

An Interview with
Lola Belle Underwood

at Greene County Extension Center in
Springfield, Missouri

22 March 2012

interviewed by Dr. Virginia Laas



Oral History Program
The State Historical Society of Missouri
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Collection C4051

One-room Schoolhouse

CD 18

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For further information, contact:

The State Historical Society of Missouri
University of Missouri
1020 Lowry Street
Columbia, MO 65201-5149

PREFACE

Lola Belle Underwood was born in Marshfield, Missouri, on November 9, 1936. She spent a majority of her life in Webster and Greene counties. Beginning at the Oak Hill School, Underwood attended, and later taught at, one-room schoolhouses throughout Webster County. She taught at Eighty-Eight, Greenwood, and Jameson schools, among others. Underwood highlights her experiences in education, including family life, notable teachers, school activities, interactions with students, and teaching responsibilities. She also discusses her attendance at Southwest Missouri State College (now Missouri State University).

The interview was taped on a CompactFlash card, using a Marantz PMD-660 digital recorder and an audio-technica AT825 microphone placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets [/]. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [“”] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Sean Rost.

Narrator: Lola Belle Underwood
Interviewer: Virginia Laas
Date: March 22, 2012
Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

5

[Begin Interview.]

[Begin Track One.]

10

Laas: Start here, and I'll start with how Jeff has had us start. My name is Virginia Laas. I am here representing the State Historical Society to interview Lola Belle Underwood in Springfield, Missouri at the Green County Extension Center, to talk to her about her experience attending and teaching in a one-room schoolhouse. So we could start off by, could you tell me when and where you were born?

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Underwood: November 9, 1936 at Marshfield, Webster County.

Laas: And something about your family. Your siblings? Your parents?

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Underwood: Okay. There were three girls in the family. Back to my mother and dad's education. My dad went to school at Plank, which was in the northern part of Webster County. When he graduated, he actually wanted to go on and get more education. And he had an opportunity to. But they were farmers. So actually his folks could not really afford to send him off. So he did not go. But he always valued education. My mother went to school at Anderson in Webster County. When her dad passed away in 1929, they had to sell their farm. They bought another one and moved to the Oak Hill district. And there she completed her education. But she wanted to be a teacher. And I think that's where I got my aspiration to be—

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30

Laas: Right.

Underwood: —but anyway, I think she went two years to the eighth grade at Oak Hill. She went one year to high school. But at that time, they had to provide their own transportation. And if they rode the bus, they had to pay for that. Well, my grandmother, being a single parent, could not afford that. So she did not get to go on either.

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Laas: Brothers and sisters?

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Underwood: Two sisters. One is twenty months younger than I am, so we were really close. The other one is nine years younger than I am.

Laas: And what are their names?

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Underwood: Winona Marie. Last name was Graves.

Laas: Okay. And?

Underwood: Patsy Jean. J-e-a-n Graves.

5 Laas: Okay. So when did you start school and where'd you go?

Underwood: I started when I was—I was either four or five, probably five, when I started. And I went to Oak Hill, rural school. We lived next door to the school grounds. So getting there was not a problem.

10

Laas: That was handy.

Underwood: Yeah. And a couple of years, we boarded the school teacher. The last two years that I went there, we boarded the school teacher. Which was—we lived in a four-room house with my grandmother and the rest of us. The teacher had to have a separate room. So that left 15 three for the rest of us. But we got by fine. You know, it was really no problem.

Laas: And was that just for one year?

20 Underwood: That was for two years.

Laas: Two years.

Underwood: But then after I went on to high school, she still boarded with us for a few 25 years.

Laas: Could you describe what the physical appearance of the school was inside and out, and what it looked like?

30 Underwood: Okay. It was set up on a hill. There were high steps going up to the front door with banisters on the side. And I had an experience about that later on.

Lass: Okay.

35 Underwood: You walked in. There was an entry hall. There was a library on one side, a cloak and lunch room on the other side. And I might add our library was probably the best one in Webster County rural schools. Then you walked in and there was what I felt like was a huge room for the classes. The big stove sat over on the right. It was a big jacketed stove. The blackboard was to the front of that. And the desks were spaced out. There were windows 40 on the south side, just a big row of windows. A couple of higher windows on the north side.

Laas: How were the desks arranged? Were they individual desks? Or bench things? Or—

Underwood: They were individual desks, except they weren't really individual. They were 45 on runners. And the seat of one—okay, there was a seat and then a desk. And if you would separate those, the desk and then the seat.

Laas: Right.

Underwood: And we had several of those.

5

Laas: And were they bolted to the floor, then?

Underwood: No, they weren't bolted. But they were bolted to the runner.

10

Laas: Yeah, yeah. So the whole row was bolted together.

Underwood: Right.

Laas: Yeah, yeah.

15

Underwood: The older children sat under the, sat on the north side, under the smaller windows. And the younger ones then were on the south side, close to the windows.

Laas: How many, how big was the room? Do you have any idea how—

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Underwood: I really have no idea how big it was.

Laas: How many students were in there? Do you have any idea of that?

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Underwood: There were in the upper twenties, lower thirties, when I went, as I recall. A lot of them.

Laas: A lot. So the blackboard's in the front.

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Underwood: Mm-hm.

Laas: And then did you use tablets, or?

Underwood: One thing you had to have to start school was a Big Chief tablet.

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Laas: Big Chief. Okay.

Underwood: Your pencils, crayons, glue.

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Laas: Did you keep them in your desk?

Underwood: Right. In your desk. Of course there was an inkwell on the desk that the older students got to use.

45

Laas: And did you yearn to use an inkwell?

Underwood: Oh, we enjoyed using it.

Laas: That's right. Right. (laughs) How was the stove heated? Was it coal or wood?

5 Underwood: It was wood.

Laas: Wood.

Underwood: Mm-hm. And the patrons of the district supplied the wood.

10

Laas: Okay. Was that kind of on a volunteer basis they did that?

Underwood: It might—you know, I'm not really sure if they hired someone to supply that or not.

15

Laas: But the teacher started the fire every morning.

Underwood: Mm-hm.

20 Laas: Was there electricity in there?

Underwood: There was after 1945. I started the school in '41. So in '45, electricity came through.

25 Laas: In '45, electricity came through.

Underwood: I think it was '45. It was in the mid '40s, anyway.

Laas: Mm-hm. Running water?

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Underwood: We had a well there that had been dug. According to the history, it was dug in 1937. But my husband and I both went to this school, and we both recall that the older kids would go get water from a neighbor's well and bring it up in buckets. And pour it into a big crock that had a spigot on it. And then we had—

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Laas: Did everybody have their individual cup?

Underwood: Uh huh. Right. I think earlier they probably all drunk from the same cup.

40 Laas: From the same cup. (laughs)

Underwood: But, as I recall, we had our individual cups.

Laas: By the time you came along.

45

Underwood: And then later on, they must have gotten the well fixed, because I remember there being a pump there later on.

5 Laas: Mm-hm. So you could just bring water in. What about the outside grounds? Did you have any playground equipment?

Underwood: We had balls and bats. I don't remember any slides. Swings? Yes, we had swings. We had jump ropes, lots of balls to play with.

10 Laas: How far was—oh, you lived right beside it, so you didn't have to walk far. Other students had quite a walk?

Underwood: My husband walked two miles, at least two miles. And he and a group of kids walked through the woods. And then another, at another place he lived, they walked around the road.

15

Laas: Yeah, yeah. And I think you said the building does still exist and it's being—it is restored?

20 Underwood: No. That building isn't restored. When the school was consolidated, three couples bought it. Their intentions were to start a church there. And it had served as a church earlier, when our local church had burned. But, they bought it. Then, it wasn't too long until just one of them owned it. And they turned it into a dwelling. So it's still there, but it's remodeled into a dwelling.

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Laas: I see—

[End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]

30 Laas: —How many students—well, let's see, that's not, you kind of told me how many students you thought. And were there students at every grade? Or did that vary? There was somebody in every grade?

Underwood: Oh, it might vary from year to year. But I recall there being someone in every grade.

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Laas: Do you remember who your teachers were? Did you have the same teachers the whole time?

40 Underwood: Not always. I started out with Ruth Greer. And she had taught a few years before that at Oak Hill. She also was my dad's first grade teacher, so that was pretty special to us. (laughter) Now for some reason, she left midterm. And then Helen Dyche(??) came in. And she was there for three and a half years. Then next was Doris Dugan(??). And eventually, in later years, after my husband and I married, we rented Miss Doris's house in town, from them, and later bought it. The next teacher was Vera Bass. And the next one was

45

Annette Whitehurst. And she spelled it at that point A-n-n-e-t-t-e. But later, now, she spells it A-n-i, no, A-n-e-t-a. So she changed the spelling.

5 Laas: Okay. Aneta Whitehurst?

Underwood: Uh-huh. She had been a Shumate.

Laas: Okay. (laughs) And you finished out school with those?

10 Underwood: Uh-huh.

Laas: You had five teachers in eight years.

15 Underwood: Right. And my sister had Aneta, I think all eight years of her education.

Laas: Okay. So you just happened to be in a period where there was a lot of turnover.

Underwood: Right.

20 Laas: And, now there was a separate lunch room and cloakroom area?

Underwood: It was just to keep your lunchboxes.

25 Laas: Oh, just to keep your lunchboxes. Okay. And to keep your coats. Okay. Yeah. Okay. Did you learn a lot from listening to the older kids? Or being one of the older kids? Did you help the younger ones?

30 Underwood: Uh-huh. The older ones would always help the younger ones. And that was—to me, that was a real treat. And I did that in high school, too. I went down and helped in the second grade room. But the younger ones, you just couldn't help but learn a lot. Because you heard the lessons repeated, you know. So sometimes you were really ahead of your classes. Out of this, out of this school came a lot of really good students. Prominent businessmen.

35 Laas: Now this school went through the eighth grade? And then where did you go to high school?

Underwood: Marshfield.

40 Laas: In Marshfield. Okay. And did most of the students who went to that school go to Marshfield, then?

Underwood: If they went on to high school, they went to Marshfield.

45 Laas: Did most of them go on?

Underwood: Not all. Most of them did, but not all of them. I can remember one girl who really should have gone on. But she was the ninth child of eleven.¹ And her parents said since nobody else had gotten to go, she wasn't going to go. And my best friend didn't get to go, either. But they really should have, because they both were really good students.

5

Laas: What about other activities at the school? Programs or pie socials? I'm hearing a lot about pie socials. Tell me about some of those things.

Underwood: Okay. We had the usual parties. Halloween, Christmas. At Christmas we would do a play, or several plays, recitations. And I wrote in mine that I still remember what I said.

10

Laas: What did you talk about?

Underwood: At my first one?

15

Laas: Uh-huh.

Underwood: The teacher gave you a little recitation that you learned. And mine was, "My face is sticky, sticky, my hands are sticky, too, here comes Momma with a washrag. Oh dear, what will I do?" (laughter) That was first grade.

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Laas: That was first grade. But you were required to memorize that.

Underwood: Right. Yeah. We did quite a bit of memorization. And of course we had valentine parties, and I can remember making the big valentine box that we all put our valentines in. And then they were distributed at the party. Pie suppers. At Oak Hill and at every school I taught, rural school, we had a pie supper. The teacher would decide what plays she wanted to put on, assign the things, and then we'd memorize them. We had a big rod across the front. And we would string a curtain on that. That would be up by the time of the pie supper. We studied those lines for quite a while and practiced every day to get them down pat. The community all came. We would have the program first. And then we would do like the prettiest girl contest. She got a, usually a box of candy or maybe a pretty cake. Most lovesick couple got a jar of pickles. They had to open them and feed each other. Man with the dirtiest feet or the biggest feet, a bar of soap or a pair of socks.

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Laas: These were, the winners of all this were townspeople.

Underwood: They were community people.

Laas: Yeah. Mm-hm. Not the children.

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Underwood: No, not the children. Well, not necessarily. Maybe the most lovesick couple, they might run. But usually it was the older ones—

Laas: Yeah, yeah.

45

¹ The girl in question was ninth out of ten children.

Underwood: Most henpecked husband. And, of course, you wanted to be careful not to run somebody who really was.

5 Laas: Yes. (laughter) Now did they vote on these?

Underwood: They voted on 'em. It was a penny a vote. And, you know, during that time, a penny was money.

10 Laas: Yes. Yes.

Underwood: And it would bring in quite a little bit.

Laas: So did you have stations for each of these contests to put pennies in jars?

15

Underwood: No. You ran them one at a time. And then there might be some children out collecting them and bring them up to the teacher and she would write up, you know, erase and write, erase and write.

20 Laas: Fun.

Underwood: And then after that was the pie auction, which the girls and the ladies had made pies or fixed a box lunch. And then the boys and the men bid on those. Sometimes there would be heated bidding on a certain girl's box.

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Laas: Did they know whose pie they were bidding on?

Underwood: They weren't supposed to. But you know, they had ways of finding out.

30 Laas: Now could you see the pies? Or were they in boxes?

Underwood: No. They were in boxes. And usually decorated. I remember chrysanthemums were always in bloom. So my sister and I always decorated ours with chrysanthemums. One time, as I said before, my husband and I went to school together a couple of years there. And he bought my box. And a little boy bought my sister's box. So we went out to my dad's car to eat. Well, that was not acceptable to go out by ourselves like that. Daddy marched us in. No uncertain terms. (laughter)

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Laas: No sitting in the car alone.

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Underwood: No sitting in the car. No. Not at all. (laughter) But it was always a good time.

Laas: So everybody really did a lot to decorate their box.

45 Underwood: Mm-hm.

Laas: That's just fun. That's just fun. The usual school parties, what'd you do at Christmas, did you just have a—

5 Underwood: We had a program. And then Santa always came to visit. My husband and I were talking about, I'm not sure if we drew names in the earlier years. Because money was tight. And most families had enough to do to take care of their own at home. But I know we got candy. Usually hard candy. I don't remember too much else about it. The boys always went to get the tree. The older boys would go cut down a tree. And they'd bring it in.

10 Laas: So you had a tree in that room also—

Underwood: Uh-huh.

Laas: —at Christmas time.

15

Underwood: Right.

Laas: With all those kids. (laughter)

20 Underwood: Right. And we managed.

Laas: Where did you house the teacher?

Underwood: The decorations, of course, were homemade.

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Laas: So Halloween, Christmas, any springtime—

Underwood: Valentine.

30 Laas: Valentine. Oh, yes. Valentine's Day. You make your own valentines?

Underwood: Generally. Or you bought them in the box that had a whole bunch of them in, that didn't cost too much.

35 Laas: End of school party?

Underwood: Yes. We always had a picnic the last day of school. And that's when we got our grade cards—

40 **[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]**

Underwood: —Diploma if you were an eighth grader. Your reading certificate, and I have a copy of that somewhere. Did I say grade cards?

45 Laas: Mm-hm.

Underwood: Any other awards you got, like for attendance, anything like that. Good citizenship.

5 Laas: Was there an exam at the eighth grade that you had to pass?

Underwood: Yes.

Laas: Was it a state exam?

10 Underwood: It was. Every eighth grader had to pass it. And we went into the courthouse at Marshfield to take it.

Laas: Oh. Oh, that must have been a little intimidating.

15 Underwood: It was. (laughs) But I was really fortunate. Aneta was, I'd say one of the best teachers in Webster County. And she really pushed us to do our best.

Laas: You think she was the best teacher you had?

20 Underwood: I think she might have been. I really admired Miss Doris and Miss Helen. Of course Miss Helen was one of my first ones, and you always love your younger teachers.

25 Laas: Right, right. I'm still amazed at how anybody manages to do all that and to pass those standardized tests. Did any of your students, any of those students in your class not pass that?

Underwood: No, I think they all passed it.

Laas: Oh, good, well then you did have really good teachers.

30 Underwood: I think everyone did, yeah.

Laas: What about recess? What did you do at recess?

35 Underwood: Well, if it was pretty, we played outside. And jump rope, boys would set up a marble ring. And inside, also, they played marbles. Work up softball, where you, you know, worked up bases. Wintertime, I remember sledding down the hill. There was a slope coming up. I think on a shovel. Or just about anything else. I don't recall anybody ever having a real sled. But whatever you could get to slide down. We'd go in just wet as can be and stand
40 around the stove and get dry. Inside recess, "clap in, clap out" was a favorite. Have you ever heard of that?

Laas: No.

45 Underwood: Okay, the girls or boys, whichever one, would set up the desks. And the other would go in this lunchroom. So whoever was in charge of it would ask you to name a boy's

name. So they would call that person out. And he would sit down beside whoever. And if they sat by the right person, they got a clap. And they had to sit there.

5 Laas: I see. They had to sit beside the person who called their name.

Underwood: Right.

Laas: Who named them.

10 Underwood: Right.

Laas: So, okay, that has all kinds of possibilities, doesn't it? (laughter)

Underwood: Or they'd get the button on the string. They did variations of cat's cradle.
15 Outside we did dodge ball, crack the whip, tag. A story about a tag game. This older girl was it. And I think she was probably eighth grade. And this boy was in sixth grade. And he ran up on the wood pile. And he said, "If you come up here, I'm going to hit you with this stick of wood." Well, she came up there. And he did. And that was the worst spanking I have every
20 seen delivered to any child. The teacher was a fiery redhead. She sent the big boys after switches. She bent him over the desk. And she would break a switch and throw it over her shoulder.

Laas: Wow.

25 Underwood: A lot of us did not like that. But maybe that's why I don't spank very much.

Laas: But she used switches.

Underwood: Yeah—and it was, it was bad.
30

Laas: What grade were you in, do you remember what grade you were in, about?

Underwood: Sixth. I was in the same grade with this boy who got spanked.

35 Laas: Okay. Old enough for a good dose of righteous indignation.

Underwood: Yeah.

Laas: But those first graders must have been frightened.
40

Underwood: Oh, they must have been horrified. I can't imagine.

Laas: Yeah.

45 Underwood: Yeah. She just—she didn't teach next year.

Laas: Oh. (laughter)

Underwood: In fact, I think she retired. I think she quit teaching.

5 Laas: Uh-huh. Did the students have chores in the school? Did you have to clean the blackboards or do things like that?

Underwood: Mm-hm.

10 Laas: How did that work?

Underwood: Usually they volunteered, I think. It was a privilege to get to do the blackboards, dust the erasers. I don't recall ever sweeping the schoolhouse floor, but we probably did. We swept out the toilets.

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Laas: Oh, that's one thing we haven't talked about, the toilets. Did you have, was it an outhouse, or—

Underwood: Uh-huh.

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Laas: Were there separate boys and girls?

Underwood: Right. On separate sides of the playground.

25 Laas: Okay.

Underwood: And then they always kept a good supply of lime in a container. So that made it a little more pleasant.

30 Laas: (laughs) Yeah.

Underwood: I think maybe we had Sears and Roebuck catalogs. I don't remember toilet paper then. Now later when I taught, we did have—

35 Laas: Right. Right. Did you, did the boys carry in the wood and do that sort of thing?

Underwood: They kept the wood supplied.

Laas: Was that a boys' job, to do that?

40

Underwood: I—

Laas: Or did girls do it, too?

45 Underwood: Well, I think the girls helped some, too.

Laas: Okay. Did you take your lunch? Or did you skip home for lunch?

Underwood: I don't remember ever going home for lunch. We would miss out on too much fun.

5

Laas: Right.

Underwood: So we always took our lunch. And once in a while the teacher might bring some beans, and, you know, and people might supply stuff for soup. I don't remember that happening too often.

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Laas: What did you usually take for lunch?

Underwood: Whatever was handy.

15

Laas: Whatever—(laughs)

Underwood: Whatever you had. Whether it was eggs or, I remember one time I took—when we butchered hogs, my grandmother did not waste anything. So we—she made what we call souse. Well, it was good if it was cold. But you let it get hot, it was not good. And I had set my lunch beside the stove. It got hot. Not good.

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Laas: Not good.

25

Underwood: But just whatever you had, you took.

Laas: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. I thought of something else I was going to ask you about that. Now I've kind of lost what it was. (laughs) How long did you have at lunch?

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Underwood: I'm not sure if it was, I think maybe an hour. Because—

Laas: Kind of a long lunch hour.

Underwood: Because we ate and then we played. We had a morning recess, also. And an afternoon recess.

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Laas: And an afternoon recess. What time did you start in the morning?

Underwood: Nine o'clock. And then I think we got out at four.

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Laas: So with an hour at lunch and two significant recesses—

Underwood: Probably fifteen minutes of recess.

45

Laas: Yeah. Yeah. And when did you start school in the, I hate to say fall or summer.

Underwood: Well, it was almost summer. Because it was early to mid August when we'd start.

5 Laas: Then you got out in March?

Underwood: Some schools were eight months. And I don't recall if ours was eight months at that time or not. But the ones I taught in were nine-month schools. So we would get out like in April.

10 Laas: Yeah. Do you keep in contact with any of those people you went to the one-room schoolhouse?

Underwood: Oh, yes. Uh-huh.

15 Laas: Do you?

Underwood: Uh-huh.

Laas: Do they still live in the same—

20

Underwood: Some do. Some have left and come back. My sister and her husband had lived in Oklahoma. And they bought my mother's place after she passed away. So they live right next door to that school. Her best friend still lives around here. And a lot of them still do. Of course, a lot of them moved away. Some have passed away. Several have passed away.

25

Laas: And I take it you feel you got a good education.

Underwood: Very good.

30 Laas: How do you think going to a one-room schoolhouse influenced you? You think it made a difference in how you look at things or what you decided to do?

Underwood: It probably does. The two teachers I mentioned, Doris and Aneta, were really influential—

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[End Track 3. Begin Track 4.]

Underwood: —on me. Because when I started teaching, I based my teaching pretty well on their philosophy.

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Laas: Mm-hm.

Underwood: I think the kids were taught respect of the teacher. If the teacher told you something, that's what you did. And if you went home and had been in trouble—especially if you got a swat at school, you got another one at home. I remember one incident. My sister and her girlfriend were out by the pump. And Miss Aneta called them in. And they made

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5 some smart-alecky remark back to her. And she heard it, so she slapped them. Well, they went home and told their version of the story. And my mother and the other girl's mother were wise enough to say, "Okay, there's something more to this story." So, they didn't go jump on the teacher. But too often nowadays, that happens. You know, if the child gets in trouble at school, it's not the child's fault, it's the teacher's.

Laas: Right. And that just wasn't the case then.

10 Underwood: That wasn't the case at all.

Laas: Yeah.

15 Underwood: I remember one of my mothers at Eighty-Eight saying, "If you tell my daughter something and I tell her something else, she says what you said is right." (laughter)

Laas: That's good. Gosh, do you have any particular stories that you remember about that experience as a student?

20 Underwood: I was going to tell you about the high steps, high entrance way. It was really, really windy one day. And this little girl took hold of the door and it swung her off and swung her, well, about three feet.

Laas: Wow.

25 Underwood: I remember how her head bled and, you know, how scared we all were.

Laas: So there were the steps coming up, but then it was just a drop off on each side.

30 Underwood: But they had rails, but I don't know, somehow she got flipped under those.

Laas: Huh?

Underwood: But anyway, she was okay. But it sure scared us.

35 Laas: Right, I bet it did. Any mischief going on in that school?

40 Underwood: Oh, I'm sure there was. (laughter) There always was. Especially with some of the older boys. We had a couple of boys that had come in from town schools. Of course they knew a lot. So anyway, I'm sure they gave the teacher a lot of headache.

Laas: Well, let's talk a little bit about you becoming a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse, then. How did you get into that? How did you make that move?

45 Underwood: I think I always wanted to be a teacher. From the time I was little. And my dad always said, "Teachers are born, not made." But be that as it may, I just always wanted to teach little ones. So after I graduated from high school, I did get a scholarship. Went to SMS

[Southwest Missouri State College]. Would you believe my scholarship was seventy-five dollars, and that paid, that paid tuition for the year. (laughs) My mom always said I started on a shoestring, which I did, a hope and a prayer. My grandmother gave me a little bit of money. And I worked the summer before. I lived in a house with five other girls with a lady named
5 Mrs. Lindsey, the sweetest lady.

Laas: In Springfield.

10 Underwood: In Springfield. At 1020 East Harrison. And she had, she rented our rooms with cooking privilege in the basement for three dollars and fifty cents a week. And I worked at Roper's Dry Goods in Marshfield on Saturdays for three dollars and fifty cents a day, so—

Laas: There you go.

15 Underwood: —that took care of that.

Laas: Yeah. Yeah.

20 Underwood: So it wasn't easy going. But I went that full year and the summer, had forty hours of credits, and got hired at Eighty-Eight. Which is out east of Marshfield.

Laas: Eighty-Eight?

25 Underwood: Uh-huh. And I don't know how it got its name. I thought the other day, maybe it was because of the railroad tracks it ran by. I have no idea. But anyway, it was close to the railroad tracks.

Laas: Was it called School Eighty-Eight? Or just—

30 Underwood: No, just Eighty-Eight.

Laas: Just Eighty-Eight.

35 Underwood: Uh-huh. Don't remember the district number.

Laas: Now did you apply for this job?

Underwood: Uh-huh. Right. I did.

40 Laas: And you had enough credits that they hired you.

Underwood: Uh-huh.

45 Laas: So when you started there, were you able to live at home?

Underwood: Yes. Uh-huh. I lived at home. Drove my dad's car. And I remember that first year I bought a sewing machine. And what was it about, it was the car. '46 Dodge, I think. A car to drive.

5 Laas: And he let you drive his car to work every day?

Underwood: Uh-huh. He had a truck.

Laas: And he had a truck.

10

Underwood: And Mama stayed at home.

Laas: Yeah, yeah. What did your father do?

15 Underwood: He was a, well, at one point he ran a business that made vaults. At that point, he had his own truck and just did for other people.

Laas: So he could let you have the family car to go to—

20 Underwood: Right.

Laas: —well, that was pretty nice—

Underwood: That was pretty adventurous on my part.

25

Laas: Yes, yes. And how long a drive was it, then, from?

Underwood: It was probably six miles. Six or seven miles.

30 Laas: How was that in the wintertime?

Underwood: Not good. Not very often, though, did we cancel school. Once in a while we would. I can—

35 Laas: Now were children still mostly walking to school?

Underwood: Right. Uh-huh. Or parents would take them if necessary. I don't recall having anybody that subbed for me here at Eighty-Eight. Now I did at Greenwood.

40 Laas: So how long were you at Eighty-Eight?

Underwood: Two years.

Laas: Two years. And then what happened?

45

Underwood: Then I went—during that time I got married.

Laas: Oh.

5 Underwood: At the second year that I was teaching there. The fellow I told you about, that we went to school together. He and his family moved back to Iowa. And his sister and I stayed in contact. So one—it was our senior year. She had moved down here. And he came down to visit. And she said, “I know somebody you can’t get a date with.” But he did. (laughter) So anyway, we got married in ’56. One of the girls, this one, became a teacher. [Underwood points to picture] And every once in a while when I meet her, she says she still
10 remembers the thrill of going to our wedding.

Laas: Oh. Now would they have allowed you to continue teaching after you were married?

15 Underwood: Mm-hm. Right.

Laas: They would have.

Underwood: Then, they would.

20 Laas: Uh-huh. Okay. Those days were over.

Underwood: Right. Even back at Oak Hill, Aneta got married during the time she was teaching there. So, those days were over.

25 Laas: Okay. That’s good. So you got married. Then did you continue teaching?

Underwood: Uh-huh. I went to Greenwood at that point. Someplace I have some Greenwood stuff. I have some pictures. This was written by one of the other fellows in the neighborhood that also went to Greenwood, and I thought that would make a neat thing to put in the history
30 part.

Laas: Yes. That should go in your file in here. Oh gosh, you’ve got lots of really nice documents, pictures.

35 Underwood: This is, this was a reunion we had, and they listed all of the teachers for Greenwood.

Laas: From 1914 to 1965.

40 Underwood: Right.

Laas: Wow.

Underwood: And these were the teachers in attendance.

45

Laas: Uh-huh. Oh my.

Underwood: And I'm not sure what year that was. I think maybe '63. No it had to have been more than that.

5 Laas: Well, they've got '64-'65 listed teachers. It must have been 1965.

Underwood: I'm not sure what the date was on that one. Then here's one of my groups.

Laas: And what's the, grades one through eight.

10

Underwood: Uh-huh.

Laas: Wow.

15 Underwood: This fellow got killed later on in a domestic situation. She got off scot-free. (Laas laughs) And I wrote in my thing I wrote, the Ray family, which this was one of the Rays, they had, this one, they had a little boy who—

[End Track 4. Begin Track 5.]

20

Underwood: —was, he just walked like an old man. And he would want to come to school. So when he got tired, his sisters and I would fix him a pallet near the stove. Well, he passed away with brain tumor.

25 Laas: Oh, my. The year he was in your class?

Underwood: Uh-huh. The summer after.

Laas: Oh, my. Now where was Greenwood?

30

Underwood: It's north of the Northview exit about a mile and a half.

Laas: Okay. Is that building still—

35 Underwood: Yes. And when it was consolidated in 1965, the community bought it. There were three couples who were trustees of it, including my husband and I. We meet now as a community club. They had a really strong PTA, so we just kind of took those members, and we became a community club. We're working on, like I said, putting the door in and getting new windows. We want to take up the floor covering and go back to the original floor that I
40 have swept so many times with—

Laas: Right. (laughs)

45 Underwood: —the stuff you sprinkle over it. And do some other keep-up work on it. But it's been well kept up over the years.

Laas: How many years did you teach there?

Underwood: Two.

5 Laas: Two.

Underwood: And then the farm that we, on which we live, this school property comes off of that.

10 Laas: I see. I see. And did you teach more after Greenwood?

Underwood: (coughs) Excuse me. Yes, after, let's see, after Greenwood, I retired. The second, let's see, no, I retired the first time.

15 **(Pause in recording.)**

Laas: Ready? Okay. Okay. Here we go. How did you organize your day when you were the teacher in these one-room schoolhouses?

20 Underwood: We started out with the pledge. And at that point, we did have prayer in school. We would sing some songs. We had this, I think every school had the yellow song book. And it had a lot of favorites in it. We would sing from that. One family brought in some hymn books and all the kids liked to sing hymns. So with money from one of the pie suppers, we bought a piano. And I know how to play enough to get by. So we liked to sing hymns. Then
25 we would, I would assign lessons to the older students. While they were working, I'd move down with the little ones and we'd work on ABCs or whatever we were working on. Then just move up through the period to the older kids' classes.

Laas: But you'd get those older ones started first on something.

30

Underwood: Right.

Laas: Yeah. Yeah.

35 Underwood: And then sometimes if one of the older ones got their lessons finished, they would go down and do something with the younger ones.

Laas: With the younger ones. That was just an expected thing that they were to do.

40 Underwood: Well, not necessarily. A lot of them wanted to do it.

Laas: Mm-hm. And you mentioned at the—you mentioned at the beginning that you had a library in the back. Do you feel like you had a pretty good library in there for the students?

Underwood: At Oak Hill, at Oak Hill we had a really good library. Now, I don't recall Eighty-Eight having such a good library. Greenwood's was pretty good. When I taught at another school named Jameson, it wasn't too bad.

5 Laas: And then I also kind of cut you off from Greenwood and you retired, but?

Underwood: Okay. (laughter) I retired from Greenwood because my husband had gone overseas. And that was one of the times I had to hire a substitute, when he was leaving. I drew out my retirement money. Because if you didn't draw it out within a certain length of
10 time, you just lost it, at that time. So I worked that summer and went overseas to him. But before I went overseas, Elkland, which was actually a part of Marshfield, needed a first and second grade teacher. And it was like on Saturday and school was going to start on Monday. And so anyway, I was hired.

15 Laas: Elkland?

Underwood: Uh-huh. They had four rooms. Grades one and two, three and four, five and six, seven and eight. I taught there until December. I only had a three-month contract, because
20 they knew from the first I was going to be leaving in December.

Laas: Mm-hm. What year was this?

Underwood: This was 1959.

25 Laas: So you taught the fall semester, in effect?

Underwood: Mm-hm. Right. And somebody else came in. So then I went overseas to him.

Laas: Where were you?

30

Underwood: In Germany. At Furth, near Nuremberg.

Laas: Uh-huh. In '59.

35 Underwood: Became pregnant over there, which was, that was our intentions. (laughter) Came back and Northview needed a teacher in the lower room because the teacher had left midterm. So I took that, finished out that year.

Laas: Was this the next year?

40

Underwood: This was '61. '61-'62. Then I—Jameson, which was a grades one through eight school, needed a teacher. So I took that for one year.

Laas: After this year—

45

Underwood: After Northview, uh-huh. And during that time, I found out I was pregnant with our second son. And decided, okay, I'm going to retire again. Because with two children, I don't think I can, I want to teach anymore. But I did decide to go ahead and get the rest of my degree. Because I hadn't finished my bachelor's. So I got the bachelor's in August before the
5 second son was born in December.

Laas: That would have been in December '63?

Underwood: Uh-huh.

10

Laas: Yeah.

Underwood: So in the meantime, there was another son born. I did go back to subbing some. But it just got to the point I could not do it. So after two more children, two more children,
15 we—

Laas: We kind of need to get your children down with the names here.

Underwood: Okay. Lyle was the first one. Kim.

20

Laas: K-i-m?

Underwood: K-i-m Laverne. He does not like that name. (laughter) Lynn David. Steven
25 Lee.

25

Laas: p-h?

Underwood: No, v-e-n. And Paula Marie.

30

Laas: Paula?

Underwood: Mm-hm. Marie. M-a-r-i-e. So, let's see. The timing—

Laas: So with five children, you were a little bit busy.

35

Underwood: I was just a little bit busy.

Laas: Yeah.

40

Underwood: When I taught at Jameson, there was a lady that had two children at school. And she was constantly on the run with those kids. And I said I would never, ever do that. (laughter) Well, with five children, I did.

Laas: Yeah, you did.

45

Underwood: I was also a JFA leader, a Junior Farmers of America leader. And of course that kept them busy. And they were in T-ball, and, you know, odds and ends. Girl Scouts, Brownies. So let's see.

5 Laas: You taught in a huge variety of schools here.

Underwood: Uh-huh.

10 Laas: Were there differences in them? Different ways that they did things or expected you to do? Or?

Underwood: Pretty much the same, I think. My methods didn't vary a whole lot. Of course, you know—

15 Laas: Where did you get your methods?

Underwood: Where?

Laas: Mm-hm.

20 Underwood: From Miss Doris and Miss Aneta.

Laas: Okay.

25 Underwood: That's where I got them. And also, you know, you took methods classes in college—

Laas: Yeah. Right.

30 Underwood: —which you got.

Laas: Which are sometimes helpful, and sometimes not so.

35 Underwood: But your practical, down-to-earth, was just from watching these two good teachers.

Laas: Two good teachers.

40 Underwood: And at Jameson, it had been a two-room school, but the population had dwindled until it was just one room. But that second room, the board hired a lady to cook lunches. So we did have a hot lunch program there.

[End Track 5. Begin Track 6.]

45 Laas: Now, I've got to get straight where these are, Greenwood we know, Elkland—

Underwood: Is on 38, going north.

Laas: North of Springfield?

5 Underwood: No, north of Marshfield.

Laas: North of Marshfield. Yeah.

Underwood: And it's a small town.

10

Laas: Yeah.

Underwood: It's probably on the map. And Northview probably isn't on the map anymore. It's directly south of the Northview overpass. Off of 44. That building burned and there's
15 now apartments there. At one time they had had a high school. And Elkland also had had a high school, but they had consolidated. Jameson was, okay, it's northwest of Marshfield on Highway W, just off Highway W. That building is no longer there.

20 Laas: Mm-hm. What was the hardest or easiest thing about teaching in a one-room school?

Underwood: Hardest for me I think probably was discipline. That's always been, you know.

Laas: Yeah.

25 Underwood: And generally, I hardly ever had to spank. I can think of one little girl at Greenwood that talking did no good. (laughter) Nothing did any good. I don't think spanking did any good, either. But generally, it was just losing recess. And I might have them write something, you know. And like I said earlier, I've given swats. But you don't do that
30 anymore.

Laas: No. No.

35 Underwood: When I quit teaching, you could not do that. And you don't dare—I reached the point that, the kids liked to sit on my lap, because I taught first grade. And I'm a hugger. You know, I like that. But where do I put my hands?

Laas: Mm-hm.

40 Underwood: I don't want to do anything that's going to be misconstrued.

Laas: Right. Right. What was the most fun about teaching in a one-room schoolhouse.

Underwood: The kids. You know, having all grades. And you could get out and play with them. And I did. Went out and played with them. But they were a lot of fun.

45

Laas: And you were definitely with them every minute of the day.

Underwood: Mm-hm. You were.

Laas: So you were on the playground when they were playing. And playing with them.

5

Underwood: Right.

Laas: What was your favorite subject to teach?

10 Underwood: Probably reading, because I love to read myself, you know. I always thought if they can learn to read, they'll be okay. They can get the rest of it.

Laas: Right. I think I probably asked you generally most of these questions that are on the list. But is there anything else you'd like to say or tell about your experience in one-room schools?

15

Underwood: I don't think of anything else. Like I said, I spent two or three days on writing something—

20 Laas: Yes. I think that's wonderful.

Underwood: Oh, when the school nurse would come. And I remember, I just looked up some stuff about her before I came. Her name was Elnore, what was her last name, E-l-n-o-r-e. I shouldn't forget that. I cannot remember her last name. But anyway, she would come visit and inspect us and, you know, give shots and odds and ends. And I noticed something I was reading about her before I came. She said sometimes she'd have to run them down to give them shots. (laughter) I don't recall that. She may have. And the superintendent coming to visit. We had a superintendent named Oscar Carter when I was in grade school. And he was a jovial guy. I loved to see him come in. I don't know how the teachers thought about it. But he had this little dog that sat on a little stand. And it was rigged so that he could push the bottom of it and he'd make that little dog just flop all over. I loved that.

25

30

Laas: Yes. (laughs)

35 Underwood: But I remember that. Then my superintendent was Ellis Jackson. He was, he was not quite as jovial, but he was nice. I always got along well with him. They would just pop in anytime. And you just always hoped the kids would behave while he was there. Let's see if there's anything else in here that I—I do remember that when I taught at Eighty-Eight, they loved baseball. And we listened to the World Series. We took time out to hear the World Series.

40

Laas: Yeah.

Underwood: Let's see. I don't think I told you, I did finish my master's.

45

Laas: No, you didn't tell me that.

Underwood: I finished it in 1982—'81. I think it was '81.

Laas: Oh, you were persistent, huh?

5

Underwood: Well, it took me nine years to get my bachelor's, you know, from the time I started—

Laas: But you had all these kids.

10

Underwood: —until I got it.

Laas: Yeah.

15

Underwood: And then after, I'd gone back to teaching at Marshfield. And my dad said, "Why don't you get your master's?" Well, this was going to be a little hard. But anyway, I did. In fact, I was only subbing, I think, that year. But anyway, that year I signed up for classes at night. I had taken on a job of tutoring a sixth grade boy after school two nights a week. Then, I got called to sub for this teacher. Two weeks into the term, she got very sick. Come to find out she had cancer. But I finished out that whole year for her. But, anyway, with—my daughter and I would leave school, go by our little store, pick up something to snack on, go tutor this little boy. I would run back home, drop her off, grab a snack, go to school at Drury.

20

25

Laas: How many children did you have? You had all five of them.

Underwood: Had all five of them, then.

Laas: Were they all still at home?

30

Underwood: Uh-huh. So my husband would cook supper. And we had a chart for chores. And each child had a chore that they were responsible for, a housekeeping chore. Every week, that would rotate. So that's how we got through that year. So when I graduated, I said all of them should go across the stage with me. (laughter) Because, you know, without them, I couldn't have done it. But I think—

35

Laas: And your master's was in education?

Underwood: Uh-huh. Yes, it was. Then after I got hired full time at Marshfield, I—

40

Laas: And that was after you had your master's?

Underwood: Uh-huh. Yeah. So then I did some work on a specialist from MU. But it came to the point I was going to have to spend two summers up there, and I could not do that. So.

45

Laas: Yeah. And how long did you teach at Marshfield, then?

Underwood: Nineteen years.

5 Laas: Nineteen years. So that starting at a one-room schoolhouse put you right into education.

Underwood: Mm-hm.

10 Laas: That's really wonderful.

Underwood: One thing I might mention. Duplicating machines were not like they are now. If you know what the duplicator was.

15 Laas: I do.

Underwood: Okay. The little box that had the stuff.

Laas: Yes.

20 Underwood: So you didn't run very much.

Laas: Yeah.

25 Underwood: I volunteer now on Wednesdays and run spelling papers for first graders. Go through reams of paper. But that machine just clicks them right out, you know. It's totally different.

Laas: Yeah. Maybe you should explain how the duplicator worked.

30 Underwood: Okay. It was a rectangular square with a jellied substance in the bottom. You had an indelible pencil and you wrote off whatever you were going to copy with that pencil. Then you dampened the jelly substance, smoothed that paper out on top of it, give it some time, pick it up. And you might do, if you were fortunate, maybe three or four copies off of the same one. So you didn't do very many copies. Most of the work was blackboard. But if
35 I—

[End Track 6. Begin Track 7.]

40 Underwood: —was going to give a test, I made the copies.

Laas: And for twenty children?

Underwood: No, you didn't make them all. Mostly seventh or eighth grade, six—fifth grade
45 up.

Laas: Fifth grade up.

Underwood: And you might do a worksheet. But it would be a test of addition and subtraction for the younger ones.

5 Laas: And then you had to sweep up before you left for the day.

Underwood: Right. And we had this compound, this pinkish compound that you sprinkled on the floor which took care of the dust. So you took care of that. I might say that at Eighty-Eight, they had an oil stove. So keeping it warm was not any problem. But when I went to
10 Greenwood, they had a wood stove. And I had never built a fire. I'd watched them built, but I'd never built one. And I could not keep one going. Or build it. So they hired a neighbor lady who lived just across the road. And she would come every morning and build a fire for me. And then an older boy, whose name is Jerry Bertoldie(??), I still love that kid, would come, would be there, and keep the fire going all day.

15 Laas: Keep the fire. Now did the school district pay for that woman to come over and—

Underwood: I'm sure they did.

20 Laas: Okay.

Underwood: They did.

Laas: Because I have talked to teachers who said they had to pay for somebody to come in.
25

Underwood: I didn't have to pay.

Laas: That would have been a little earlier than your time.

30 Underwood: Uh huh.

Laas: But, yeah. Oh, my. Well, anything else? Or? This has been a wonderful interview. I've enjoyed hearing your story.

35 Underwood: You've made it so easy. (laughter) I don't know if there's anything else that I haven't covered. I'll leave a copy of this if you want it.

Laas: Fine. Yes, I'd love to have a copy of it.

40 Underwood: I'm thinking my first paycheck was \$200. But that might have been at Greenwood. It might have been \$150 at Eighty-Eight. I just don't recall for sure.

Laas: The other thing I didn't ask you, thank you very much for remembering that.

45 Underwood: That's a far cry from what we received now. I don't know what the teachers get now. And I don't really remember what I was getting. I know it's a lot more than I did then.

If you would like to keep this, this one I just ran off because it just shows where we were raising money.

Laas: Right. Yes.

5

Underwood: But this is another one of Greenwood, but not when I was teaching. There are several here of Greenwood.

Laas: Oh, these should all go in the—

10

Underwood: Well, that is what I thought.

Laas: —in the files. Yeah. Yeah.

15

Underwood: I started to bring the originals. And I thought I'm going to copy them. This is the first teacher from 1914.

Laas: The first teacher, oh my.

20

Underwood: And they had their own little yell. And it's printed on the chalkboard. But, a friend had printed it off on the back.

Laas: How nice. How nice.

25

Underwood: These are all the teachers at Oak Hill.

Laas: And the years they were there.

30

Underwood: Uh-huh. And this is a history of it. And this, this one was the guy who became my husband.

Laas: Oh! I see.

Underwood: And where am I in here? Right here.

35

Laas: Right there you are. Very nice. These will be a great addition to the files and knowing about that.

40

Underwood: That's just a copy of the reading certificate. Like I said, we had a really good library. We had to read a certain number of books. And it was usually a competition who could read the most.

Laas: Mm hmm. And someone did that. There's another.

45

Underwood: Copy of the grade cards(??) and this is—

Laas: Oh, how good.

Underwood: —and I think as I said before, our school had been blown away in a, we called it a cyclone—

5

Laas: Mm-hm

Underwood: —tornado, at the same time our house, just down the holler when I was three months old, was blown away. So eventually they built the cellar.

10

Laas: I see. One-room schoolhouse that had a storm shelter.

Underwood: Right.

15

Laas: Great. (laughs)

Underwood: I don't know what this was off the back of, one of the pictures—

Laas: Vera Bass, teacher. I should probably turn this recording off while we're doing this. But thank you very much for doing this. It's been a wonderful interview.

20

[End Interview.]