

**Marlys Alm**  
**Narrator**

**November 13th, 1990**  
**Interview done for The Golden Age of Radio Oral History Project**



*The transcription of this oral history was made possible in part by the people of Minnesota through a grant funded by an appropriation to the Minnesota Historical Society from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Any views, findings, opinions, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the State of Minnesota, the Minnesota Historical Society, or the Minnesota Historic Resources Advisory Committee.*

Interviewer: 00:00 Might as well get it done. We're going to ask you when you were born so we—

MA: 00:04 1915, so I'm 75 years old.

I: 00:10 When did you move to Stevens County?

MA: 00:11 I was born and raised in Stevens County, in Morris. We lived on a farm by Morris.

I: 00:18 Okay. Where did you go to school?

MA: 00:22 Went to school in a country school to start with. My first and—well, first two grades, they called it primary instead of kindergarten. And then I went to the first grade, and then I went into town and stayed at my grandmother's, and went to second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth in town. But we didn't stay at the grandmother's, only in the wintertime. We walked to school, two and a half, three miles, rode a bicycle to Morris.

00:56 And then we moved and I went to the country school my seventh and eighth grade. We moved out where we couldn't go to my grandmother's anymore in state. And I went to seventh and eighth grade in the country school, and then went back into Morris. And we did—my brother and my sister and I, and we did what you called light housekeeping. We had a room and a stove. Well, the stove was one of these—they used to heat water onto wash clothes with it. And we had that that we cooked on.

01:38 And we lived—we stayed real close to the old Morris High School at that time. And so at noon, we'd run home and stir up a batch of soup or something and cook it, and have it for

our meal. And then we lived on a lot of soup and sandwiches. And I graduated in 1933 from Morris High School. Myself and all five of my children graduated from Morris. We all graduated from the same high school.

- I: 02:11 You said you had a brother and a sister. That was the three of you?
- MA: 02:15 No, there's another brother, a younger one.
- I: 02:18 And you married then?
- MA: 02:23 I got married in 1934 and moved to Donnelly. So I have been here a long time, and now I didn't like it in Donnelly at first, but now I don't want to leave.
- I: 02:37 Did you live in the town or on a farm when you moved to Donnelly?
- MA: 02:40 Right in town all the time.
- I: 02:42 What did your husband do?
- MA: 02:44 He worked on the railroad—well, he worked different jobs until he worked on the railroad.
- I: 02:48 Did you stay at home and take care of your kids or did you—
- MA: 02:51 I stayed at home and took in sewing. I couldn't—there were no babysitters, and if there would've been, I couldn't afford it anyway, so I took in sewing and did housework where I could take my two older kids with me. And then I worked in a restaurant, two different restaurants. And then I went to work and cooked in the Donnelly school. I cooked there for four years, I think. And then I got the job as a clerk in the post office, and I worked in the post office for 22 years before I retired.
- I: 03:33 When you first begin to listen to radio, not necessarily on your first one, but did you go to other people's—
- MA: 03:40 Well, only what we had at home. Like I said, we had this little box with the earphones, that's the one I remember first. And then as time went on, we got a—I remember we had a little better one that my aunt had sent this one time. And like I said, we took the earphones apart so that we could each one listen on it. And especially to the world

series. And I don't think I was too old at the time, but my dad played baseball and he was on the Donnelly team and played baseball. He lived in Morris, but there was a team in Donnelly.

04:18 And we always said, when he got too old to play baseball and he couldn't see good, they made him an umpire. And so then he was an umpire. And so we went to all the ball games. And I always said, if I had been born in the summer months, I'd probably been born on the baseball field. But we listened to ball games. Like I said, we—I guess that's why I've always been interested in baseball especially, but I like lots of sports. I do like sports.

I: 04:53 Was there—well, when you get—you talked about when you got your first radio, was there a particular reason that your family bought it? Was it to get sports or it was just—

MA: 05:03 No, it was just that everybody was getting a radio and we squeezed one out somehow, I don't know. I know we didn't have much money, but for some reason, we got one.

I: 05:16 So most other people were getting them bought the same time?

MA: 05:19 Yeah. There were other people that had.

I: 05:23 What kind of stations were available when you first—

MA: 05:27 We used to get a station way down south someplace. I remember with old time music, it was more like a Mexican station. I can't remember what the name of it was, but it was down in Texas or someplace that we used to listen to a lot. And we always would listen to the news, of course. That wasn't too interesting to us kids, but then the folks had to listen to the music and the news. And we—there were Fibber McGee and Molly, and Ray, and what was that other—

I: 06:15 Bob and Ray?

MA: 06:16 Bob and Ray. And there was another one, too, that we always were listening to those—that type of thing, too.

I: 06:26 Well, we'll come back to programs in a sec, but what did—before you had the radio, what did you do for news and stuff?

MA: 06:37 Well, we used to take a daily paper, I remember that, yeah. Because I know when we'd have a snowstorm and the mailman couldn't get to the mail, I remember my dad was upset because he didn't know what the news was or what was going on any place.

I: 06:58 How about after you got a radio, did you quit getting the paper then? Did it change?

MA: 07:06 No. We always had a newspaper, yeah.

I: 07:10 How about music, then? What did you do, I guess, for music or other types of entertainment?

MA: 07:17 My sister used to play the piano. We had a little piano, and she used to play the piano by ear. And we'd all gather around the piano and sing the best we could. And we used to do a lot of that singing, and just the family. Had a lot of fun.

I: 07:36 Did that change after radio at all? Did you begin to gather more around the—

MA: 07:43 Not really. Not too much, no, because it seemed like—well, the radio went over—when we would be able to listen to it, it was getting too late and then the folks would have to go to bed because they had to get up early and then we'd have to go to bed and get it up and go to school. So after the news was over, most of the time, it seems like the radio was—that was it, we didn't listen too awfully much. Probably did one or two of those programs and then that was it.

08:14 And of course, we didn't listen to the radio a lot, we played a lot of cards, made candy pop popcorn and did a lot of things like that at home because we didn't listen. Nowadays, the TV is on blasting all the time, but we had to make most of our own fun. Even when I was younger and was going out with boys, they'd end up—we'd have five, six—there were three other—two girls that were very good friends of mine and their boyfriends, and we'd always end up at my place and we'd play cards and pop popcorn, and make fudge and stuff then.

08:59 Once in a while, it was on a Saturday night, we'd get into my mother's dessert for Sunday dinner. But those days, you didn't have money to go to shows and that, so the kids—they like to come to our place and, well, the reason they

came to our place was because we didn't—couldn't go to the other—their folks wouldn't didn't want us. I mean, they didn't want that noise around, I guess. With my folks, they liked it.

- I: 09:29 Was there a movie theater in Steven County?
- MA: 09:32 Yeah, there was movie—there was two of them in Morris at time. And you could go to the movies for a quarter. And I suppose popcorn was a nickel, I don't remember.
- I: 09:45 But most of the time, most people didn't spend the money—
- MA: 09:48 There wasn't too many—we didn't go to too many movies, no. Very few movies. Because, well, we didn't—see, I—that was—I was—when I was young, yeah, going to high school, it was during the depression. And, well, I went—at 16 I went out and worked weekends and holidays and things in order to finish high school, otherwise, I would never have finished high school, my folks couldn't put me through. And I did anything I could to get some money so I could have clothes to go to high school. And you just didn't have that kind of money to be spending on movies, you saved it.
- I: 10:26 But you could listen to the radio.
- MA: 10:28 Oh, yeah.
- I: 10:31 You touched on what kind of programs you liked. Can you think of any others? Did you ever watch—maybe after you get got married and stuff, did you listen to soap operas ever when you were in the house?
- MA: 10:42 They didn't have really soap operas at that time on the radio. Like I said, Fibber McGee and Molly, and that type would be about the only thing they ever had on the radio that I can remember.
- I: 10:56 So mostly comedy.
- MA: 10:58 Yeah. It was more comedy stuff.
- I: 11:02 And the music you mentioned, right?

MA: 11:03 And the music. Oh, yeah, Lawrence Welk, of course, we always had to listen to that and some of these other Wayne King, some of these other older orchestra or band leaders.

I: 11:18 You talked, too, that your parents had listened to the news and stuff. Were there types that other—did each family member or the kids like certain programs and the parents have different programs?

MA: 11:35 No, because we all had to listen to the same program. We only had had one radio, and we always just went with whatever the folks wanted to listen to, we listened to. Or else we'd go off in a corner someplace and play games.

I: 11:53 Okay. How many radios, did you have just the one?

MA: 11:59 No. We had more than one when I was home. Oh, I can't remember, probably four in all. I know we started with that little one with the earphones and went on, had a little higher up all the time.

I: 12:18 Did you keep your other ones around then and use the older ones, too, or did you basically just had one radio that—

MA: 12:23 You just had one radio most of the time, right. Something would go wrong with the other one. In fact, I don't know, do you have—do you do in Morris, too, with people in Morris? My brother has these radios. I think—I don't know if he has them all or not, but I know he has this little one with the earphones, and that in Morris. And if you go to—if you do this in Morris, he might show you them. I don't know.

Female Speaker: 12:57 I'm sorry that you had company. I forgot about—

MA: 12:59 Oh, that's okay. Come on in. No, no, come on in. No, we—I guess the batteries would wear out or something would go wrong, and so then you'd have to—they had the—they were all battery radios, they were never anything else but battery. Well, we didn't have lights. We lived on the farm, we didn't have lights, we didn't have sewer, we didn't have water, we didn't have anything.

I: 13:25 When did electricity come out to this area?

MA: 13:28 Well, when I was a kid, some people had electricity and some had what they called—oh, what was it? They had a machine that made their—

I: 13:39 A generator?

MA: 13:40 Yeah. That made their electricity, so, yeah.

I: 13:47 Did you usually listen by yourself or did the whole family listen as a group?

MA: 13:54 The whole family listened. Yeah, we listened as a group. Because when we were—we didn't use it all the time, we tried to save on the battery, so we only would be able to use it certain—at news time and certain times, otherwise, the radio didn't go on all day long like it does now.

I: 14:16 Were there certain rules besides that, like you're saying, one rule was that you tried to save on the batteries. Were there certain rules? Were there shows that kids weren't allowed to watch or listen to, I mean?

Marlys 14:26 No, we didn't—no because there wasn't anything on those days that was—I don't think there was anything on that was smut or anything.

I: 14:36 Was there any rules at all associated with—

MA: 14:38 No. Just that we didn't use it when it wasn't something important on. Yeah, we didn't always get to listen to it.

I: 14:48 Was there a certain time of the day that you—

MA: 14:54 Well, usually in the evenings. We had to study first, we had to get our homework done first before we could listen to it or before we could do anything.

I: 15:04 Did you usually listen—did you just listen or did you—or did people do housework or talk to other people while the radio was on?

MA: 15:14 No, because you—well, see, when you had the earphone ones, you had to just sit and listen. When you had the others, it wasn't—it usually wasn't loud enough that you could do be doing anything, but just—you just sat down and listen, you didn't do and work while it was—you might have danced if there was some dance music on, we did that.

I: 15:40 How about—did you—you already said that you just turned it on for specific shows, basically, you didn't just turn it on when you had free time, you just—

MA: 15:51 Not really.

I: 15:52 It was just specific shows.

MA: 15:54 It was more or less different things that was on. Come time for this would be on, we turn on the radio.

I: 16:01 Did you especially look forward to Lawrence Welk being on?

MA: 16:04 Oh, yes.

I: 16:05 You looked forward to it? ,

MA: 16:05 We looked forward to some of those.

I: 16:07 Did you watch the clock to make sure you got there on time?

MA: 16:09 Oh, yeah.

I: 16:12 Do ever talk about the shows that were on afterwards?

MA: 16:15 Well, we would laugh about something that was said on some of these—like this Fibber McGee and Molly, we rehash it.

I: 16:26 I don't know how to really say this, but did any of the characters or the situations that have happened on any of the shows, could you relate them ever to your own life or didn't you ever make—

MA: 16:37 Never paid that—well, maybe Fibber McGee's closet, because my closets are sometimes like that when I open them up, everything comes out of them. We always said, when he had a messy closet, we had a Fibber McGee closet. That was—because that's where his program was. He'd open up the door and all this stuff would fall out.

I: 17:01 That was a phrase you guys used a lot?

MA: 17:02 And that was a phrase, we had Fibber McGee's closet, and I still have. Yeah. That was something that ran along.

I: 17:10 Did you ever—did they give you information about the stock market and stuff like the farm when you listened—yeah?

MA: 17:16 Oh, yes. Oh, yeah.



I: 17:18 Did it ever help with maybe household hits? Did they have household hit kind of deals?

MA: 17:24 They used to give recipes.

I: 17:25 Recipes? Did you not pay attention?

MA: 17:28 I didn't pay too much attention to them because I didn't want to cook. But they did use to give some recipes, and they had a woman's program here where they give recipes and stuff, yeah.

I: 17:42 You talked about the music quite a bit. Did you listen to Roosevelt's fireside chats on the radio?

MA: 17:48 I suppose we did. I can't remember it, no.

I: 17:52 Did you remember anything about World War II being on the radio?

MA: 17:57 Yeah. I remember. And then we'd always listen when it was—when the war was on, we would wait and we always listened to see if it finally would be coming to an end or something, and just waiting for them to say peace. And so we'd wait for that.

I: 18:19 Did the radio make you feel like you knew more what was going on?

MA: 18:22 Oh, yeah, I think it did. It helped us. Yeah, it educated us a little bit.

I: 18:27 Did it change the way you looked at political events? I mean, maybe—

MA: 18:32 Well, we always listen to—when there was an election, I tell you, that we stayed up all—the folks would stay up all night, practically listen to the election, and they would have parties. And a group would get together and then they'd have a party and listen to the election returns. And I know us kids had to go to bed, but I know the folks would have a party when there was election returns to see who was going to get in and who wasn't.

I: 19:03 Do you remember any of the commercials that were on?

MA: 19:06 No, I can't remember that, no.

I: 19:09 Do you think they influenced you to buy anything or probably not?

MA: 19:12 I don't think they did at that time because I think we bought what we had to have and that was it. We didn't go out and buy something just because it was something new that came up.

I: 19:24 Or other ways they could influence you other than just—they could have just inform you it was cheaper or probably did—

MA: 19:32 Yeah, that, I suppose they did, but—

I: 19:34 Or were there any premiums?

MA: 19:36 But there wasn't too many commercials and things on like that. There were premiums, I remember. There were—maybe not premiums, and I know you could—a program recipes and things, you could send in and get the recipe book and this and that.

I: 20:01 Did any of the shows that you watched ever make you frightened or happy?

MA: 20:06 Well, we didn't watch any on radio, radio wasn't TV. We weren't watching.

I: 20:13 Did any of the shows that you listened to—

MA: 20:14 No. Because I don't ever remember anything on the radio like that.

I: 20:21 Or even just—was there anything with any kind of emotion, even just news of war and things like that.

MA: 20:28 Well, that sometimes would get to us, oh, yeah. And it would be news and—

I: 20:33 But none of the—or the other sheet, not necessarily bad, I mean, just the comedies that make you happy and—

MA: 20:41 Oh, yes. Oh, sure. It was like listening to your TV right today when they have the comedians on. They would have these guys on and they'd be telling jokes and things.

I: 20:55 We read a broadcast, the War of the Worlds, and we were wondering, was that broadcast around here? Did you ever

remember listening to—it was supposed to have been broadcast in October of 1938. Did you remember—

- MA: 21:07 Oh, I can't remember.
- I: 21:09 —listening to it or anything? I was just curious if it was broadcast on station—
- MA: 21:15 Well, let's see, in '38, I'm sure I didn't have a radio. Because the first—I can't remember what year we got a radio, and I remember we saw an ad—I was married then, and we saw an ad in some magazine for a dollar down and a dollar a month you could get this radio from this big old catalog, and we sent to see if we could get it, and they sent it to us, and that was the first radio we had. And that was after I was married, I mean, after I left home. So when I was first married, we didn't have a radio.
- I: 21:53 Was that first radio—was it like a big piece of furniture size?
- MA: 21:58 No, it was just a small—no, the first one we had was just a small one we had.
- I: 22:01 Is that what most people had?
- MA: 22:03 Well, there were some people who had huge ones, yes. They had real fancy ones. No, we just had the little ones.
- I: 22:11 Was it a big deal that first radio?
- MA: 22:13 Oh, you bet. It was a big deal.
- I: 22:17 Did people come over a lot of times that didn't have radios and listen at people—
- MA: 22:23 When I was a kid at home, they did. Before I was married, yeah, people would come over just to—we had a program on and they didn't have one and they'd come over to listen to it.
- I: 22:38 Is there anything else you'd like to add? Anything that we haven't asked? Anything you can remember that—
- MA: 22:44 Oh, I can't remember anything too much. It was just that the radio was quite a thing to us when we first got one because we had no—like I said, they had to be battery, we

had no electricity, and so it was different, lots different than they are now.

- I: 23:07 How do you think it changed after television came out?
- MA: 23:13 Well, after television came out, I think—I myself, I do not listen to the radio a lot. I listen to the news, the obituaries, and turn it off. I don't listen to it much. For one reason, some of the news it gets just beyond me, I can't take it. I'm too old for some of that jazz. But, yeah, it got where I don't listen to the radio a lot. I listen to the TV a lot more. And now that I am a widow, I do watch TV a lot. I would be lost without TV. Even when I—before I was a widow, my husband used to say, if the TV went haywire, it's the first thing he had to get fixed. But the radio was quite a thing that day. Yeah, we got lots of things on it.
- I: 24:19 I remember one time, I didn't hear it, but my folks telling about it, I don't know how it could have happened, but they were listening to the radio and they heard someone holler on it, help, I need help, my daughter is dying. And my dad recognized the voice of a neighbor, and how it came over the radio, we—I—nobody ever could explain it.
- I: 24:44 And they went to this neighbor's and she was, she was having convulsions and this little girl. And the mother—and they went over and then they helped, they knew what to do. They put her in a tub of water, and how they ever did it, I don't remember what it was all about. But I remember the folks telling that, now, how would that come over that radio?
- I: 25:03 It's amazing.
- MA: 25:03 Yeah, it was. And somehow, it connected some way or other. I always said it was weird, but it saved her life because they got over there and helped. It does sound weird, but I remember the folks telling about it.
- I: 25:28 Well, thank you a lot. This is really, really helpful.
- MA: 25:29 But like I said, if you are in Morris and you go to Wayne LeSage, do you know him? He works in the Red Owl Store, older man. He works there and goes out and delivers the groceries and stuff with Willie.
- I: 25:46 Wayne, what was his—

MA: 25:46 Wayne LeSage. And he's the one that has these radios,  
and—

I: 25:51 How do you spell his last name?

MA: 25:52 L-E-S-A-G-E. He might show you, like you say, these  
radios, if that would make any—help you to be interested  
in it. I know he has them.