

Interview with Kathryn Amelia (Zenker) O'Neill (KO)

Conducted by Kathleen Kirschenman Brown (KB)

April 27, 1997

KO: My name is Kathryn O'Neill.

KB: Your date of birth?

KO: My date of birth, 1905, the 19th of August.

KB: Where were you born?

KO: Leola, South Dakota.

KB: Do you know in what county Leola is?

KO: McPherson, I believe.

KB: What was your father's name?

KO: Philip.

KB: His last name?

KO: Zenker.

KB: Do you know from what village in South Russia he came?

KO: He was born May 5, 1874, probably in Odessa Russia. They came out here when he was a young man. Catherine the Great promised all these people in Germany and some of the other countries to come to Russia because there was all this vast land and very few people, and so Catherine the Great said that she would make it nice for them, and she said that if they come, they won't have to go to war if there was a war, and everything would go okay. So, they went. There were a whole bunch of them, you know. I don't know how many, from Germany to Russia.

KB: When did your father pass away?

KO: My father died on April 20, 1955, in Leola, South Dakota. His father, August F. Zenker, came with them and his mother, Elizabeth Jesser. His father, I don't know how come, but he was riding in a wagon with some horses and was going through a river. He didn't know it was so deep; it just got deeper and deeper, you know. Finally, the wagon box slid off, and I don't know what all happened, but he died there. He drowned there. [Possibly later buried in Berlin.] [The Zenkers came from Bergsdorf, Odessa.]

KB: Was your mother also from South Russia?

KO: No, my mother never was in Russia. Oh, I guess her people did go, migrate into Russia, but for not so very long and they came to South Dakota. [The Wackers came from Freudenthal, Odessa, Russia.]

KB: What was her maiden name, her full name?

- KO:** Her name was Amelia Wacker. They used to pronounce it "Walker", like German you know. Finally, they started calling her Wacker.
- KB:** Do you know from what village in Russia she came?
- KO:** I don't know except I know that when they migrated into Russia, they built some long buildings and just had a lot of rooms in it, and different families lived in these rooms, and they called them "semilong."
- KB:** What did that mean in English?
- KO:** Well, long means long, you know, but I don't know how they meant that. Anyway they called them that. Mother, of course, didn't know him then, you know, Philip. But anyway, they all stayed together. There were quite a few from Germany and some of the other countries, but I kind of forgot what the other countries were.
- KB:** When did your mother pass away, and where?
- KO:** My mother passed away in 1938, when she was only 61. She died in California. She was very ill, and I drove back to South Dakota and brought her out here. She was with my sister, my older sister, for a while, but she died here in Sacramento, and she was buried there in Elk Grove.
- KB:** So, she's buried in this area then?
- KO:** She's buried here, yes. Did you want to know when they got together?
- KB:** Yes.
- KO:** Later, you know, when they were coming from different countries, or from Russia mostly, into America, and they all seemed to go to Yankton, South Dakota. Are you familiar with Yankton? Anyway, so there is where she met him. In those days, it was grandpa and grandma who got talking, "Oh, there's a nice young man, just right for Amelia." So, they put them together. That's the way a lot of them did in those days. She didn't have anything to say about it and never did again (giggling)
- KB:** Can you tell me about the children in your family, your brothers and sisters. Tell me their names in birth order and whom they married.
- KO:** Well, they had my sister, Elizabeth. She was born in 1898. She married a man by the name of Chris Feickert. She lived to be 95, and he lived to be 98.
- KB:** Who was the second child?
- KO:** Elizabeth was the first one, and then there were August and Henry and Barbara. August died early. I think he was about 15 or something like that.
- KB:** Was the next child Henry?
- KO:** Henry married somebody by the name of Lenora Stiger. And then Barbara didn't marry. She had kind of crippled hands, and there was something the matter with her legs, and she never married until later. She met a man, Dell Willard, and they had two girls, twins. Next was me. I was the fifth one down in the family.
- KB:** And whom did you marry?

- KO:** Whom did I marry? Well, I was working in a drug store in Wishek, North Dakota when a young man came in. He was always buying something from me. So, finally, he says, "Can I take you home?" There were severe snow storms in the area, you know, so I said, "Ya." There were only about two and a half blocks from the store where I worked, and we didn't want to go in the house where I lived because the family I was staying with had children, and the oldest boy was such a tease, and I didn't want him to be pesterin' me, you know. So, we stood out in a snow storm, and those were our courting days. It wasn't cold out there. (giggling). His name was Joe, Joseph Edward O'Neill.
- KB:** Who was the next one?
- KO:** Oh, the next one was Fred, my brother. I guess you'd call him Frederick, but we just called him Fred. Like they did me. My name was Kathryn, and it was Katy all the time. I didn't even know I had another name until I was a bigger girl. Anyway, Fred, he was born a year and a half after I was. It was in 1907, I believe. And then, there weren't any children for ten years, and then my other sister was born, and two and a half to three years later, my other brother. So, there were almost like two families.
- KB:** What were their names?
- KO:** Well, there was Elvina Zenker. She married someone by the name of Louis Hammrick. And then later, my brother, Julius, was born. And he went to war. He had to go to war, you know. You remember the five Sullivan brothers? There were five Sullivan brothers, and my brother, Julius, and I don't know how many were on the ship, and they all lost their lives right at the beginning of the war. [World War II]
- KB:** When you were born, what was your home like?
- KO:** My mother and father homesteaded there. Everybody homesteaded around. You're familiar with that?
- KB:** Yes.
- KO:** They built the house, and a barn and a poultry house all out of adobe brick. They made the bricks and let them dry, and then they built these houses. You can imagine, people worked pretty hard. The house had two rooms and a little entrance, and the rooms weren't very big either. There were eight of us children, of course, and when Julius and Elvina came, the rest of us were pretty well grown up, but you can imagine, or can you Dad and mother, eight children and a very small table. I never ate at the table as long as I was home because by the time the boys and dad had something, you know, they had first table space, and we just ate after that. I don't know how they did it. I don't know. Anyway, I think we grew up on potatoes and bread because they raised the potatoes and then they'd get a big bag of flour, and mother was always baking bread.
- KB:** Do you remember other dishes that your mother fixed?
- KO:** Well, later I remember her making, oh, nothing special, just real good soups. We were always real glad when mother made her soup and baked bread, and it smelled so nice from way outside. She made a lot of different things with the dough, just a lot of different things. She always had something different but coming from the same sack of flour.
- KB:** What language did you speak as a child?
- KO:** German.

- KB:** Where did you learn English then?
- KO:** Oh, when we went to school. That was another thing. There was no school. There wasn't anything around. But there was a school house built later. My oldest sister was 13 when she first got to go to school. Of course, I was young. I remember the teacher saying, "Now, don't speak German here. We want you to learn the English language." And we did. We didn't want to talk German when we were in school. And so that's where we learned it.
- KB:** Did you ever learn to read or write German?
- KO:** Very little.
- KB:** At home?
- KO:** Well, yes. Just with Grandfather, my mother's father, kind of showed us how. I remember Grandfather used to get some letters from Germany. He had brothers, one was a jeweler and one a doctor, and I don't know about the others, but there were more of them. Grandpa would get a letter once in a while, and he'd give it to me and would help me read it.
- KB:** You wouldn't remember where those letters came from in Germany, would you?
- KO:** I did know, but I just...All I can think of is Heidelberg. It was maybe Heidelberg or Stuttgart.
- KB:** What kind of chores did you have to do as a child?
- KO:** Oh, well just as soon as they were able to, they'd get cows, you know, calves, and they'd raise cattle and horses and so about the first things we had to do was milk the cows.
- KB:** How many?
- KO:** Barbara and I sometimes had to milk 18 cows, but that was later, every morning and every night. This was all the time, not only a few times. This was all the time. I was just a little kid, and I had to be out there milking the cows, so these hands did it
- KB:** Anything else? Any other work that was your job?
- KO:** What other jobs? Well, after we milked the cows, we'd separate the milk. That was another thing. Mother sold the cream because that was all the money she had to buy the necessities for cooking and for our clothes. Other jobs were feeding the calves that they took away from the cows; and feeding the hogs and chickens, and gathering the eggs. Gathering the eggs wasn't such a big job. I remember one time when I crawled under the granary when I was a little kid. The chickens liked to lay their eggs way under the granary, and you know when there are just 2x4s coming along there, and I crawled down there, and I got through one opening, and I stuck my head in the other one, and I saw a nest of eggs. Well, I tried to get my head back out of there, and just how I had gotten it in there was one thing, and getting it back out was another thing. I tell you I had some awful sore ears. I thought I was never going to get out, but I did somehow. I couldn't get those eggs, though. (Giggling). Usually, the hens, if they were smart enough to lay them where we couldn't get to them, they'd hatch them out, and we'd have all kinds of hens walking around with a big bunch of chicks. (Giggling) But I'll never forget how I was panicked down there. I thought I'd never get out. I didn't think anybody would find me there, either.
- KB:** Did you have to help with the cooking?

- KO:** No, I always had to help the boys because I had two older sisters, Elizabeth and Barbara, and Mama always said, if I wanted to stay in the house and do something, she'd say, "They're older. You go on out and get your work done." That's all I ever heard, "Get your work done."
- KB:** If you didn't do your work, how were you disciplined?
- KO:** Oh, very, very severely by dad. Very, very ... I won't tell you. He had no mercy. Dad's mother stayed with us, and she would sometimes tell Mama something, and if I happened to come in the house, I'd stand there and listen. Or else I'd never hear anything. There was no such a thing as a magazine, newspaper or book, and I was so interested, I wanted to hear what grandma was telling, and she'd see me standing there, and she'd look at my mother and say to me, "Ach, die hat keine schand hier horchen zu stehen. Gehe und tu deine Arbeit" [Oh, you don't have any shame standing here listening. Go and do your work.] You know, that I should be ashamed of myself standing there listening when I had work to do. Work was the only thing they felt was anything worthwhile, and to me it was about the last thing. I was interested in everything and wanted to know about everything, but there wasn't much opportunity to learn.
- KB:** What was your school like, and how much education were you able to get?
- KO:** The school house was just one room and a little entrance where everybody put their wraps, and long stove pipes up high and on over. The heater was in the middle of the room. We were lucky sometimes that the pipes didn't fall down, which they did sometimes. We had to walk two miles to school in all kinds of weather. What else did you want to know?
- KB:** Did you go through eighth grade, or how far did you go?
- KO:** Well, I went through the eighth grade, all they had there, you know.
- KB:** Do you remember any of the teachers' names?
- KO:** I remember some of them. We had a man teacher, and his name was Eldred Marsten, and Flossie McPherson, or something like that; and Mueing was a later one; and Delphy Fostler and Ruth Hull, but sometimes we didn't have a teacher. Our teacher couldn't get out there sometimes because of the snow storms we had, and so a neighbor, Mrs. Gibson, would be our teacher, and she didn't know much more than we did.
- KB:** In what way was religion and the church an important part of your upbringing?
- KO:** There wasn't religion in our school house, but where my mother's people lived, which was several miles another way, Grandpa, my mother's father, had the best education, so he was the one to conduct the religious service. They had school, and then on Sunday, they had church in the same little building, and Grandpa was the minister.
- KB:** Do you remember if they were Catholic, Baptist, or Lutheran or something else? Do you remember if Grandpa was Catholic or Baptist or...
- KO:** Oh, just Lutheran. We never got to go to church because we lived so far from there except on Christmas, and so we all got a little piece to speak, you know, and memorized it. And then afterwards, we got a little bag of hard candy with peanuts and usually with an apple in it or an orange.

- KB:** When you went to church on Christmas, was the service in German or English?
- KO:** German. Well it was German, but sometimes we kids talked in English.
- KB:** Do you remember at any point when the service was spoken in English? Did it ever change to English?
- KO:** I don't remember that the minister ever spoke English in the church there. Of course, we were only there at Christmas time. We lived quite a ways from there, and the only way we could get there, you know, was by sleigh ride.
- KB:** Did you look forward to that?
- KO:** Oh, ya. It was the only thing practically that ever happened around there, you know.
- KB:** Tell me a little bit more about your mother's family. Where were they from? You said they were a little ways away. What town?
- KO:** Well, they lived in a little place, Long Lake, and went to Leola sometimes.
- KB:** Who were your closest neighbors?
- KO:** Some Indians lived on our land. They would come to see us sometimes. Sometimes I would go to the top of the hill and look down to see what I could see. They lived in soiled and tattered tee pees. I wondered how they could live there in all kinds of weather. One day, they disappeared, and we never learned what happened to them. We missed having them there.
- KB:** Did they leave anything behind?
- KO:** We kids found pieces of flint and grinding rocks. There were three burial mounds. The center one bigger than the other two, and there was a depression in the center of each mound. We were curious, but we never did touch them.
- KB:** Do you know to what tribe the Indians belonged?
- KO:** No, I don't know. I wish I did.
- KB:** How did your family deal with death? When someone close passed away, like your brother, how did the family deal with that? How did they react? What were the traditions?
- KO:** Well, I don't know how to answer that. Everybody was kind of sad, you know.
- KB:** Did they leave the body in the home and let people come, or...
- KO:** Oh, it was taken to the church and buried there. Behind the church was a graveyard.
- KB:** Did they have a service right there at the church?
- KO:** Yes, they did.
- KB:** Does your family have any heirlooms or objects of sentimental value? Any handcrafts that anyone did? Did anyone make anything that you still have?
- KO:** I don't think we ever had anything.

- KB:** Do you have pictures, books or anything, scarves?
- KO:** We didn't grow up with books. I'm embarrassed to say that, but that's the way it was. I only have the one picture of me as I grew up at the school house.
- KB:** Tell more about the sod house.
- KO:** Well, every spring Dad and the boys fixed the roof and changed everything. Mother and we children papered the walls and white-washed the adobe house, and it really looked nice, but I don't know why we never got a picture of it. It had wood floors with wide boards, but I understand that some of them didn't even have that, but just dirt floors. Mother washed the floor every day and always kept it so nice. I can see mother working, working and working, always to keep everything nice and clean. We had a little cellar underneath, and that was all dirt floor.
- KB:** What did they keep there?
- KO:** Well, for one thing, mother raised a lot of vegetables, and she made sauerkraut and she made whatever you could save down there, you know. Potatoes, of course, were always kept down there, and bread, you might say. Mother made quite a few nice things out of bread dough. We had oatmeal and pancakes for breakfast. We never had cornflakes at home because it was too expensive, but once at a friend's house, I was treated to a carefully measured out portion of cornflakes. That was something to tell about.
- KB:** Do you remember other things she made, what they were called?
- KO:** Well, these things are German, Kasespatzle. Gekochte Kartoffelklosse, and apfelstrudel, for instance. She made lots of Kuchen because, you might say, that was our dessert.
- KB:** What did she put on them?
- KO:** Usually, mother would make cottage cheese also, you know, and she would make cottage cheese with egg and sugar in it, and I don't know what all, and it tasted real good. She made cheese dumplings, too. One thing, she made a lot of borsch, that's soup, you know, and we thought that was so good. And I made it after I was married, and my kids liked that too. And cheese dumplings. We made all the noodles and everything like that, Mother rolled it out and cut them in little squares, and she put a little mixture of cottage cheese, eggs and sugar on the squares and sealed the squares with a fork. She would put them in boiling water and boiled them for a while, and sometimes afterwards, she'd fry them in butter a little bit, and oh, they were good.
- KB:** It sounds good. Did you celebrate any other holidays in your home, like Easter and Thanksgiving?
- KO:** Nothing that I can remember, except we always had our one thing. We didn't work on Sunday, you know. Sunday was the one day that we didn't. We worked all the time, but I mean we didn't go out in the fields and work.
- KB:** How about birthdays? Were birthdays celebrated?
- KO:** No, about all you got was a remembrance that it was your birthday.
- KB:** What else did your family do for Christmas? You said that you went to the church and you each had a little thing to say and you got a bag of candy.

- KO:** That was our Christmas. We never got any gifts, not at all. But, boy when I grew up and I had my children, I always tried to change the things that I wished I had because I had heard of some people getting nice things, and we didn't get anything, so I always tried to make it a nice Christmas and exchange gifts.
- KB:** Tell me about your marriage ceremony. What was your marriage ceremony like when you and your husband got married?
- KO:** Well, we never had such a thing as a wedding, you know. No, when I went to church in later years, the minister happened to talk to me and he said, "Where were you married?", and I said, "In Leola, South Dakota." He said, "Tell me about it", and I said, "Well, we just called the judge and his wife, and maybe your sister or so would stand up for you, and you were married." That's how I was married, and I said, "Can I still come to church?" He laughed, and I said, "Well, maybe you think I wasn't married." (Giggling)
- KB:** And then where did you and Mr. O'Neill live?
- KO:** Oh, Joe and I, after we were married, we had this plan all the time when I was working in the drug store about our future, you know. Mr. Hofer, that I worked for in Wishek, had bought a phonograph, or a big horn, and he had this song on there about high garden walls, and soon, and it'd say, "We'll build a sweet little nest somewhere in the west, and we'll let the rest of the world go by." I played that all the time. I got so that I thought Mr. Hofer must be getting tired of it, so I tried not to play it when he was around. And then, guess what we did. We came out here to California, Joe and I, in 1925, in the depression years, and we found it even harder here. We knew the hard times in South Dakota, but we just didn't know what all was going on in cities. The times were awfully hard.
- KB:** Did you settle here in Sacramento?
- KO:** Ya. We came to Sacramento and I'm still here. We've been here for a very, very long time. Well, we went back to South Dakota just to take another look, you know, and we were driving there, going towards my home, my old home, and I could see the hills there, the horses and the cattle, and tears began rolling down my cheeks; and Joe would say, "What's the matter? What's the matter?" He didn't seem to understand. We went out there, and I had been away a few years, you know, and mother got lunch or dinner, or whatever it was; and as I said earlier, we never sat at the table when I was growing up. I never had sat at the table when dad was there. We were just brought up that way. It was for him and the boys, you know, my brothers. I thought to myself it was funny, I had two children, and Pat was the baby, and Delores was just a little girl. She was cute. Dad came in and looked and never said a word. Of course, he never did before anyway. He never said a word, and he ate his dinner and went out. That was the first time that I had ever sat at that table with him. I thought, "How funny." My husband was working night shifts, so he was sleeping, and so it was just Pat and Delores and I there, but he never talked with us before anyway. It seemed odd sitting there with him at the table, which I had never done. I don't know what went around in his head, but it must have been goin'.
- KB:** Was there any music in your home?
- KO:** No, never had a thing. You mean in my home after we were married?
- KB:** No, do you remember any German songs?
- KO:** Oh, I just remember maybe a few titles.

- KB:** From when you went to school?
- KO:** I went to confirmation school when I was 14. That's one of the things everybody, all the people around there, sent their children to confirmation school, and at that time...
- KB:** Was that Lutheran?
- KO:** Yes, Lutheran.
- KB:** Why don't you tell us about the confirmation school.
- KO:** Our minister there in Leola preached out in the country, but I never heard him out there except for Christmas. His name was Reineke. I remember his name, and they were a nice family. Three girls growing up, and I thought they were awfully nice. He taught us to say the Ten Commandments in German. I still remember it. "Du sollst keine anderen Gotter haben neben mir." He taught us to memorize them. I was staying at the home of some people by the name of August Lehr, which was right close to the church, and we had lots of things to memorize, so we studied and studied and studied. Finally, we thought we'd be a little naughty, I guess, and several of us went out, and there was, at the church, some boards laying across there, and we got on those boards and stood there, you know, bouncing on them until they broke; and so the next day they were all wondering whatever happened to the boards. I don't remember what happened or if they found out or what.
- KB:** It sounds like you didn't have a lot of time to play. When you did have some time, do you remember any games that you played as a child.
- KO:** At school? Oh, we played pum-pum-pull-away, and we played colors, and we played drop-the-handkerchief. Are you familiar with any of them?
- KB:** Drop the handkerchief, I remember that.
- KO:** Things like that we did at school, I mean at the country school, not at confirmation school.
- KB:** Pum-pum-pull-away. How do you play that.
- KO:** Pum-pum-pull-away. We ran I think, and whoever got to us were the winners. I don't remember too much about it.
- KB:** Were there any superstitions when you were young?
- KO:** Well, there were little ones. One of them was when I was a little girl, I had lots of freckles, and everybody said something about Katy's freckles, you know, and I didn't like it. So, somebody told me to go out every morning for nine mornings and get the dew of the grass and wash my face with it, and don't bother to look in the mirror or anything, just do that. It worked. It was the funniest thing, they went away. I was glad because people were always saying something about my freckles.
- KB:** Do you remember when people got sick, did you have any special remedies for illnesses or treatments.
- KO:** No, we never even had a doctor, and no dentist. No doctor in our home town. We just lived and died. Finally, they did have a dentist after I had left home. I had so many toothaches, and I suffered all the time. Mother would take, you know what carbolic acid is? Well, a deadly poison, I guess, and mother would take a little stick, wrap a little cotton on it and dip it just a little bit in the acid and put it in the

tooth that was bothering me. It stopped my toothache for a while. I did suffer so much with toothaches all the time. That's all we had was the carbolic acid.

KB: Do you remember any of your brothers or sisters being born? And was it at home? Do you remember anything about that? Were they born at home and who helped assist your mother?

KO: All babies were born at home.

KB: Was there a midwife or a doctor? Did anyone come to help her?

KO: Usually it would just be mother or if she had a mother or sister or somebody who could come and help her. It just happened that when I was born, my aunt Kathryn was with my mother, and so they named me after her and after my mother, and that's how I came to be called Kathryn Amelia. That's just the way you lived out there.

KB: Did your family ever get any modern conveniences at the sod house?

KO: Well, when I was already 16, we got a telephone. We had no electricity. I don't think we ever had any in the adobe house. I always had to use the kerosene lamps and clean the chimneys. Mother and father built another house when I was already 16 or 17. It took a long time to build the wood house. There was no hurry. The neighbors helped whenever they could. One time before the house was finished, we were allowed the special treat of sleeping in the new house in the cellar. Barbara and I bundled up good with all kinds of blankets, some feather blankets, you know. There was no heat in the house. The next morning, we were surprised to wake up covered with a snow bank. The window had been broken by the snow storm during the night, and we hadn't heard a thing. My father didn't think we had enough granary, so he opened the windows upstairs in the new house and put some of the grain in there. It was a two-story house, and he felt like it was such a big house and didn't know what to do with all the rooms, so he put the grain in the upstairs. Anyway, Barbara and I were together a lot and were almost the same age, so there was one time that we slept upstairs in the new unfinished house. There was a cot there where she and I laid with the grain. We had a kerosene lamp for our light and heat. We closed the room to conserve the heat. Pretty soon, we both got sleepy, so sleepy, and I just thought if I opened the door, not that I thought about air, I just opened the door, and as soon as I did, both of us looked better, and the light became brighter. So, we learned something there Just think how close you are sometimes to dying and find out in time.

KB: I think you had a lot of close calls.

KO: I guess. When I was just a little girl, I think I told you I had to go and milk the cows, my sister Barbara and I mostly. Every morning and every night until I left home, which was at 18. I had to work out in the fields. In the spring, plowing, disking and dragging, and all of that had to be done. Now there are seats on all the machinery. Well, they didn't then, but Dad did. He plowed, and he had a seat on his machine. But Barbara and I always had to drag and walk in that loose dirt. The first two weeks or so, we got so tired, our legs, you know; but finally, it would get so we couldn't even feel our legs much anymore. We had to be out there until all the dragging was done. First they'd plow, and then they'd disk, and cut it and then drag it. Oh, I didn't like that. Barbara didn't either. I'd cry and cry until I couldn't cry anymore, planting the corn, and then we'd start the next day, and I always had to be out there helping the boys. I had to be up on the haystack to move the hay around, atop the round haystacks. Sometimes the hay would come out fast and furious, and I had to work like everything to keep up. The loads came up, and I wasn't

seeing it quick enough, so I fell down in back with some of the loads. There I was for some time with black eyes and my face was all swollen and all banged up. I was out there working with one eye. You'd think somebody would have had some feeling and say, "Oh, you can stay home now", but it was nothing like that.

End of Part I.

- KB:** Today is May 4, 1997, and this is Part II of the interview of Kathryn Amelia O'Neill. Today, we are viewing photographs, and Kathryn is now looking at Photograph No. 1, and she will be telling us what she remembers.
- KO:** Oh, I was told that this was in 1850. This is my grandfather, Carl Wacker. This is my grandfather and my grandmother, my mother's people. This is Barbara Newhart. They were always very nice. I was so proud of Grandpa and Grandma.
- KB:** Where did they live?
- KO:** They lived up north from where we lived, quite a ways up there. I didn't see them very often, but Grandpa and Grandma would come in a buggy. I can still see them. They would come in a buggy to see us, and Grandma would always have something she gave us kids. We were so happy to get any little thing, you know.
- KB:** What did she give you?
- KO:** She gave me a little necklace, and I thought that was so beautiful. Oh, it was just one of those that came down about to here, just a chain. I was staying with Grandpa and Grandma for a week one time when I was a little girl, and I said, "Grandma, can I have a piece of bread? I'm hungry." She said, "Okay." So, she gave me a piece of bread, and when I went outside and I was eating some, all the chickens gathered around me, so I threw little pieces out. Pretty soon it was all gone, and I came back in and I said, "Can I have another piece of bread, Grandma?", and she said, "Okay, my, you must be awful hungry." She gave me another little piece of bread. I was eating and feeding the chickens, and then when that was finally gone, and I went back in, I wasn't sure whether I ought to ask her or not, but I asked her for the third piece of bread. She said, "What do you do with it?", so I had to tell her that I was giving some to the chickens, and she said, "Oh, you don't have to feed the chickens. It's okay now." But they were always nice like that.
- KB:** This is Picture No. 2, and it's the one-room school near Leola, South Dakota, and Kathryn is in this picture. She is in the front row on the right, and there's a little carrot-like figure under her picture.
- KO:** All I knew when I was growing up or when I was a little kid was "Katy." I didn't even think about having another name until later, and then I found out my name was Kathryn. Why didn't they call me by my name? But then, I tried to stay with my name, "Kathryn", but later I didn't care. In fact, I like "Katy" now. They call me Katy around here.
- KB:** Do you remember this coat?
- KO:** Oh that coat. My mother bought these coats long, you know, and we wore them until they got too small for us, which was several years.

- KB:** What's that milk can doing there?
- KO:** I don't know why that was sitting out there. The Gibsons, you know. It belonged to the Gibsons.
- KB:** You said there was a hole in the window, do you remember how that got broken?
- KO:** I don't remember how it got broken, but they stuffed something in there.
- KB:** Did you like school?
- KO:** Oh, ya, I was happy to go to school.
- KB:** What were some of the songs you sang?
- KO:** Well, I guess I mostly remember the ones I shouldn't remember. There was "Three Blind Mice", and I thought that was terrible. Just terrible. It just hurt me to think that she cut off their tails with a butcher knife. We were singing it at school, and then we sang "Little Brown Jug." There were some more little crazy songs. "Ach, Du Leiber Augustine", we sang that.
- KB:** Let's go to Photo No. 3.
- KO:** This is a time when I was sick and couldn't go to school. I was jumping rope, and I didn't stop when my side started hurting. It started hurting, and I jumped until finally I just couldn't jump any more. I didn't have enough sense to quit. I was such a good rope jumper that I didn't want to spoil my record. I just managed to get home, and then I was awfully sick for some time. There was no such a thing as a doctor. We never had a doctor. It just healed up, I guess. Then when I went back to school again, I never jumped rope any more.
- KB:** No? And this was the same school house as Picture No. 2?
- KO:** Yes, it's the same school house. It had a little bathroom there "the little back house."
- KB:** Is your teacher in this photograph, No. 3?
- KO:** That's Loretta Conlon. This was a few years later from when I knew her. This was taken. And this is Bernice Gibson, and this is my brother, Fred; and Vivian Gibson. This is Barbara, my sister, and some of the Layton boys. Mrs. Layton had a baby every year or so, and so she'd come with a baby. This is probably Lillian. They had all boys, I don't know how many boys, Arthur, Rueben, Albert, Clade, Adolf, Lloyd, Oliver, and finally they got a girl, and her name was Lillian.
- KB:** It looks like a lot of people for that little school. Were you cozy in there?
- KO:** I never thought about it.
- KB:** So they were all Laytons, or Gibsons or Zenkers.
- KO:** Yes. The Hanks and the Pierces homesteaded there, too, but they didn't have any children.
- KB:** Let's go on to Picture No. 4. Do you want to describe to us what this is?
- KO:** This is the drug store where I worked. This is Dick Winkle who worked in the drug store with me. I think one of these is me, but I can't be sure. And Mr. Hofer. Mr. Hofer that I worked for isn't on here, but his son, Clifford, is on here, and maybe Cincona, his daughter.

KB: What were your duties at the drug store?

KO: Well, everything. They had a soda fountain. In those days, they had a soda fountain in every drug store. I filled prescriptions. The doctor had an office upstairs, and whenever I couldn't figure out what he wrote, (you know, at that time, doctors didn't write very plain) (giggling), then I would go up and ask him what he wrote to make sure I didn't make a mistake. I never had a lesson. I was told to fill prescriptions, and I did, but I always asked the doctor before I filled the prescriptions. There was a jar about this tall, and it had some sticky stuff in it, and when we filled the prescription, we usually put some of that in it, as the doctor prescribed. I was just awfully aware of making a mistake on that. That's the way it was, but I loved it there, and I loved my work. Finally, I was engaged to my husband.

KB: Where were you living at that time?

KO: I was living in Wishek, North Dakota. I lived with the Munch family. Pauline Munch was my friend.

KB: How old were you?

KO: I was just about 18, a little over 18.

KB: And how old was Mr. O'Neill?

KO: He was five years older than I was. He was born in 1900. We always knew his birthday and how old he was.

KB: Was Wishek his home town?

KO: No, he was working for the telephone company, and it was while he was working in Wishek when I met him.

KB: From where was he originally?

KO: South Dakota. In Woonsocket. That was down more like in the middle of the state.

KB: Where were you married?

KO: Well, I never was very proud of it, but at home there was no such thing as having a wedding or anything at all, and we wanted to get married. So, we asked the judge ...

KB: In Wishek?

KO: No, in Leola. We drove down to Leola, my home town, and I told Barbara, my sister, that we were going to get married and we wanted to have her witness. So, the judge's wife and my sister were the witnesses, and we were married by the Justice of the Peace.

KB: You said that you didn't stay very long in this area, then?

KO: No. In Leola we didn't stay. We went to Aberdeen, South Dakota, a town not so far. We stayed there two or three days, and then we came out here. We're still here. We've lived here in Sacramento all these years. For a short time, we stayed with my sister, Elizabeth, in Florin.

KB: What year was that?

- KO:** It was 1925. We were so happy when the baby was coming. We were so happy. She was the prettiest little girl you ever saw.
- KB:** What's her name?
- KO:** Delores Helen O'Neill. I have some pictures of her I'll show you some time.
- KB:** Why don't you go ahead and tell us about the rest of your children?
- KO:** Well, we decided that we wanted to go back to South Dakota once more, you know, where we were born and raised and everything. Pat was born in South Dakota. He's the only one who wasn't born here in California. Joseph Patrick O'Neill. We were so happy at that time. Everything was going nice. The only thing was that times were hard when we left South Dakota, but we didn't realize how bad it was until we came out here. It was really bad out here. My husband couldn't get any work. It was awful. I won't go into that, but I'll tell you, we nearly starved sometimes. No kidding. It was awful hard. He couldn't get any work. We were the kind who thought it was terrible to ask people for anything, too proud. I don't know what we had to be so proud about, but it was just that we had worked hard all our lives and then come to this. I don't know what we had to do in order to get anywhere. He got a little bit of work now and then in the cannery, and I worked in the cannery, too. Anyway, we finally got started a little bit, and we just hung on and just got out of it. We got along better and better and better, and that's the way it went. And then Violet Marlene was born, and then later, Donald Delano O'Neill. He was the youngest.
- KB:** So, you had four children?
- KO:** Yes, two girls and two boys. They were all very good children. Pat, my oldest son, has always been very helpful and made us proud of him. Don is wonderful. When I had my ranch on Crocker Road, I had so much work to do. My husband passed away, and there was much work to do. He knew it; but he had to live in Southern California because he was flying for TWA. But any chance that he had, he'd come up and work and work and work to help me, you know. Even now, he comes up and does most of my book work. He's coming up again pretty soon, he and Leni, my daughter-in-law.
- KB:** What did she grow in her garden?
- KO:** Well, besides those gooseberries, she grew some vegetables or whatever she could grow there. We had another place a little further out where every year we would grow a lot of potatoes, watermelon, and strawberries, rhubarb, and horseradish. I don't know how come she started the horseradish, because you had to grind it to get it ready. Mother made some kind of a sauce or something. The boys and dad liked it on their food. I remember I had to turn that handle all the time, and my eyes were burning and running so much from that strong stuff.
- KB:** How did they preserve their food?
- KO:** We didn't have any way except in the cellar in those days. They didn't have a basement but a cellar, and it was all dirt floors. Mother had barrels and things down there, sauerkraut and...
- KB:** So, she raised her own cabbage?
- KO:** Yes, she raised cabbage. Oh, I was going to tell you something else. She made watermelon pickles too. There was lots of room in the window because the walls were thick. Mother planted an orange seed in there, and it finally came up and was growing and growing and growing, and finally from the top weight,

it kind of bent over out a little bit and then it kept on going up further to the ceiling. Eventually, she had to take it out because it was getting too big.

KB: Were there any oranges?

KO: I can't remember that there were any oranges.