ES: And when she passed away, I think she must have had typhoid fever, you know it used to rage through the valley here. So, but anyway, it was such a sad occasion for all of us. And an interesting thing, Ella, just this last winter, sent me a picture of the old tithing granary where I was born. Her half brother L.Y. had bought the place years later and transformed it into a home. And she had this picture, and so she sent it to me.

HF: Now is she the one who subsequently married Wilder Grant?

ES: Yes, uh huh, she's a cripple.

HF: Yes, I have heard her sing up there, it's marvelous. Following his grant, the granting of a leave of absence from the academy, you mentioned that he had worked on the railroad in order to get means to support the school. Following this did he return to the school at any time Sister Stowell?

ES: No, he then went into the Bear Lake Valley to teach and to pursue his mining interests there. He thought he had some interests in mining in the Bear Lake Country.

HF: Sister Kerr, would you pursue that aspect. I think you sort of suggested that perhaps you pursue this a little bit if you will.

AK: Father had been interested in metallurgy when he visited Greece--was in that field. And while in the Bear Lake Country, in the mountains surrounding, he did considerable exploring and digging and felt that "there were gold in them there hills," and filed several claims. And the rest of his life after he had established the beginnings of the academy in the Snake River Valley, and we think, we're not sure, but we think he was also the one who established the Fielding Academy at Paris. At least, he taught there for some time. Then after that, he really went back to teaching in the grade schools in order to be near his mining claims, and after school and Saturday, he worked on these mining claims. And we are convinced in our hearts that if his life had been prolonged, that he would, and we as a result, would have benefited from his findings. But he was at the turn of the century when mother died, he was already afflicted with diabetes and the disease then had no possible cure or even stay as we have now. And so in 1903, he died at Montpelier. He had taught school all that week at Geneva, this is in September of 1903, and then he went over to his sister's place in Paris and was quite ill. And they took him to the hospital in Montpelier and he died on Sunday, he went over there on Friday and died on Sunday on September 27, 1903.

HF: Sister Stowell, did he take his family with him when he went to the Bear Lake Academy?

ES: No, because he felt that we were established here and had a home, and it would be better for us to be permanently settled than to take the family here and there and everywhere according to where his teaching led him and his investigation of these mining properties. So we stayed with Mother in the old home. And of course, three years before, or 1900 Mother died and then Lou and my Brother Jake took care of us two children and we never broke up our home. We just lived in the old home, the four of us children, and father visited us often. He wrote to us almost daily and it was his headquarters. Often he'd come on the train as far as Idaho Falls and then have to lay over in Idaho Falls all night to catch the train coming to Rexburg, the branch train we used to call it. Instead of doing that, he'd just get on the track and walk home, and often when we'd get up in the morning, why, Father would be there.

HF: Isn't that interesting?

AK: I want to mention that our home by that time was a commodious seven-room home, frame home, two-story home. We didn't stay in this log home too long, but had, on the corner, had built us a nice home. And Father, when we'd get up in the morning, Father would be sitting there on the porch and we'd say, "Well Daddy, why didn't you wake us, why didn't you call us?" "Oh," he says, "I want you to have your sleep." He says, "I've only been here a couple of hours."

HF: Did you refer to your father as "daddy"?

AK: I think so, "papa" maybe.

ES: "Papa" it was.

HF: "Papa"? I wonder about that because I think there's, you know, it's kind of a practice maybe, it may reveal some affection one way or the other just how you would do it. Now, did your mother enjoy fairly good health up until the time of her passing?

AK: Yes, she had good health. She did have a congenital heart condition that we were aware of all the time, sort of a palpitation, fibrillation they call it now. But she had good health, she had a good garden and worked the garden herself and did the housework, she was a homebody. She hardly ever went out in public, she wasn't like we were, full of church positions. But she was more retiring, but she was a great friend and had so many women, especially the women of German descent who were also not quite at home in America. They often came and spent hours and hours with Mother. Though, I hardly remember her going to any of their homes. But they would come to her home.

HF: And maybe spoke German or French.

AK: Or French, yes, she had some, Mrs. Luthy was French and she visited with mother a lot. There were not too many French people here. I did want to mention that Mother had a lovely singing voice. And when Sister spoke of Father playing the organ, we often in the evening as a group would stand around the organ and sing as a group. And what we loved most of all was to hear father and mother sing together. They sang songs of the homeland. And he could sing either tenor or bass, but hers was an alto voice, a contralto and that was the beginning of home evening for us.

HF: Was she, oh, a large woman or maybe rather small?

ES: Well, she was rather large; I think she was about my build.

AK: Yes.

ES: I think she weighed along the lines of 160\170 pounds most of her life.

AK: We have pictures of her, when we were tiny babies, that she was thin, but in later life she was rather good sized women.

HF: Now in the interview, I think you mentioned earlier that when Brother Maeser would come up to visit the school, he would often come to your home. Do you recall some of these instances Sister Stowell?

ES: Well, I just remember that all the authorities came to our home, you know, if they were there on school business. They stayed at our house, in fact, we were thinking this morning that often these converts from the old country, father sent them the fare to come, and then they'd live with us until they could find a place of their own. And father often gave them enough money to pay down on a lot so that they could begin to homestead it. And so that we never were by ourselves. And I remember Brother Maeser, I remember his white beard and his checking me under the chin, and making a joke, you know. And I can remember hearing him tell this story, that it was necessary for a person to light the fire. He says, "you can put the paper there and the kindling on top and the wood and say, 'fire burn' the rest of your life and it'll never burn, but you've got to light it with a match." And he thought that was the way that teachers should be. And I recall that very vividly.

HF: Was he quite a large man?

ES: No, he wasn't. He was a small man maybe your build.

HF: Comparatively speaking, he was much smaller than your father?

ES: Yes. Father was really a towering man when you think of it. And my brother used to feel badly about it because he was short.

HF: Oh he wanted to be large like his father?

ES: And he said, "The only reason I can account for my size is being transplanted just when I was growing from Switzerland to America," and that stunted him.

HF: Oh, I see. Well now, your Aunt Clara in the meantime had married someone here in Rexburg?

ES: No, this is where the coop comes in again. Aunt Clara stayed right there with mother until after Annie was born. And father built this room on the old log house, the dirt roofed house that was always Aunt Clara's room because she just couldn't live in a dirt roofed house—that was terrible. So this little room had shingles on it and it was raised up above the ground. But mother felt, and father did too, that it was just too much for her with her education and her wonderful travels and everything to just be stuck here in Rexburg. So she went to Salt Lake and visited there with some friends that she knew, but she hadn't joined the church yet. And one day she was in the big ZCMI store, and there was a woman trying to buy something and she was having difficulty because she was speaking German and the clerk couldn't understand her at all. So true to Aunt Clara's nature, she very graciously spoke to this woman in German and then interpreted it to the

clerk. Well, the woman was so delighted and the clerk was so delighted that he went and told the manager and asked her if she'd like a position there in the store to help with these people. She spoke French and she spoke the German very well and the English very well, so she got a position there at ZCMI's for that winter. And who should come into the store, but this J.U. Stucki, who was manager of the ZCMI at Paris, in Bear Lake. And when she met him, she wrote home to Mother to tell her that she had met the only gentleman she had ever met in America. And from that light, he coaxed her to come over to Bear Lake and work in his store. So she went over there and they were married.

AK: She boarded with his first wife while she worked in this store.

HF: And he married—this Stucki you mentioned . . .

ES: Yes, she married him.

HF: And they--and he was the father to J. Wendell?

ES: No, grandfather to J. Wendell.

HF: He was the grandfather to J. Wendell?

ES: And father to Ezra.

HF: And father to Ezra?

ES: Uh huh. See Ezra S., the S. in Ezra's name is for Spori.

HF: I see.

AK: Wendell's grandmother was the second wife; the first wife had no children. And then the second wife was Aunt Jane, she was from England. And then Aunt Clara, the third wife, was father's sister.

HF: And this marriage took place I'm assuming before the end of the century?

ES: Well it took place in 1890.

AK: It was before the Manifesto you know.

HF: It took place prior, well it would have had to wouldn't it, before the Manifesto, yes?

ES: But an interesting thing, I was just talking to Ezra's sister, my cousin Elsie a week ago Monday and she's still trying to find out the date of her father and mother's marriage. You know these things were of necessity, there was little said about them when there was so much persecution about polygamy.

AK: U.S. marshals were hounding them so.

ES: But I think in later life we used to spend our vacations, after Annie and I were teaching, we used to spend our vacations at Stucki's in Bear Lake. And she was so good. I remember one year after I . . .

HF: Now you're speaking of your aunt?

ES: That's right.

HF: Aunt Clara?

ES: Aunt Clara. She, I had contracted typhoid fever the last weeks of school, and oh boy I was sick, I nearly died. And when school was out, I went down. And when Aunt Clara saw me, she was so distressed to think how thin I was. And she said, "I'll put weight on you this summer," and she sure did. She'd bring French toast upstairs to bed to me before I'd get out of bed in the morning, just slather it with sugar and cream and strawberries and everything good to eat, and I really put on the weight then. I came home to teach a butterball.

HF: Sister Stowell and Sister Kerr, you have indicated here that your father passed away in September of 1903. And it was this same year, if I understand correctly, that the Spori Building was dedicated?

ES: Yes.

AK: But it wasn't called the Spori Building.

HF: And this is what I want to have you tell me about, when, at the time it was dedicated, who dedicated it if you know and when and how and what circumstances led to its being named the Spori Building?

ES: Well, that didn't come until years later, the naming of the building. But at the dedication of the building, Apostle John Henry Smith dedicated the building and I remember that I had a little part, a little history, a brief history of the college to give on that program. And in the building, upstairs was the auditorium, and it was really the first decent place in this town where people could meet. It was beautiful, it had a lovely ceiling and it had a stage and a nice cyclorama and curtains and then it had opera seats on the floor and it would seat, I imagine, about 600 would you think?

HF: Now when you refer to opera seats were these seats fastened to the floor?

ES: Yes, they were fastened to the floor and they had arms and they raised up, something that we'd never done—all we had was benches before that all our lives. But these were very nice; I remember we were so thrilled at this beautiful building. But I have a picture of—this was in the fall. Then in the spring they had what they call the cleanup day and I

have a picture of the whole school teachers and students and all, cleaned up that field. All the debris of the construction was still all around it, you know. And these students worked, we cleaned the plaster off the woodwork, you know, and off of the glass in the windows. And the boys, they cleaned up the yard, tons and tons of debris they hauled away and leveled it all off. And laid the walk from the front clear to the street, and that was the first board walk that I remember.

HF: It was a board walk?

ES: It was a board walk. It was planks, two-by-fours.

HF: And did they endeavor that spring, that following spring to establish lawn.

ES: No, there's no water.

HF: There was no water? There was no means to dig a well or even to pump the water from the well?

ES: Well, I don't know why they didn't. I've often wondered about it, that they just never tried. I think maybe it was just too expensive. You know, down in the valley we had our own wells, or pumps you know.

AK: Each home had its own well.

ES: And I think that was how we had these leaks of typhoid. You know, people didn't know about the water not being pure.

HF: Now this was the only building. How was it heated?

ES: It had a big old furnace. It had, Walker Radiators, you know.

HF: Steam?

ES: Steam, uh huh. Because I remember that it used to be down the hall in each hall with one across the window. And that used to be our courting place.

HF: Was it heated from underground, and the heating system wasn't in the building was it?

ES: Yes it was in the building.

HF: Was it in the basement in the building?

ES: In the basement in the building because a time or two we had a real bad explosion and everything in the building was black with smoke.

AK: By that time we had coal for the furnace. Heretofore we'd always used wood in all of our stoves, but I think that the college was probably the first building that had a furnace underneath it and used coal.

HF: And this would have been the only building up there at that time?

AK: Oh yes.

HF: And were they farming; did they farm pretty close up to the building as you remember in the summer time?

AK: Nothing but sagebrush.

ES: This whole hill.

AK: None of these dry farms or anything. That was another of Father's dreams was that some day all this sagebrush would be replaced with waving grain. He didn't mention potatoes, but he did speak of the waving grain. And I remember as a little child sitting by the table when he was explaining to someone how the water could be siphoned. He spoke of the river water, now of course, we have the deep wells on the farms and they could sprinkle these rolling hills. But once more they tapped their heads as though he was a just a dreamer

HF: I like your comment there, very interesting. In my question, I posed the inquiry as to under what circumstances it became designated and named as the Spori Building. Can you carry on and tell us when it was?

ES: Well, it was named--these first buildings. When they first named the buildings on the college, they decided that it should be called that. Now that was when the Kirkham Building was dedicated.

HF: Oh, this was then years and years later.

ES: This is years later. Yes, you can find the history of that. And then they decided that they would name different buildings. They named the David O. McKay Library it was completed then, and the science building for Brother Romney, and then the Kirkham Building for Brother Kirkham.

HF: Francis Kirkham was it?

ES: No.

HF: Or his son?

ES: Oscar.

HF: Oscar Kirkham?

ES: And then they spoke to us about naming the old administration building for father because they thought it would be a sort of a monument to him, this first building because that had been his vision.

HF: That's very, very wonderful. Now who was the principal at the time the first building and the first lesson, first classes were conducted . . . ?

ES: In this building.

HF: In this new building?

ES: Ezra C. Dalby.

HF: What can you tell about him, just reminisce for a moment about this fine man?

ES: To me he was as near ideal as ever a man I knew. He was so devoted to the school and to the students; each student was a personal friend of his. He made it a point to let each one know that he loved them and appreciated them, he understood their needs. We could go to him with our problems and talk them out just like you could with your own father. I remember our little class, of course, small and our theology class. We often, instead of meeting in the school room, he'd have us come into the office and we'd sit on the floor around his desk. And we'd just talk no special assignment, anything like that, we would just talk about—he'd keep the subject in hand, you know, and he'd draw us out. I think no man that ever taught at the college touched as many lives as he did in such a sweet way. Now everywhere you go, students of his, you find the same is true that he entered into their lives and helped them to form their own ideals. And he was an idealist--get that little book. Our president of our class now is an old man you know, and last winter he wrote a little booklet and sent it to us called "Out of My Memory," "From out My Memory," by Clarence Stevens. And in this book he repeats some of the memory gems that Brother Dalby gave us. Now that was one thing, he wanted us to have ideals, and so every month on a little blackboard in his theology room, he printed one of these inspirational poems. And he expected us to learn it. He never made it an assignment, we all memorized these and we talked about them. And throughout the years that he was there and in this little front piece that Clarence wrote, he says, "From out My Memory is a selection of choice quotations from various well-known authors and poets most of whom have long sown, reaped, and gone to rest with the immortals with some exceptions. These quotations were memorized prior to 1910 by this writer and had been constant friends used over and over many times in public speaking and writing. Their moral influence transmitted from home to home, church to church, and school to school inspires, encourages, and comforts hundreds seeking hope and faith in time of need. To many, they formed a part of daily vocabulary and an expression of life's highest ideals and noblest desires. This writer humbly offers them with sincere thanks to all who have in any way contributed to their selection and compilation. To the writer they have become a code of life. My interest in these inspirational quotations was first kindled in

1903 by Ezra C. Dalby, president of Ricks Academy in Rexburg, Idaho. President Dalby continued for many years the monthly assignment of selected quotations. Together with his lectures, accompanying them, they became never-ending influences in the lives of hundreds. Not only have they been useful in teaching others, but also they have become sources of personal strength to all.

HF: Very good.

ES: The poems you know are like “Behold the Earth Swinging among the Stars” and this one we all love so well:

Alone I walk the ocean strand;
A pearly shell within my hand.
I stooped and wrote upon the sand,
My name, the year, the day.
As onward from the spot I passed,
One lingering look behind I cast--
A wave came rolling up high and fast
And washed my name away.

And so, me thought, twill quickly be
With every mark on earth for me;
A wave of dark, oblivion sea
Will sweep across the place,
Where I have trod the sandy shore
Of time and been, to be no more,
Of me, my day, the name I bore.
To leave no track or trace,
And yet with Him who counts the sands
And holds the waters in his hands,
I know a lasting record stands
Inscribed against my name.

HF: Isn't that beautiful? Sister Kerr, turning our attention now to a little of your life, following your graduation from the Ricks Academy in 1909, did you commence to teach school thereafter?

AK: Yes, while Sister was reading these memory gems of Brother Dalby, I was thinking that I'm ever grateful to him because he offered me a position in the Academy the next year. They still had seventh and eighth grade preparatory work there. And though my graduation from high school and normal was really just high school work and the some normal lessons on the side, I attended the University of Utah that summer and came back as a member of the faculty. And my most intimate relations with Brother Dalby were as a member of his faculty for two years. Then from there, I was offered a position in what we called the district school where the junior high school is now--was a frame building. And Mr. Langton, under whom I had finished my eighth grade work, invited me to come

down there and help set up for what they called departmental work. Up to that time there had been one teacher for each grade in school, and Mr. Langton thought that we would have two eighth grades on the upper floor. And he would take the Math and the History and still be the principal of the school, and in the room next to that I would take the English and Geography and Spelling and we had Reading in those days. And so the next year I taught, I taught with Mr. Langton. I hated to leave the Academy, but I got more money in the district school and I was planning to be married the following year so my last year I taught there. And then I had met the brother of my dearest chum the four years that I was at the Academy, Vera Kerr. And being an orphan, I had spent a good deal of time up on the Kerr ranch with these girl friends. My husband had four sisters and I chummed with them, and Libby was also invited to the Kerr Ranch. And it served as a second home for us by that time because our brother Jake and Louise were married by that time and we were alone.

HF: And where was this Kerr ranch?

AK: This Kerr ranch was up west of Ashton, four miles west of Ashton. It was first established as Ora and Ora post office and an Ora ward. And N.J. Kerr was the bishop of the Ora Ward. So when I married Robert in 1912 . . .

ES: He was in the stake presidency.

AK: He was in the stake presidency then in the Yellowstone Stake. And I moved up into the big Kerr home and big Kerr ranch. It was a big ranch in operation and they had sheep, but I was well acquainted with the run of the place because I had spent so many summers and Christmases there with the family while my husband was at school in Corvallis, Oregon. He was a graduate engineer at Oregon State University.

HF: Isn't that interesting? Now, will you tell us something about your family: name your children in their order of birth and just rather briefly, their accomplishments and then I would like to inquire of Sister Stowell along the same lines?

AK: We had five children. The oldest, Robert Kerr Jr., is an attorney in Blackfoot and is the stake president of the Blackfoot Stake. The second son, by the way Robert is a graduate of the University of Idaho. The second son never finished his university work because he was a product of the depression in the '30's and had passed the Civil Service Examination in the local post office while he was still at Ricks when it was a Junior College. And he began working for the postal service, and he's still with the postal service. He lives in Portland, Oregon and is what they call a postal officer, and he has Washington, Oregon, the western part of Idaho, and the northern part of California under his supervision. The next, was a girl, her name is Coral Kerr. And she graduated Ricks and graduated at the BYU and taught at Ricks two years. She married a career army man, Colonel John W. Clifford and has traveled practically all over the world in that capacity. She had two children born in Salt Lake City, two boys, and they have both filled missions for the church one in Japan and the other is now in the Philippines. And she had one son born in Japan and a daughter born in Germany, and at the present time, they are in

Taiwan, formerly Formosa. And then the next child we lost when he was nine days old, his name was Lionel Stuart. And my last child was Douglas Leone. From high school, he went into the V-12, this would be in 1942. And in the Navy, the government educated him. He went first to Lawrence, Kansas and then to Madison, Wisconsin where he graduated with high honors in Engineering. And as soon as he was through with his stint in the Navy, he went directly to work for General Electric, and has been with them for twenty-five years, and he's still with them.

HF: How many grandchildren do you have?

AK: I have fourteen grandchildren.

HF: Isn't this marvelous?

AK: Four of those are adopted.

HF: This is wonderful, this is really wonderful. Now Sister Stowell, you've indicated that you also taught school. Where did that begin and maybe end.

ES: Well right here in Rexburg. I remember that they were, the year I was graduated in 1908, they were hunting teachers for the public school. And I remember that Brother Dalby said to me, he says, "you teach here because your sister is here and she's going to school, the two of you should not be separated." And I said, "Well you know what about a prophet in his own country, I better go out of town to teach." "You teach here," he says, "You'll get along just fine." And so I took his advice and went down to a William Walker who was then chairman of the school board. And Doctor George E. Hyde who was the clerk. And they accept me, and so I went and took the state examination and happened to pass very well. And so then I started my teaching career in the old Washington Building, and I taught there for three years. And I loved every minute of it, it was just such an inspiration thing to do, was to teach.

HF: Which classes or ages?

ES: I had the third and fourth grades and they were just nice. They were old enough not to be babies and young enough not to be smart alecks. And so I just enjoyed it. Jessie Porter Morrell, maybe you know her, was one of my students and she sent me a little card the other day, to her favorite teacher—after all these years. And then Will, D.W. Stowell, David William Stowell came back from his mission in 1909, and he had been president of the class over at Ricks. And I had been his secretary, so we had corresponded during his mission. And he was gone for thirty-three months, but we kept in touch. And when he came back, he came to see me. And I was very serious then with another young man, but when I saw Will it was—I just thought well if it's all right with him, it's all right with me. And it turned out that it was just fine. And so we were married then in June of 1911. And he, of course, was just home from a mission. And he debated whether to teach school or whether to farm or go into business. And he decided that he'd rather go into business. So he started then as a salesman for the Studebaker Company. And he worked

for them for seventeen years. And during that time, five times he got the bonus of the highest sales in the western district. Then the bottom fell out of everything, we had built this house and gone into debt. We had five children; we thought we were on top of the world. And then Studebaker Company decided to go out of the wholesale, retail business. And so then, here we were, five children and new house and no job. And we've often felt like it was just providential because there was a man, a real estate man here in town and insurance by the name of William Upham. And he was really a Mormon hater. And he came to Will just shortly after and said, "Buy me out." He says, "I want to get away from the Mormons." And so Will decided, but we had nothing to buy with. But he'd made a loan to man by the name of Rudy Roth and had forgotten about it. And so I reminded him of it and he went down and Rudy gave him the money. And we came up and bought Upham out. And for the rest of his life until he retired, he was in the real estate and insurance business.

HF: D.W. Stowell Realtor and Charms Company did very wonderfully.

ES: And he not only was interested in business, but he was very public minded and very religious. He was mayor of the town for three terms, and he was in the bishopric and then on the high council. He was superintendent of the mutual for about ten years.

AK: Stake mutual.

ES: The stake mutual and we had a very lovely. And he was a scouter, a national scouter. He got his forty-five year pin and silver beaver.

HF: Now will you kindly indicate your family, starting with the oldest as your sister has done.

ES: Well, we had seven children. Our oldest was Ruth, and she was just a born musician. And we were so proud of her; she did so well. She was just a bright spirit, but she died just six weeks before she graduated from Ricks. She was the student body secretary at the time. And so, in her honor, we have established an organ scholarship every year of a hundred dollars for the most promising organ student at the college. And she died in April of 1931. The next child is Edna, and she's a graduate of Ricks and of the BY. And she specialized in Art and in Literature, and has a double major and has been teaching now for the last seven years in the Saint Anthony High School. And she married Gordon Taylor. And the next is Erma and she married, first she graduated from Ricks and then went to the Y and was an honors student at the Y. And she went to teach at Manti, and there she met her first husband, Melroy Luke. And they were very happily married, but he died when her third baby was seven months old. So then she came back, and Brother John Elkhart gave her a position at the college. And she taught there for three years until she was married again.

HF: To whom?

ES: To Doctor Niels P. Nielsen who was dean of the Physical Education Department at the University of Utah. And that's where they live now. And the next is Mary. And she's also a graduate of Ricks and of the BY. And then she married a young man by the name of Gordon Jensen who was you know . . .

HF: Doctor Gordon Jensen.

ES: Who was Doctor Gordon Jensen. And so she went with him to Carolina where he finished his medical work, and then he was sent overseas. And when he came back they practiced for a while in Driggs. They established a home there, and that's where their first child was born. And then he went to do special residency in surgery and died shortly after.

AK: Leukemia.

ES: So that she's still single. And her two daughters, one is married and the other is soon to be married. And the next is our son David William who wanted to be a doctor all his life. But he fortunately graduated from Ricks and had a chance to go on a mission before the war caught up with him. And when he was being interviewed after he'd been drafted at Fort Douglas, they thought because of his ability to speak Spanish where he'd gone on his mission. He still wanted to be a doctor and so they said, "You'll be nothing but a stretcher bearer." But he still wanted to be a doctor, and so he went and fortunately his credits and his desire and our prayers I guess all went together anyway. He got his medical training under the army setup, very fine medical training. And he did all of his pre-med work at Durham, New Hampshire. And then was transferred to the University of Utah from which he graduated. Then he practiced medicine for a while and then was called back into the army when the Korean War broke out and was sent with the Ninetieth Division to London, the Air Force. And he was the base surgeon there for a little over a year.

HF: And where is he now?

ES: And now he's in Salt Lake City; he's been with the Veteran's Administration as a radiologist, Chief Radiologist for the last twenty-five years. And the next is Elaine, she's our baby girl, and she graduated from Ricks and from the BY. And she taught school here at Madison, and then she married Brent Baumann from Driggs. And they are living now at Burley and he has, is manager of a chain of OK Tire Stores. And they're doing very well. They have a fine home, and they have some nice children. And then our youngest, Paul--he was caught up like Edney's Douglas--graduated from Madison and went into the army in August and was overseas in February. And he was a foot slogger, he really had it hard. He went into the Philippines, you know, and then up into Okinawa and then farther into Japan, so that he really saw the rugged side of army life. And when he came back, he got back in February and went to Ricks to finish. And he worked hard—he completed from February around the next year to the next June to graduate from Ricks College. And he became the Student Body President at Ricks. And all this happened while he was wondering about going on a mission. He felt like he'd lost so much time, all the other

boys that he was with were ahead of him, and he felt like he should go on with his education. But I had him read a letter of Father's which he wrote to us, telling us how he appreciated the elders that brought the gospel to them, to the family. And how that this family, the Spori family, would be forever in debt and that they would have a debt to pay. And so Paul laid the letter down and he said, "I guess I better go because I've got to pay this debt." And so he too went on his mission, and then he came back and took his pre-med at the University of Utah. And one of the professors asked him if he's any relation to a Bill Stowell that they'd had there two years before. And he said, "Yes, I'm his brother." And he says, "Well, are you as smart as he is?" And he says, "Well, I don't know, but I try to be." And he said, "Well, we've got a scholarship waiting for a young man that can qualify for a medical, four years of medicine at Yale University." So Paul took a try at it and won. And he did his medical work at Yale University and graduated from there Cum Laude. And since, he came back and took a residency in Pediatrics and now he's a pediatrician at the Budge Clinic in Logan. And he married a very lovely girl, a Lorry Strom.

HF: William A.—no, Leon's daughter.

ES: Leon's daughter and they have five children. And we've got now twenty-two grandchildren and thirteen great grandchildren.

HF: Having been born here in Rexburg in the early days of the community, and having lived here virtually all of your lives, married here, at least much of your married life was spent here, what do you think of Rexburg and what might be your tribute to Rexburg Sister Kerr?

AK: Well, the best way to answer that is what we're doing right now. My husband died six years ago, and Brother Stowell died two years ago when we decided to pool our forces and live together. Sister said, "Do you want to come to Logan where I've been while Will was ill?" And I said, "No." I said, "Just so it's in Rexburg, I don't care whether we live in your house or my house or build a new one, but here's where I was born and here's where I want to die. I've been practically around the world--I've lived in lots of places and seen a great many people, but this is my favorite place. My roots are here, and here's where I want to stay."

HF: Now Sister Stowell, your comment to the same inquiry?

ES: Well, I often said that with as large a family as we had, we couldn't have possibly financially, ideally, spiritually raised our family as well as we did if it hadn't been right here. I often said it was worth a million dollars to raise our family right in this neighborhood. Bishop Merrill lived on the west of us and President Hyrum Manwaring on the east. Our children belonged to all the families, and it is a good home town. It's not perfect, there are faults as there are in every community, but I think it's an ideal—especially an idyllic school town. And when we were first married, we lived at Rigby for a while and then Will had a chance to go with Studebaker's either to Brigham City or come back here to Rexburg and take over the plant. And we decided to come back to

Rexburg, not because Brigham City wasn't a nicer place. But it was because of the school that we came back, so our children could go to Ricks and have the same happy experiences that we had when we went there because Will too was a member of our class although he left for his mission before we graduated. And so I'd say, like Annie says, I don't know where I want to be more than right here, this is home.

HF: It's been a real privilege for me to come here, and now having completed the interview, I thrill at the choice experience which has been mine this day, being in the home of two lovely, wonderful sisters. It should be noted that this interview was conducted with these two lovely ladies on the 17th of October, 1970 at Rexburg, Idaho.