



**WASHAKIE MUSEUM**  
& CULTURAL CENTER

## **THE WAR BABIES OF WORLAND: ORAL HISTORIES FROM THE CLASS OF 1960**



**PEGGY STEELE PORTER**

Extended conversation after videotaping

Interviewers: Laine De Freece & Cathy Healy

Proofreader: Peggy Steele Porter

**July 25th, 2022**

*This transcript expands from the video due to additional conversations.*

This is **Laine DeFreece**. Today's date is July 25, 2022. It's 9:45 am here in Denver, where I am, and in Worland, where you are located.

We thank you, Peggy, for adding to the oral history collection of the Washakie Museum and Cultural Center located in Worland, Wyoming. There are two questions that we ask everybody that give an introduction to the interview. What is your full name, including your maiden name?

**Peggy Steele Porter:** Peggy Ann Steele Porter.

**Laine:** Was there another name or a nickname that you were known by in Worland?

**Peggy:** No, no nicknames.

**STEELES MOVED TO WORLAND IN 1952**

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**Laine:** If you weren't born in Worland, how old were you when your family arrived and when you left?

**Peggy:** I was 11. It was 1952 when we moved here. I think, in November of that year, so I was in fifth grade.

We, as fifth graders, went to the Junior High because South Side Elementary School was just being built, and it wasn't finished. Then, when it was finished, we moved over.

We were the first students in the South Side school. I assume the first-fourth graders came over too. We weren't the only ones in there – the school was full of kids. And Dr. Berkenkamp was our custodian. He was such a gentle soul - everybody just loved him. He was the pastor of the old Lutheran church, just catty-corner from his house on Grace Avenue. We all knew that he had a Ph.D. – he was a living lesson to us that any and all work is honorable. He was from Germany. He had quite an accent.

**Laine:** Did your family leave Worland, or did they stay there?

**Peggy:** My parents lived here the whole time – 48 years. At one time I moved to Douglas for about seven years, and then back to Worland.

**Laine:** What brought your family to Worland?

**Peggy:** My dad was in the meat business, the cattle business, and he worked for Triangle Packing. He also owned the Worland Livestock Auction in later years, and my mom ran the office.

Triangle Packing was a slaughterhouse – cattle, pigs, and I suppose, sheep. It was on South Flat Road, just south of Holly Sugar Factory. It's just an old abandoned building now. Here's something odd. There were three families where the men all worked at Triangle Packing in that two-block section of Thomas Avenue from 6th to 8th streets – my dad and our classmate Sharon Chagnon Frisbee's dad were two of them.

**Laine:** Where was your home, In town, or did you live outside the city limits?

**Peggy:** It was in town, on the south side of town. it was a new area – the houses were only two years old. They were all built in 1950, and my folks bought that house fully furnished, which is kind of unusual. You don't see that today. They lived there until they passed.

## **CHILDHOOD: SIGHTS, SOUNDS, SMELLS**

**Laine:** If you were to close your eyes, what would you remember about the sights, the sounds, or the smells of your neighborhood and downtown?

**Peggy:** [Laughs] The main thing I remember is I would walk to town going down Eighth Street, especially when I hit Grace Avenue. We always had these worms that hung from the trees. Do you guys remember those? I don't know what they were or where they went, but I haven't seen them in years and years and years. But I'd walk down the middle of the street because they just hung off the trees along the sidewalks.

**Laine:** I think we called them bagworms. [Western tent caterpillars] I don't know what the term was, but they were scary to children.

**Peggy:** And they were pretty thick in the older trees as I got up toward Culbertson and closer to Main Street. You had to dodge them.

**Laine:** Do you have memories of the area surrounding Worland, like the mountains, the badlands, or the back roads?

**Peggy:** I really don't. I don't recall that we went to the mountains. We weren't a camping family or anything. My dad was kind of a workaholic.

**Laine:** So you were a city girl then.

**Peggy:** Yes, pretty much.

## **RHEUMATIC FEVER: FLAT IN BED FOR ONE YEAR**

**Laine:** Before we started this recording, you chose some topics that you'd like to share. We'll go chronologically to make it easier for listeners to follow and then take a look back from the adult perspective.

The first question: What do you remember about your childhood prior to starting first grade? This would have been from about 1941 to September 1948.

**Peggy:** We lived in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. That's where I was born, and at age five, I started kindergarten. Shortly after I started, I was diagnosed with rheumatic fever. There was no penicillin at that time [or at least it wasn't available, apparently.] The doctor said the only way to treat it was to put me to bed, flat on my back, where I spent a year at the age of five.

I have no idea how my mother kept me there because I don't remember feeling sick, but I had a heart murmur that you could hear with the naked ear. Can you imagine! I felt fine – I just had this heart murmur that Mom said she could hear—you didn't need a stethoscope.

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I was in bed for a year, and of course, there was no TV back then. Mom had to invent games and stuff that I could do lying down flat to keep me occupied. [ I can only remember two things that I did in bed. Mom had a box of pretty and decorative buttons, and I'd just play with the buttons. And I remember she would set an empty milk bottle by the bed, and I'd drop clothes pins into it – people today don't know about glass milk bottles delivered to your house, and they probably don't know about clothes pins either since most people have dryers

I have no memory of how I could eat lying flat or go to the bathroom – maybe I could sit up or walk for that – I don't know. I wasn't contagious, but I don't remember my brother coming in – he was seven. Mom told me later that she wouldn't let anyone, not even my Grandmother Steele, come stay with me because she was afraid that they wouldn't keep me down.]

I remember the doctor coming in about eight months, and he said that I could sit up for 15 minutes a day. Doctors in those days made house calls.

That put me a year behind in school, and it left me really afraid. At the age of five, I felt that I could suddenly be in danger without any warning. Most kids at that age think they are indestructible. Even though I was over the rheumatic fever, I couldn't go to first grade because it was all day, and I had to rest and take a nap in the afternoon. At that time, kindergarten was only in the morning.

So I started kindergarten again as a six-year-old. Then in first grade, we moved to Riverton. My dad owned a packing plant there, and I went to first grade, partly there, and before the school year was out, we moved to Gering, Nebraska.

I had two more traumatic things happen before I moved to Worland. My third-grade teacher got a brain tumor, and she passed away in surgery. As I think back, she couldn't remember our names. For several years after that, I was afraid to go to an eye doctor because they looked into your eyes with that light, and I was scared he'd see a brain tumor in there. Then my fourth-grade teacher got polio. That was the year of the big polio scare, you couldn't go to the movies, and they closed the swimming pools. Neighbors down the street rented their basement to a couple, and the man caught polio and died. When my teacher came back, her arm was crippled.

**Laine:** So you were well aware of what illnesses could do —

**Peggy:** I certainly was.

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: 1949-1954

**Laine:** When you moved to Worland, you mentioned that South Side School hadn't been opened yet,

**Peggy:** No, they were still building it.

**Laine:** Where did you go?

**Peggy:** In fifth grade, I went to the junior high school and had Hilda Myers as a teacher. She was kind of intimidating. Coming from Nebraska, I had not had any fractions yet, and they were petty well into fractions here, so I was behind. But she was very, very nice, and really helped me catch up.

**Laine:** You probably stayed after school for help.

**Peggy:** I don't remember staying after school. I was nervous, but she was very understanding that I had not had fractions yet—

**Laine:** And she took the time to help you.

**Peggy:** Yes, she did. I don't remember what time of year it was that the South Side was finished, then we moved over there and finished fifth grade at South Side. I think after New Year's, we moved over.

## **JUNIOR HIGH: 1954-1956**

**Laine:** Then you went back to the Junior High building again for seventh and eighth grade. What are some of your memories about Junior High?

**Peggy:** When I look back, I remember that they were going to perform an operetta. I'm not a person who likes to be in front of people, but for some odd reason, I tried out for it, and I got the part of the Blue Fairy and sang a solo. [Laughs] I look back at that, and I think, why in the world did I do that? I wouldn't even think of doing that now but for whatever reason, I did it— and it was fun. But it was out of character for me.

**Laine:** Good for you, it shows your courage.

**Peggy:** Another thing about junior high – and high school – that would just blow the kids today away – was we had to wear dresses or skirts. We were not allowed to wear pants, even when there was a football game right after school. We had to go home and change, and then come back. I can remember walking to school when it was so, so cold, and we had dresses on. Your legs were bare – leggings hadn't been invented. We wore bobby socks that rolled at our ankles. My legs were just red and itching like crazy by the time I got to school. I guess we weren't

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even allowed to put pants on under our dresses until we got to school. It didn't matter how cold it was, we walked! Our parents didn't take us. The coldest day I walked to school, it was -45 F, and that was only the temperature. There was no such thing as wind chill back then. And we never even thought about fighting for the rules to change. That's just the way it was. My mom wore a dress all the time. Women just did. Mom wore housedresses to clean the house, and then she had work dresses and dressy dresses.

**Laine:** Remember the marks that the boots used to make on our bare legs?

**Peggy:** Oh, yeah, they did, kind of.

### **YOUTH ACTIVITIES: JOB'S DAUGHTERS**

**Laine:** Did you have any after-school activities, or was that mainly in high school?

**Peggy:** I was in Job's Daughters. I don't remember what age I was. They had a drill team at that time, and I was on that. I loved that. That was fun, and I really liked it. Now, they don't have Job's Daughters here anymore.

**Laine:** I didn't realize that.

**Peggy:** They haven't had it for quite a while.

### **WORLAND HIGH SCHOOL: 1956-1960**

**Laine:** You moved on to senior high school, which was from September 1956 to our graduation in May 1960. What are your special memories of those years?

**Peggy:** [Laughs] Oh, gosh! I remember that I struggled in Spanish class because each week, Miss Mundy gave us Spanish words to learn, and I just didn't, and all of a sudden, there were a lot of words I didn't know and that put me behind. I remember sports, football games – I guess the Job's Daughters dances and those things. Nothing just totally outstanding, I guess.

**Laine:** Did you help with any of the floats, building the floats for Homecoming?

**Peggy:** I did. I rode on one — I was on, I believe, our sophomore float. We made a big orchid in lavender and white, and then on the float, it said, "Orchids to you, Warriors." Sandy Voss and I were on that float in our strapless formals. That was fun, but I just don't remember a whole lot more.

### **RADIO TO TELEVISION GENERATION**

**Laine:** What about television? Did you have television in your home?

**Peggy:** We did, probably when it first came out, because Mom had not worked, but then when my little brother was five, and I would have been 15, she went to work for the cable TV. So, we did have TV, and I remember watching American Bandstand. It came on at 3 o'clock, and I think that was the first TV program of the day.

I don't think TV was on all day, certainly not all day like it is now. But I loved watching American Bandstand. I'd always watch Lawrence Welk [and the "Champagne Hour"] with all the bubbles—

**Laine:** – and the Lennon sisters singing —

**Peggy:** Yes, yes.

## **PARENTS' LIFE IN WORLAND**

**Laine:** When you were going to school, what were your parents doing?

**Peggy:** Mom worked, like I say, at cable TV, and Dad worked at Triangle Packing at that time, and my little brother David went to a babysitter, but they arranged for me to have study hall at the last period of the day so that I got out of school early and could go home and take care of David until they got home from work.

**Laine:** Wasn't that something how accommodating the schools could be?

**Peggy:** Yes, really. They don't have study halls anymore, not like we had. We had a whole period where we could go and do our homework there, and then you didn't have to take it home with you – if you used it like you were supposed to.

**Laine:** So most of us in our class of 1960 have turned 80, and because of the Covid pandemic, we've had to postpone our 60<sup>th</sup> reunion twice. Finally, we got together in person. In the meantime, we've talked a lot in these past few years about our time when we were kids, thanks to Zoom, emails, and phone calls—

## **OPERATORS WERE STILL NEEDED FOR TELEPHONE CALLS**

**Peggy:** Strange to remember now, but I worked as a telephone operator.

**Laine:** You did?!

**Peggy:** I did.

**Laine:** Was that in high school?

**Peggy:** No, no, it was after I was out of high school. It was in '65, probably, '64 or '65. It was interesting work.

**Laine:** Could you listen in on conversations?

**Peggy:** We could. We were not supposed to, however, but we could. At that time, people could only dial locally. We handled long-distance calls.

## **IMPACT FROM GROWING UP IN WORLAND**

**Laine:** In your experiences of growing up in Worland, what created the most impact on your life? Have you been doing anything in your adult life that you thought you would be doing as you were growing up?

**Peggy:** Yes! I have! My lofty goal was I just wanted to be a wife and a mother. All my life, that's what I wanted to be, and that's what I've been. "Just" makes it sound like it's simple, but it's not. I've raised five kids – two stepkids and three of my own. When I was 29, my husband's ex-wife passed away in California, and we took his two girls, so I had two sixth graders, a seventh grader, an eighth grader, and a three-year-old. And I'll tell you that was a challenge. Not only were there a lot of kids about the same age, but you've got all kinds of tensions when you are putting five kids from two different families together.

But all five of them grew up to be very successful. They have wonderful families and very good jobs – they're doing well financially. I now have 13 grandchildren, and they're doing well. And I have 26 great-grandchildren. My oldest great-grandchild is 20, and my youngest is 20 months.

**Laine:** So you continued to stay in Worland after graduation and raise your children there?

**Peggy:** Until 1969. My husband, Jay Mangus, worked for the telephone company, and he was transferred to Douglas. We lived there for seven years, and then we came back here, and I've been here ever since. We came back here in 1976. He passed away in 2016 after 51 years of marriage. In 2018, I met Lonnie Porter – he's a chemical engineer – and we married in 2020. Cheryl, my youngest, said to me, "Mom, how did you find two such wonderful men?!"

**Laine:** When you have conversations with your friends there in Worland and those that have moved away, do you feel that you have a happy childhood there in Worland?



**Peggy:** I do, oh, yes.

**Laine:** And what do you attribute that to?

**Peggy:** Worland was close and safe. We played out at night in the neighborhood until dark, and nobody was ever afraid, or we'd go over a block to Park Avenue – Dennis Smith lived there, quite a few of us that lived in that neighborhood – and we'd just play out there in the neighborhood until it got dark, and then we'd go home. We'd ride our bikes wherever we wanted — no helmets. [Laughs]

We had a pretty good, safe childhood. You don't see kids out at night like we did. Probably because they're inside watching TV or on their phones or their video games. They have a whole different life than we did.

## **YOUTH ACTIVITIES: MERZ BAKERY FOR “SCHOOL” LUNCHES**

**Laine:** Were you one of the kids who went to the Saturday matinees at the Kirby Theater?

**Peggy:** Yes, some, I don't think a whole lot. We could go with Merz's bread wrappers, I think, couldn't we?

**Laine:** And Merz being the bakery.

**Peggy:** Yes, a wonderful, wonderful bakery. A bunch of us used to take our lunch money, and we'd walk down to the bakery, and that's what we'd do for lunch. [Laughs] I don't know if our parents knew that. They might not have liked us doing it. Oh, that was such a good bakery! Now kids walk to Blair's and get food from the deli – our only grocery store, by the way. We used to have a couple of big grocery stores downtown and then we all had neighborhood grocery stores. That's very definitely a thing of the past.

**Laine:** And be back from “lunch” at Merz in time for class?

**Peggy:** Oh, sure, it wasn't that far. We'd spend our lunch money on donuts and rolls—

**Laine:** And Mr. Merz never ratted you out?

**Peggy:** No... quite a few of us went there.

**Laine:** Was there anything else you would like to talk about, something that we haven't shared so far?

**Peggy:** Well, let's see, as far as working when I was in school. I babysat a lot, and I car-hopped at Wilson's Drive-In — 25 cents an hour, and that's what you got for babysitting.

We went to the Methodist church, and I was in the youth choir at that time. That was fun. I enjoyed that. It's all I can think of, really.

## **WISDOM FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

**Laine:** Well, in closing, for generations to come who may listen to your story years from now. Is there any wisdom you want to pass on to them? What would you want them to know? Think of your grandchildren.

**Peggy:** The world is so different now than when we were growing up. I think the main thing is for them to go to church, stay in church, and just use that as their anchor.

**Laine:** Everybody needs an anchor of some sort.

**Peggy:** My — I just had a thought. Years and years ago — do you remember Snyder's Dairy on South Flat Road, and we all went out there and bought our milk from Snyder's Dairy? My granddaughter, who lives here and teaches is married to Cliff Snyder's great-grandson — I guess he would be — and they still farm, so it's all just carrying on. Her name is Jamie Snyder.

**Laine:** Absolutely.

**Peggy:** Cliff Snyder had that dairy for years and years and years. We'd go out there and get our milk.

**Laine:** I had forgotten all about that. Thank you for including them.

## **PARENTS' LIFE IN WORLAND, PART 2**

**Peggy:** The one question on your questionnaire — “While you're going to school, what were your parents doing, and what did they do for groups?”

You remember they had the Coconuts Dance group at that time, and my parents were members of the Coconuts — I don't know how they got their name — but my parents and their friends would take turns having dinners at their houses, and then they'd all go dance. It was quite a big deal, and of course, then parents belonged to bridge clubs, so that's what they did.

**Laine:** Do they still have the Coconut Dance Club?

**Peggy:** No. it's been years and years and years.

Dad always had a horse, so he rode his horse.

The other thing I thought of — and I don't know how many people would remember this — when we moved here and bought the house on Thomas Avenue, our next-door neighbor was Dr. Mark Watson. I don't know if anybody remembers him. He was here for quite a few years, and he was our next-door neighbor. but I don't hear any people talk about him at all, so I don't know if anybody remembers he was here then, but he was.

## **ADULT WHO MADE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN YOUR LIFE**

**Peggy:** The questionnaire asks if there was a community member who made a difference in your life. I ran around with Marilyn Carroll. Her dad was a huge influence in my life, Bill Carroll. They were members of the Church of God at that time, over on South Seventh Street, right next to the little Cottage Grocery store, one of our neighborhood groceries. The church was upstairs, and the pastor's family lived in the basement. [That wasn't so unusual when we were kids. There were several families around town that built basements and lived in them until they could save enough money to build a house on top. The door to the basement – their front door – stuck up like a periscope on their flat-topped, black tar-papered “roof” so the door fit when they built their actual house. Sometimes they'd rent their basement as an apartment afterward.

Marilyn's dad, Bill, was the associate pastor there. He was such a sweet man, and he really had an impact on my life. They lived in the basement of her mother's sister's house, Florence and Dick Hartley. One of their sons, Doug, was a classmate – the Hartleys had three kids, and the Carrolls had five.

## **MORE ABOUT: JOB'S DAUGHTERS & “AMERICAN BANDSTAND”**

**Cathy Healy:** What did you do in Job's Daughters? What was Job's Daughters all about? What was Lawrence Welk about? American Bandstand? Those are such code words for us — we can immediately hear and visualize and have feelings about them, but your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren — your kids even — won't have any concept of the importance they played in our lives. Tell us more about those TV shows.

**Peggy:** Did you guys watch American Bandstand?

**Cathy:** Of course! So when you say it, we immediately have reactions.

**Peggy:** Right. well, Dick Clark was the host, and it was just they played teenage music, and they had all these kids that went there and danced. And you would just listen to the music and watch them dance. It was an hour or two-hour-long program, I think. It came on about three in the afternoon. As far as I remember, that's what time the TV came on. And of course, we were the first ones — teenagers — when Elvis Presley came out too—that was a big deal for us. Rock and roll! Remember when Elvis Presley was on the Ed Sullivan Show, and they wouldn't show him from the waist down?

My dad watched the Lawrence Welk Show, and I liked it. It was more adult music. They had a band and different singers. Probably older people liked it more. I watched it because Dad was watching it. But they did have some really good singers, Lennon Sisters — but it was just strictly a musical program, as was American Bandstand.

**Cathy:** What about Job's Daughters —

**Peggy:** What was the purpose of it? Honestly, I don't really know. A lot of girls belonged to it. We had meetings. You had to have a relative who belonged to the Masons in order to join Job's Daughters. So Dad joined the Masons just so that I could join Job's Daughters. I know we had dances. We had the drill team. We had meetings — honestly, at this point, I couldn't tell you what the whole purpose was.

**Cathy:** What were the meetings like? How are they different from just belonging to any girls' organization?

**Peggy:** Cathy, I honestly don't remember. Isn't that terrible? I remember going to meetings, but I don't remember what we did in the meetings.

**Cathy:** Oh, we wore Grecian robes, and we had secret handshakes and all the ritual was a secret.

**Peggy:** Okay — So the Masons and all of that stuff is was always very secret. Yeah. I just don't remember that part. I remember I loved the drill team. I don't remember who led it, but I loved that, it was fun, and we were in parades.

**Cathy:** And what would you do? What were the kinds of drills?

**Peggy:** Well, it was like any drill team, you know, they'd call out commands, and you'd march in unison, so whatever command they gave, you know, turn right, turn, left, or however we did it.

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I can remember practicing over by Sanders Park. but you know, just like a drill team would do today. They're not that much different. You weren't in the drill team?

**Cathy:** I don't even remember the drill team. I remember all the rituals for the meeting. The meeting was mostly rituals.

**Peggy:** I remember going to the meetings, but I don't remember the meetings at all, I would imagine it was because Masons were the same way. they were all very secretive — which is kind of strange to me when I think about it now. [Laughs] From the Masons, you could go on and belong to the Shrine. They did a lot of good stuff. They brought the Shrine Circus here every year. They supported the Shrine Hospital for burn patients, and it's still in existence today. The Shriners do a lot of good, good work.

**Cathy:** Do you remember when the Shriners would participate in our parade?

**Peggy:** Oh, yeah, in their little cars, very little cars –

**Cathy:** And didn't they have those red fezes, the hats?

**Peggy:** Yes, yes. they wore the fez – tall red hats with the Shriners insignia on the front of them.

**Cathy:** And a black tassel hanging down.

**Peggy:** We still sometimes see some Shriners. I don't know if they're still active here, but they all had those little cars that they rode in and buzzed around along the parade route. We don't have many parades here anymore. You have a Christmas parade and a homecoming parade, and that's about it. Ten Sleep has the Fourth of July parade. We used to have more than we have now.

You were in our neighborhood. I remember going to Thermop with you when your grandpa owned the Carter Hotel in Thermop. I told you about the time we were over there, and you and I went walking and crossed over the fence on a stile, and there was a cave, and this man came out of the cave, and you didn't remember that at all! And it scared us half to death — we went running away. I'm surprised you don't remember that.

**Cathy:** I probably blocked it — too traumatic to remember [Both laugh.]

**Peggy:** There were little steps that went up the fence and down the other side. And then there was a little trail, and we just went over the fence and walked on that little trail, and there he was. It's probably when the hospital was still up on that hill.

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**Cathy:** Oh, gosh. As safe as we were in Worland, we girls were brought up to be wary of strange men. That's all for me. Laine, do you have any other questions?

**Laine:** No. I have learned so much from you today, Peggy.

**Peggy:** You did?!

**Laine:** Yes, I did, because I learn a lot in every interview because there are so many different experiences, and there's so much I've forgotten that they bring to mind.

**Peggy:** Looking at your team's memory joggers – this list of questions – you listed two drug stores, Reeds and Grahams, but there were three – Ricker's Drug Store, and I think it was Halls before Bill Ricker bought it. He was so funny, Bill. He had such a personality. His drugstore was right there by Hake Agency.

**Laine:** And we had one drug store with a soda fountain.

**Peggy:** Well, Graham's and Reed's both had soda fountains. [Classmate] Sonny Shearer's mom worked at Graham's. I'd walk down there, and she'd fix me a butterscotch sundae. And then we used to go to Reeds and - I'd usually get a vanilla Coke or a cherry Coke. We used to mix different flavors with our Cokes. They had a fountain with stools, and they also had booths. I don't think Grahams had booths.

## **WASHAKIE MUSEUM: THANK YOU FOR BEING INTERVIEWED**

[Peggy's computer froze. When she came back on, she, Laine, and Cathy decided that the interview had covered all the topics that Peggy wanted to talk about. They thanked each other and closed the interview.]