If Your Sister Called You a Hun, You’d Burst into Tears

Interviewer: You were telling me yesterday that there was quite a bit of patriotism and patriotic feeling during World War I.

Brickett: Oh yes, there was. And we went out to the fort during that time—I remember my dad taking me out—and well, we were just generally well—of course in World War II I was more involved in it because my husband was in the Army, and that was awful too—but we used to talk about the Huns a lot as children, you know. And that would make you cry, if you’re sister called you a Hun, you’d burst into tears [laughter].

We Were Quite Concerned About Those Fellas

Brickett: We knew a lot of older boys that were off to war—neighbors—and, so as little children we were quite concerned about these fellas at the front. And my sisters were old enough so that they knitted socks [to send to soldiers]—horrible things, they probably never got there.

Entertaining Ourselves Over Here, Fighting Over There

Interviewer: And weren’t you saying that some of the neighbors would come over [during the war] and play [patriotic] songs?

Brickett: Play songs, yes, and sing “Over There,” and “How Are You Going to Get Them Down on the Farm After They’ve Seen Paree?”, all those patriotic songs. We had some nice neighbors in those days. The Sanders girls, whose father Jim Sanders—he was a lawyer here—and he was a brother of William—Wilbur—F. Sanders, and so they were nieces really. And there were six girls in that family, just a block away, you know, and so they were at our house quite a bit—at least the younger ones—and we would play games and read books, and so forth.

A Much More Difficult Time for Almost Everybody

Interviewer: Well, we were gonna talk about the war, since you were living in the Governor’s Mansion during the period.

Brickett: Yes, well, we were looking at some material on Mrs. Sam Ford, whose husband was governor during World War II, and I mentioned that she had such a hard time because of the rationing, and I was surprised that she said that—although I suppose you couldn’t have gotten much better than [unintelligible] if you had to entertain—but World War I, of course, was a much more difficult time for almost everybody and we all had things like bread made from potato and very little butter, and we had very dark (?) bread. I suppose lots of things were limited. And during that time there was a coal strike in Helena—I mean in Montana—and so coal was limited. And the two newspapers here—the morning paper, the Helena Independent, and the evening paper, the Helena Record Herald—always had a great feud going on. So the Record Herald, which was Republican, came out with an article that said that everybody was freezing to death except the governor, and that there was lots of coal in our house. So my father had Mr. Campbell, who was editor of the Independent, put a little quip in and say that we had some coal but no very much; however, if anyone was really cold, they could come and get some. And so, only one woman came, and her husband was one of the state officials, and she came with a little basket, and apparently she was just curious [chuckles].

It Was a Dangerous Time

Interviewer: Well, one incident which occurred right before World War One that I thought was interesting [is] the Butte Miners’ Strike and how your family was affected by that.

Brickett: Well, it was before the United States got in the war, but the war, of course, was going on. Of course the strikes in Butte were quite frightening. And, so anyways, my father was always quite popular in Butte, but he called out the National Guard and that ended it. But it was a violent strike, and my dad didn’t just take anybody’s word about what was going on over there, but he hired himself a Pinkerton man who went over to Butte. And, as he was reporting to my dad over the telephone and he was in his office, somebody was shot and I heard the shot over the phone, and that was when they finally called the troops out.
So at that time we had a lot of threatening letters and things like that, so the house had National Guard people around. And one of the young National Guard soldiers that was out in front of the house was Johnny Van (?), who was the father-in-law of Eric Van—John Van’s father—and he was a young soldier. And my sisters were in Central School at that time, so they had soldiers walk back and forth with ‘em, and we weren’t allowed to open packages and things like that because of these threats. And that had to do with the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World], who were instigators in those years—and I heard you’re saying you’re going to give a talk on the IWW, and I’d like to come and hear it if I could. But a little bit earlier than that, there was a governor in Idaho who was out of office but then involved in these labor disputes, and he was shot, and I think that had a lot with my father wanting to call out the troops here. It was a dangerous period.