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Debra Snyder [00:00:08] Mm-hmm, so he really became involved with them...

Myrtle Cheever [00:00:11] I beg your pardon.

Debra Snyder [00:00:12] He became involved with helping disabled people, or who had a disability?

Myrtle Cheever [00:00:16] Oh yes, and he's been on the President of the United States Committee.

Debra Snyder [00:00:21] Mm-hmm.

Myrtle Cheever [00:00:22] For the handicapped ever since, and he's traveled, he gets along. With the thing he can't do is what I can't do very well now, is to sit down comfortably and get up.

Debra Snyder [00:00:43] Oh.

Myrtle Cheever [00:00:44] And his wife has stayed right with him. And she has been just wonderful. And so that's the only trouble he has when he's up. But he has a little machine now that he even puts on the back of his car and takes places with him, they travel a lot and he talks to people and so forth, but. Lots of people don't notice that there's anything bad about him at all. But he is the best nature, honestly. You can have more fun with him, you can't be serious too much.

Debra Snyder [00:01:25] Mm-hmm, he doesn't like serious, yeah.

Myrtle Cheever [00:01:27] No, he's just, he overcome, he has overcome so much.

Debra Snyder [00:01:31] Well, that's good that he took a disadvantage and...

Myrtle Cheever [00:01:34] Well, he really made it into something when he finally had to give up the state farm business.

Debra Snyder [00:01:49] We are continuing the Living History Series and today we have Mrs. Myrtle Cheever with us. Thank you Mrs. Cheever for being willing to do this interview with us. I'd like it if you could begin with just a little bit about your background and how you became involved with the Home Economics Department at MSU.

Myrtle Cheever [00:02:09] Alright, I was born in Bozeman. And went to school through the elementary schools and the high school here, and went on into college from there. And while I was in high school, I began to teach piano as one of my favorite things to do and played at the college for gym classes, some at eight o'clock in the morning and some in the afternoon. I was excused from school to go and do this, and so I began to earn money rather early for a young person and enjoyed doing it very much. It just seemed to be part of me. Then, when I was in college, I knew quite a few people anyway, you see. And having been associated with the college people, I knew many of the professors personally, and I had played in their homes and for their dinners and things, you know. So, I had quite a business going there, and then when the time for college came—I wanted a degree living in town here and going to school, I thought, well, I should have a degree. At that

time, a degree was not being given in music. It hadn't developed. There had been some very fine teachers there, one man that I started with, was accepting the students himself. He and his sister, his maiden lady sister, were here. And they took students and they were teaching all day and Saturdays and some Sundays and making plenty of money. Well, some of the other professors heard about how much he was making and they just I thought that wasn't fair. So, they fussed enough that it was changed so that the students had to register through the registrar and pay their money in there. Well, then there wasn't that much that could be done. They couldn't teach that much, you know. And so that man left right now when they said that that couldn't be. And his sister left, too, and they lost two mighty good teachers there. But there were very good ones since that followed them also. But, in time— when I was ready to go to school, there was no degree offered. So I searched through the catalog to find what would be interesting and the trouble is everything is interesting. But I thought, well, I would probably use home economics more than I would any of the other subjects. And my oldest sister had, when she had taken commercial work, she took a good deal of home economics too, and our mother was a wonderful cook. So she always called me her second cook, and I would do the running around and washing the dishes and so forth. But my interest was there, and I would watch her do, and my sister Georgia, the oldest sister, made it a little tough for Miss Harkins, I think her name was, who was head of that department when she was there. And she said, well, that's not the way my mother does it. So that wasn't very good, but they got along all right. Then the course changed quite a little bit, of course, as it grew. And there were, I've forgotten how many professors in the department. But they... It was just very regulated and planned in many courses and I think the, as I've said, I wasn't in favor all the time because I had to be playing here or there and had to work the home economics around it. And there were two professors that were just not too nice about it. They put up with me, but grudgingly, and embarrassed me very much sometimes with the remarks they would make to me about when "You better go play the piano a little bit more. You're not kneading that bread right". Well, I think I was. I was kneading it the way everybody else was. And things like that. And so it made it tough. But it did make it tough for me because I had hurry around and I had to be dressed just so.

Debra Snyder [00:08:46] Mm-hmm.

Myrtle Cheever [00:08:47] And then get back into the department and so on. But I found that the ones, the professors that were the most difficult, they were ill at the time. And I think anything out of the ordinary or the routine would have bothered them. But anyway, I lived through it. Finally, I had to, here I was a Phi U and I had to meet the scholarship committee the last quarter in school in a freshman subject. This teacher was quite cross with five of the senior girls who were in that class, a freshman class. And I had only 12 credits the last quarter. So here I was walking across the campus, not knowing where the scholarship committee was meeting, and Mr. Conkling, an engineering professor, came along and said, well, where are you going this fine day? So I said, Well, I don't rightly know. And I told him, and he says, "You?" And... So he says, well, I'm on that committee, I'll just take you over there. Well, I'd played in their home many a time and played cards with them even sometimes. So we went over there. Well, Dean Herrick at the time. Have you heard of Dean Herrick? Did you know her at all or anything about her? Well, she was a wonderful person. But she ruled things. Believe me, she was on top of everything. So when I was the only girl there besides Dean Herrick, and so when she saw me and the meeting started, she said they took me first and she says, what do you mean being here? And I was getting a little perturbed about that time with all this going on because this teacher with who was ill, I think was the reason, she reported me in those two credits and if you weren't passing in 12 credits why you had to meet the committee. So, I said, well, I

guess Miss Tear and I just couldn't or didn't get along, and oh, with all the rage she could muster, she said, "It's not Miss Tear's business to get along with you, it is your business to get along with her. You are excused," and that was all there was to it. But Dean Branegan... The next day when I met her in the hall, with all her fury that she could muster, she asked me what I meant by having to meet that committee. And I was getting a little more perturbed by that time. I said, how many freshman girls have complained to you about that teacher in this last year? And she didn't say another word, and turned around and walked off, and I walked off. But things like that were difficult. And yet, she did not turn in my grades that spring afternoon. All of a sudden I thought, well, you better see if all your credits are in. And it was a very warm day. But I trudged over to the, to the registrar's office, and she had not turned them in. So, to the last drop, but it went along all right, but it was, I enjoyed all the time because I was happy with what I was doing, and I hoped it was all right. I didn't think that I wasn't working for Phi U, I was just doing my job. And I was real surprised and pleased when I was invited. And I think the... The reason I chose the Home Economics was that there would be a degree in it, and it took me five years to do it. But anyway, it came out all right. And I did teach one year in Libby, Montana, and had a biology class extra. Every teacher had to have something outside of their regular work. The superintendent had me take his algebra class about once or twice a month, because he had business downtown, so I had plenty to do there, and the superintendent had dismissed the music teacher the spring before, and I think that's why they hired me...

Debra Snyder [00:14:39] Mm-hmm.

Myrtle Cheever [00:14:40] Was I'd have that on the side, and he even expected me to take his church-playing job when I got there. And it was ridiculous, the things he was asking me to do, just take on her work. Well, I took on what I wanted to because it was part of me and didn't take the rest. But, now there, the reason I went to teach was, I thought I'd gone to school in my own hometown. Is this beside the point?

Debra Snyder [00:15:19] No, no, you're doing fine.

Myrtle Cheever [00:15:24] Was because I could fill that in, you see, and he would get credit for saving the county money. So it was, I didn't stay but one year, and I think I should have stayed two just for doing it. But I didn't and came back and started in with my piano class again. So it's been, and that's the way I met my husband, I was playing, my sister and I were playing a violin and piano for Friday afternoon movies for the elementary schools. And they were having a big picture one week and wanted another violin, and they were very scarce in town at that time. And I, at the choir practice, I said to a young man, where am I ever going to find a violinist? He says, "Oh, I'll introduce you to one", so that was when... Burt Cheever's, Hurlburt Cheever's first year here. And so he said, well, he'd try with us, and so then we got along all right, and so we just kept on playing together and finally were married. But after I'd been away, to... to do my year of teaching, I was thankful for that year of teaching because going to school in your home town and living at home, there's lots you miss, and I learned an awful lot that year in that little town. I was very glad to have done it. But I, my sister Trena, who took home economics, and I could work together just like, just two peas in a pod. Everything went just, well, we did the same, we had one year after the other, you see, it was much the same. And is there anything along in there now that you would like added?

Debra Snyder [00:18:14] Well, I would like to ask you what the home economics courses were that you taught your year in Libby when you were there.

Myrtle Cheever [00:18:21] Oh my.

Debra Snyder [00:18:22] Can you recall?

Myrtle Cheever [00:18:25] Well, not too many, the foods and the sewing mostly.

Debra Snyder [00:18:32] You really didn't have much in child development?

Myrtle Cheever [00:18:34] Oh, not anything like that at all, no. And just a small room with three sewing machines and twenty-seven girls in that one room and really it was quite difficult. I neglected one girl who was, oh, she was so large and... And just funny kind of, you know, and they came to the time when they were to make their dresses in the spring. Well, with that many girls in that smaller room, and I couldn't get to everyone to help them individually, and that poor girl was a very poor family. And she came to me after she'd cut out her dress and basted, we basted it up in those days. And she's crying, tears just were pouring down her face. She says, "I can't get my dress on, it's too little." Well you see I hadn't been able to get around and so all I could do was to buy her more material and help her cut it out so she had her new dress. But that was, they liked the music they had, I started an orchestra up there and they played for different things and played for assembly every Friday afternoon and all the classes there would sing songs. And that was fun to do. And the children loved it, and the families loved it. But then when they came to ask me to play in the afternoon for their lady's aid, I couldn't do it. Then they didn't like it.

Debra Snyder [00:20:49] You couldn't do everything, could you?

Myrtle Cheever [00:20:51] No, couldn't quite.

Debra Snyder [00:20:52] No, no. What do you feel was the most useful in relation to your college experience after you finished? Even though your interest went more towards music, how did your college preparation...

Myrtle Cheever [00:21:08] Well, for my home, excuse me, I didn't mean to.

Debra Snyder [00:21:11] No, that's fine.

Myrtle Cheever [00:21:13] It was a great help in my home, you see, and I always liked to cook. And so we always sewed, my mother was a tailoress as well as a good cook, and we'd always make dresses out of the scraps of our material, you know, two for adults, so that it just brushed up everything in the order you might say. I felt that the time had been well spent, and I don't understand what's going on now. And when they don't have textiles, they don't have any courses like that, do you?

Debra Snyder [00:22:15] We're taught some textile courses at the high school level, it's probably minimal what they teach. But at the university level there are still textile courses.

Myrtle Cheever [00:22:28] There still are, I'm glad to hear that. And these days we certainly need that with all the material that are appearing.

Debra Snyder [00:22:40] That's true. What were some of the major courses that were taught during your years here?

Myrtle Cheever [00:22:48] Well, always the Foods and my thesis was in sewing. It was Historic Costume. And that was very interesting. That was with that Miss Tear, too. But I think it would have been better had it been in miniature. Rather than full size. She had me make them to fit me. And what has become of them, I'd like to know.

Debra Snyder [00:23:27] What is miniature? Is that for...

Myrtle Cheever [00:23:30] Well, doll size, so that it wouldn't be such a problem to take care of them, keep them, you know. Nobody knows where they are now. And, they're quite the costumes, clear from the Egyptian, you know.

Debra Snyder [00:24:00] So you were taught Foods and Clothing?

Myrtle Cheever [00:24:03] Yes, and... [I] can't think.

Debra Snyder [00:24:11] Home Management or?

Myrtle Cheever [00:24:14] No. Well, the last year in school was the first year of the Home Management House. And that was down at 320 South Wilson. In that house, there were five girls there. Dean Branegan was there, but her mother lived with her at that time, so she had to be there. Have you ever heard about that? She was a lovely person, but she was quite elderly. I can feel for her now. But, oh, she thought it was terrible for those young girls to have to stoke the furnace, it was a coal furnace, and we would set the alarm and get up, and at four or five o'clock to have the house warm. And so she thought it was so bad that we would have to get up and do that when we'd been working all day. And she would get, she set her alarm earlier and you'd meet her coming up when you were going down. And... She would, we had to put the tea kettle on the stove right down next to the fire in order to have lunch ready when they would be there for lunch. She would come along and, oh my, get that tea kettle all so black and have those, those poor girls have to clean that up, she'd go and put the plate on and then the water wouldn't be hot. So we had some times. But we, I was with the group that went in first, so it was Miss Branegan's first time at a Home Management course. And so we had it a little easier, I think, than some of the others, because she regulated it as it went along. She was a wonderful person. She was of value, too.

Debra Snyder [00:26:45] Could you elaborate a little bit on the Home Management House? What was that situation like? How was it set up? Did you live right there?

Myrtle Cheever [00:26:54] Well, yes, yes we lived there for the six weeks and had all our other courses as well and we just moved in there. And then the different jobs were divided up with the five girls, two and two and one, and I was one. I've been loner quite a bit because when you're playing, you're first there and the last to leave and so on. So it just was natural. It worked out that way. But it was, they had formal dinners and invited faculty people in.

Debra Snyder [00:27:55] Mm-hmm.

Myrtle Cheever [00:27:56] And I guess that's about all I can think of.

Debra Snyder [00:28:02] So during this course you were learning home management techniques while living in the situation?

Myrtle Cheever [00:28:07] Yes, and we had the washing to do, and just like you would in a home. So that, we always helped at home enough so that I never did feel that that was, except the formal part of it, that certainly was different than we had at home.

Debra Snyder [00:28:31] Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. What changes do you perceive that have taken place in home economics since you graduated?

Myrtle Cheever [00:28:46] Well, I think the main thing is that the course is different. You have so many—well—I don't quite know how to say it. It's getting to be more universal rather than local. I guess that would be it.

Debra Snyder [00:29:15] Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Myrtle Cheever [00:29:17] And that's about all I... Do you have the same number of credits?

Debra Snyder [00:29:25] They may have increased because now it's a little more in family life and child development so they may have increased in that respect.

Myrtle Cheever [00:29:34] It seems to me we had something in quantity cookery. In Phi U, in order to earn money, we used to make doughnuts and sell them on the campus.

Debra Snyder [00:29:49] Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Myrtle Cheever [00:29:51] And that was just strictly for Phi U, though.

Debra Snyder [00:29:59] Can you elaborate a little bit on the image of home economics and how that has changed from when you were in school to now?

Myrtle Cheever [00:30:12] Only that, um... You were just supposed to know and get the sewing and the foods for yourself. Rather than depend upon a course. Now that is the nearest I can say, I believe.

Debra Snyder [00:30:39] Okay. Do you feel you had any professional growth opportunities that influenced your career?

Myrtle Cheever [00:30:50] I don't quite get what you mean. I do think that my music helped my teaching in the... This one food teacher that didn't think so much of my work in a laboratory. When she came to observe my teaching, my practice teaching, why she just couldn't figure it out, why I was a perfect teacher!

Debra Snyder [00:31:28] Mm-hmm.

Myrtle Cheever [00:31:30] And it seemed to be a little difficult for her to give me a little credit, but she did.

Debra Snyder [00:31:36] Mm-hmm.

Myrtle Cheever [00:31:37] And, but that was, I'd been doing that so long and she didn't put that together.

Debra Snyder [00:31:48] Would you feel like your piano experience influenced your home economics more than your home economics influenced your piano work?

Myrtle Cheever [00:31:59] Yes, I believe maybe I do, because... I did, in high school, I helped a lady who did very much entertaining in her home, the wife of the registrar at the time, a beautiful woman, and she liked to dance and go to parties and so she'd play the first show and be the music on the piano and I'd come along and play the second. This is all for the silent pictures.

Debra Snyder [00:32:39] Mm.

Myrtle Cheever [00:32:40] And then I helped her when she would give her parties in her home, so that it all just sort of worked around together.

Debra Snyder [00:32:52] So they complemented?

Myrtle Cheever [00:32:53] Yes, they did.

Debra Snyder [00:32:58] Well, those are the questions that I have for you. Thank you very much for the information you've given us and the time you've shared.

Myrtle Cheever [00:33:06] I, it's a long time ago.

Debra Snyder [00:33:09] Yeah, you've been very accurate in your description of your experience, so thank you.

Myrtle Cheever [00:33:15] Well, you're very welcome. I always wish I could do better. Now, where does this go?

Debra Snyder [00:33:29] I think it will be kept in...