

**Transcript of Interview with Elsie Henderson
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Transcription:

Matthew Strauss: My name is Matthew Strauss, and we are recording an oral history here, at the Heinz History Center on Monday, July 27, 2015. I'm with Elsie Henderson, and her friend Kitty Paladin. And, we're going to be talking a little about Elsie's life and her career as a cook. So Elsie, could you tell us when and where you were born?

Elsie Henderson: I was born up on Mount Washington, September 7, 1913.

MS: And, is that where you grew up?

EH: Yes, that was my hometown.

MS: What was Mount Washington like in those days?

EH: Well it seemed as those, everyone who lived there, everyone knew each other. The different families. And it was very close. Where I lived was on the famous, what they called William Street. And it was mostly Italian families there, and Negros. Everyone seemed to know each other.

MS: And did you go to school in that neighborhood?

EH: Yes, I went to; let me see, Cargo. And today they have changed it into a home for the elderly. On Boggs Avenue.

MS: Did you like going to school?

EH: I loved it. And from, it was called Cargo, and it was close to home. So I didn't have to walk very far.

MS: Did you have many brothers and sisters?

EH: Oh, don't ask (MS laughs). I was the youngest of thirteen. Eleven boys and two girls. So it was a very large family of youngsters.

MS: And what was your parent's; what were their names?

EH: My father died when I was two, so I have no recollection of him whatever. One thing for sure when the brothers, were grown up, my mother had a saying that, "If you don't have a job, and are able to pay for your room and board, let the door knob hit you." You had to have something to do, or pay something toward your living, which made sense. So.

MS: Did you have a job as child then?

EH: Oh no, you know the only thing I seemed to be interested in was library. I had my card when I was six. And, what I loved from where we lived to Grandview Avenue, you know where you could look down on the city. I could go alone, and today, if you allow your children out, you may never see them again. It was a different time. And everyone knew everyone. So, it was [a] very pleasant place.

MS: Now, growing up in Mount Washington, where did your family do most of its shopping?

EH: Well, you've heard of Shiloh Street. Shiloh was the place where you shopped on weekends. You did your shopping, and the Shiloh ran right into Grandview, at the lower end. So Fridays and Saturdays, was shopping days on Shiloh Street. And there was a theater there, too. It was a big shopping area. Shiloh Street was the place to be on weekends, so.

MS: You could walk to that part of town?

EH: Yes. Walk. And be able to carry your groceries.

MS: It's very important.

EH: Yeah.

MS: And, did you help your mother around the kitchen?

EH: Well I enjoyed doing that because I figured I was a great help to her. And I mentioned all the times I was just in her way, you know. That's where I got my very first experience, in my mother's kitchen.

MS: Can you remember some of the things that you cooked with your mother?

EH: Well, things were, I'll say on the simple side. But one thing I do remember, our kitchen stove was like four burners. And then at that time, they made separate ovens, like a box, that if you had on your four burners, this thing sat right over the burners, and you could make an oven. That's what this was, a separate oven. So you always had, plenty of baking area. That was very nice.

MS: And, when was it that you started cooking professionally?

EH: Well, let me see. Do you know of the enormous, red building on the corner of Stevenson Street in the Mercy Hospital area? It takes up almost the whole block. And Mercy Hospital has a smaller building sort of adjoined to it on Stevenson Street. That was Kaufmann's building. That's where a lot of their commercial work was done, and all the packaging for the trucks, down in that huge basement, that's where Kaufmann's trucks were kept. And then on the first floor, you know years ago, they had a big sale, once a year. Kaufmann's was June. Like they have sales, now everyday. So, the first of June, every year, they would hire about eight black ladies, on this first floor to take care of this sale growth. And each one had a desk there. And as all of the packages and things came in, we kept records of everything. And then, underneath the first floor, was where Kaufmann's kept their trucks. In that building. And one thing about that, the work that we did, taking care of everything, in front of you there were enormous black boards, and each lady in there had their own separate board, and that was for the different areas. So someone might have; there might be two in the Squirrel Hill area, very wealthy, you know; and from time to time, they change, but your board is in front of you, and you know who everyone is on that board, that has an account at Kaufmann's. And you also know if they haven't paid their bill. You knew exactly who they were. So, let that be a lesson for you. Oh dear.

Kitty Paladin: Let me interject a thought. Elsie, tell about when you wanted to be a nurse. And you went into nursing for a brief time.

EH: Oh I'd thought, long, long years ago, I'd thought that I would like to be a nurse. So I went to, I'm trying to think of the name of the place. It was in Fourth Avenue, Downtown Pittsburgh. And my mother asked me, she said, "Why are you doing that?" She said, "If you see a drop of blood, you fall on the floor." So I discovered, that nursing would not be for me, so I gave that up, but I did graduate. And I had my papers and everything, but I never used them. So that was a waste of time.

MS: So you did graduate from nursing school?

EH: Yes, I graduated. But never used it.

KP: And then you went to work at Kaufmann's in the bad accounts department, didn't you?

EH: Well, that's what I was talking about. That was bad accounts in that building on Forbes Street. So, I was there, for over six years, and that's when I became friendly with Edgar Kaufmann and his brothers, because the men from the store would come up to Forbes Street often. And that's where I first met Edgar, Sr. So when I went to Fallingwater, very first Saturday, when Kaufmanns came up for the weekend, Mr. Kaufmann came in and he was hollering. He said, "I know this lady. I know this lady." And he said to me, he said, "Elsie, you're going to like it better than you did in bad accounts." So I discovered that I did like it better. In fact, Fallingwater was the best place that I'd ever work in. And I've been around all of it.

KP: Elsie, going back to your very early childhood, when your oldest brother Lewis, was in the war, do you want to tell about your remembrance?

EH: Oh yes, that was the First World War.

KP: First World War.

EH: And when it was over, my oldest brother Lewis, came home, and I remember if it was just today, there were people that he wanted to visit, and from the back of our house, we could walk to this person's home, and I remember clearly, it was so muddy. And my mother had one hand, and my brother had the other. And we were walking down this muddy road to meet these people, who were so glad that my brother Lewis had come home in one piece. So.

KP: That was around 1918, or 1919.

EH: Whatever, and I was just six years old.

KP: And she remembers.

EH: You figure. I'm not good at figures.

MS: So getting back to your career, you said you worked six years in the bad accounts division of Kaufmann's. So how did you make the transition from working in that office to cooking?

EH: Well I'll tell you what happened. After the six years, there was a lady in Squirrel Hill, a white woman, who had an employment agency of her own. And she got help for just very wealthy people. And I had heard about her for a long time, so I says, "I think I'll contact her. I know it won't do any good." But one day she called me. And she said, "Elsie," she said, "I have something that I'd think." And she put emphasis on "think." "I think you can do." She said it was for H. J. Heinz II. "And he would like to talk to you." She set up the date for me to be at her office. And I sat there, and I'm waiting. And after a while Mr. Heinz sauntered in. He never walked. He had a kind of a switch with his bodyguard. And we talked for a while about different things, and then listen to this. When he was ready go, when it was decided that I would go to Rosemont Farm, he said, "I

promise you that when you come to Rosemont, you'll have a good time." That didn't sound right to me, because I'm raised with all of these boys who put me wise to everything. And I said, "Well Mr. Heinz," I said, "if you give me ample time off, I'll find my own pleasure." And he kind of reddened. He went out, but it was decided, that I would go to Rosemont Farms. The senator at that time was only five years old, Johnny. And you've been out there, and you know how that house is. The main section was for Mr. Heinz, and then the section on this side was for Johnny and his governess. And then, on the other side was the rooms for the staff. So everybody had their own section. But, at that time, Mr. Heinz and his wife were divorced, and if I remember, she had married someone into the army. Some big person. But before we get to that, I was there for about a week when Mr. Heinz's mother, and I have never been able to figure that was his aunt or his mother, from Moorewood Heights, you know above of Fifth Avenue. She came over, the first time I saw her, and she looked me up and down, she said, "My," she says, "you certainly are tiny." She says, "Do you know how to make soup?" I'm thinking myself, "Oh Lord, here we go." I said, "Yes, I know how to make soups, but I'd like to try different recipes, you know." She says, "Well," very haughty, she says (EH imitates her voice), "I'll send some of my recipes over to you," she says, "because the canned soups are not for us. They are for the public." (EH's imitation ends) Oh dear, if she had known what I was thinking. That's how they got a lot of their money, from the public. But I discovered, that Rosemont Farms, was a good time place, when he said, "You'll have a good time," it was a good time for people that wanted a good time. I never saw so many strange women in and out, and the laundress. We could never keep a laundress. And she came up one day, and whatever she was washing or ironing, she threw it on the floor, and she said, "Elsie," she said, "I am leaving today." She says, "I'm not going to be washing after these women, who come in just to stay the night, or a few days." So I discovered that, when he said Rosemont Farms is a good time place, it was one of those places. And then, his mother knew about it, because every once in a while, she would call over there, and she said to me: "Elsie is that woman still there?" And I said, "Yes she is." But what I didn't tell her, was that in the meantime, Kaufmann (note: EH most likely meant to say Heinz) had gone back to England and brought the woman's two children. I say the nice name I could give it, was a house of ill repute. So that's; I think I was there for a little over three years, when Johnny's mother sent for him to come to California. So I says, "Well, my little friend is gone, so I'll think I'll go too." So I went to Ligonier, with very good friends of R. K. Mellon. You've probably heard of Taghshinny Farm? H.C. Bughman. Bughman was a president of a small railroad, and they had an enormous place -- barns, and men to work the farm and everything. And so I was there. The husband, H.C. Bughman, was a very good friend of R. K. Mellon. And he was the master of Rolling Rock. H.C. Bughman. And you know, starting in the fall, when those horse shows, what is it? I'm trying to think. The Rolling Rock Club, you know the hunters that would start about in October. When they had dates set up, you never seen so many dogs, and horses, riders and everything. And everybody's feeling pretty good. They had a drink before they go out, and I wondered to myself, "That's so dangerous to be drinking at a hunt." You know. But, that was their lives. So H.C. Bughman was the master of the Rolling Rock hunt, and he and R. K. Mellon were just like this (sound of putting her hands together). So. I was there for, I'm trying to think how long, but I'll tell you what happened. Oh, there was the Bughman's had a staff. There was one lady, a white woman,

who had; she helped with the cleaning at Taghshinny Farm. And she said to me, she said, "You know Elsie, R. K. Mellon is trying to run all the people off of the place he's buying them out." And she said they have tried to buy her farm. She said, "But Mellon would never have enough money to buy them out," because they wouldn't sell to him, because their farm had been in her family for over two hundred years. And she was one who never sold to Mellon. I said, "Thank you." Because they had probably just taken over the town. You know? So.

MS: Did you feel growing up in a working-class neighborhood; what was it like for you to go to work for these very wealthy families?

EH: Well, listen, I'll tell ya, in my youth, like eight and ten years old, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. In Front Royal, Virginia. And, up the road from her was another relative, and this little girl and I we were practically brought up together, because we spent so much time together. And my grandmother would sit us down and give us the whole history of everything. And she said, "If you can avoid it, whatever you do, never do housework for white folks. Find something that maybe, is your own." So that's what I did. And when we were there, down at the end of my grandmother's road, there was a white man who had a grocery store, and I don't know how they made it, but they had the best peach ice cream, you've ever tasted. And every once in a while my grandmother would let us go down to the store. And, she would tell us what to do, and when we got ready to leave; [She said,] "when you come back up the road, if you pass any white folks, you step aside," and she would show us what to do. And while we're in this store, there's white people come into shop, and they turn around and they look at you like your dirt, and even if they're the biggest things down there, they talk funny. And they say, "Who's these?" And the owner says, "These Bird Jeffery grandchildren from up in Pittsburgh." And they're looking at you like your poison or something, and then my grandmother says, "When you come back up the road, if you pass any white folks" she said, "You stoop like this. Step aside and you let them pass." Can you see me stepping' aside now for somebody?

MS: Pittsburgh at that time; was that something you had to think about, when you're in Pittsburgh; relations between.

EH: Yes, we had that since the world began. And we'll have it until He comes. So things are a little better, but they never will be like they should be. But I'll tell you one thing about being at Fallingwater, out of all the people, you know when the parents died, Junior Kaufmann, just about; what people don't know, he just about turned that house over to me. And there was talk going around the town, the two most important people at Fallingwater are Jess Hall, who was the superintendent, and Elsie C. Lee; that was my name at that time. But I tell you, out of all the years that I was at Fallingwater, I only met two people who were racist bigots. I mean guests. But up there, there was two white ladies, and one of them, her name was Elsie, too; and I tell you how she came to Fallingwater. Young Kaufmann, he took over, he said, "It's yours do whatever you want to do." And he says, "Do you think you're going hire someone else?" He said, "Let's get someone else in." And there was a woman by the name of Harbaugh, Elsie Harbaugh.

And, when Mr. Kaufmann, Junior Kaufmann, interviewed her, it wasn't at Fallingwater, he said didn't want her in his house until he found out whether or not she cared for black folks. And so he interviewed this Elsie Harbaugh, at Jess Hall's house, and Jess Hall's wife, he's the superintendent. And his wife and I were like twins. And they were in a new house that Kaufmann had built for them. It was like a ranch house, but it's open, no doors. And so his wife and I were such good friends. And Mr. Kaufmann asked her if he could interview this Elsie Harbaugh up at her place. And she said, "Yes." She knew Elsie because they belonged to the same church. So, Elsie met Mr. Kaufmann at the Harbaughs, and his wife was sitting close by, but there were no doors in this; it was all like open. And she was sitting; she could hear everything that was being said. And she told me, she said, "The first thing the Junior Kaufmann said to this Elise Harbaugh is 'Do you have any objections to working with colored people?' And Elsie said 'No, no indeed.' He said, 'Well I'm glad at that' he said 'because if you did,'" he said, "I wouldn't want you on my property." That's how the Kaufmanns felt about. So Elsie was hired, and here's the thing: Every Monday, you'd get a letter, from the downtown office, telling you if there's going to be guest for the weekend or not, who they are, and if they have any funny quirks or anything. We always know what's going on, I know how to do the meals. And everything then. And what I'm going to order and make up my menus, if someone's going to have guests. But if we didn't have a guest, sometimes I wouldn't see Kaufmanns for two or three months at a time, but your money keeps rolling. Which is good. But I got to the point, where I felt that I'm taking money for nothing, and I asked Mrs. Kaufmann, when they are away for such a long time, if one of their drivers, would take me up, say like on a Wednesday, and there was a lot I could get done. I could make my ice creams, or do baking. And that's what I would do. But, when the letters came out, the guest list, sometimes Mister Kaufmann Junior would look at it, and one time he hit the ceiling, because when the letter came out, he had Elsie Harbaugh's name ahead of mine. Just something like that. Harbaugh instead of Lee. And the office changed it and put Elsie Lee. Oh dear.

MS: So getting back to the beginning of your Fallingwater experience. Can you tell us how you got that job, cooking for the Kaufmanns?

EH: Well when I was Ligonier, with the Taghshinny Farm, I happened to be looking at the paper one day. And I read the Want Ads, and here's this ad, and I said, "This reads too good to be true." I said, "It just cannot be." I just says, "I'm going to look into this." And when I looked into it, it was Lillian Kaufmann. And the first thing she said to me, she said, "Well, can you come into be measured?" And I said, "Measured for what?" When you were at Fallingwater, say for instance, I'm going to where a uniform today. It had to be costumed made. That's how important they were about doing things right. So, I went to Fallingwater, which I have never regretted. All the others, they're really not worth mentioning.

MS: What made that so special?

EH: Because they knew how to treat people. One thing that was nice, and it was very unusual. Mr. Kaufmann's hobby was passing out hundred-dollar bills, so that's nice. Up to

the point, where when it was against the law, to have money in a safe deposit box, I had one, because I had as much as five-thousand dollars in there. So you're not going to turn that in as salary. And I only got rid of my safe deposit box, about six months ago. So, tell him why I did.

KP: I don't know.

EH: I should've kept the safe deposit box.

KP: For your future winnings.

EH: No, I'll tell you about the figures. I was at a grocery store. This was the first of December, this past year. And there was two lines there. And I'm in the wrong line, because I was going to buy postage stamps. And when I got to the window the lady said, "Oh, you're in the wrong line." She says, "This is the numbers. People play numbers."

KP: Lottery line.

EH: The lottery line. Yeah. So I said, "Well I'll tell you what," I says, "Since I'm here give me a dollar ticket." She said, "Which one do you want?" I says, "I don't know." I said, "I've heard something about it. What is there a Treasure Hunt?" She says, "Oh, yes." So I got that ticket, and I glanced at it. And I got home, and I laid it down, and I was watching TV, that evening, and when they bring the number on, I just happened to look at it, and I said, "Some of those numbers look familiar." And I looked around for my ticket, and there was close to fifty-three thousand dollars.

MS: Wow!

EH: On that.

MS: You won?

EH: Yeah!

MS: Wow!

EH: I say this can't be. And I called some of my relatives who are very highly educated, and everything. I told them, I says, "Come over here I want you to see something." And they came over and he said, "Yes Elsie you got fifty-three thousand dollars on this tickets." In the wrong line. And here's the thing, the numbers on this ticket were all in sequence.

MS: Really? They just gave you a sequence of numbers?

EH: Yes!

MS: That's some luck.

EH: Oh my. And the manager in our office, I said, "I'll have to tell them about it. This might have something to do with my housing thing." She said, "Elsie," she said; she's the type of person who will do anything for you. And she said, "Elise," she said, "I've been to this place before where you have to go." She said, "I'll take you." And so she took me in; it was enormous place, and they have people who have won the lottery. Their pictures are all over the place. She said, "Do you want your picture?" "NO! No, no, no." So we were there I guess for over an hour. And then they give you a booklet. It's huge. It tells you all about everything, your winning, and everything. And it says, it would take about four to six weeks before everything was straightened out. But mine was about four weeks. And they sent me a big fat check.

KP: I have a question for Elsie. Elsie, you know the Kaufmanns were so wealthy. They had many houses and apartments. Tell about the time, when Mr. Kaufmann, was in the William Penn Hotel, where they had an apartment, and he invited the mayor in. Mayor Lawrence.

EH: No let me see. They were up on the fifteenth floor, of the William Penn. Huge apartment. I think you're talking about time I was going in Kaufmann's Department store. And I happened to look down the street, and there was a, I'm trying to think who this was.

KP: This was the time when Mayor Lawrence, came about the Civic Arena that Mr. Kaufmann complained about.

EH: Oh yes. The talk was that Mr. Kaufmann had given over a million dollars toward the arena, but when they opened, they wouldn't hire blacks. That's what he was upset about. And there's something else involved with that. Trying to think.

KP: Well he invited Mayor Lawrence, and he complained to Mayor Lawrence, because they weren't—

EH: Yes, but after he talked to Mayor Lawrence, then they started hiring blacks at the arena. And then, their winter property was in Palm Springs, California. And when they would go away for the winter, Mrs. Kaufmann, said to me one day. She said, "Elsie," someone had to babysit their apartment. No one there. And different ones on the staff would take three or four days and stay down there. She said, "Elsie there's just one thing." She said, "When we're away," she says, "if you're here for your three or four days, or whatever." She says, "It would be nice if you would have your mother come down and stay with you for your time." She said, "But there's just one thing," she said, "If your mother comes down," she said, "I want her to sleep in my bedroom." I said, "What's wrong with ours?" So my mother came down from Terrace Village, where she lived, and she stayed for a close to three days, I believe, and I went in one day, and she is putting her things back in the suitcase. I said, "Mom," I said, "what are you doing?" She said, "I'm going back to Terrace Village, where I belong." She said, "This is too much for me." And I said, "Don't you enjoy sleeping on sheets that cost, how much? A hundred and

sixty-five dollars a dozen." My mother says, "That's the problem!" She says, "This is too much. You don't even make ice water. You have ice water coming out of the spicket." So my mother went home. She says, "I will write to Mrs. Kaufmann and thank her for allowing me to stay in her bedroom." But it was a bit too much for my mother.

KP: A human-interest story. What about the time the Kaufmanns were leaving, and all the help referred to them as--?

EH: Oh yes. Over the years, we called them "Ma and Pa" behind their backs, you know. But if they were going some place and were going to be away for a while, all of the help would meet at the William Penn to have champagne and bid them adieu. It was just something. So they're leaving, and they're going to be gone for a while, and the men are taking out all the luggage and everything. There was a woman there who wore a beautiful black silk dress. She didn't do anything; she just walked through the apartment to always check that was her job. She was there. Everybody was there. And the champagne flowing, and everything. And as they walked down the hall, the luggage has gone, and the Kaufmanns are ready to go. And as Mrs. Kaufmann walked down the hallway, she turned around, and she says, "Well, have fun." She says, "Ma and Pa will see you again." And this woman who just walked through the apartment she spit the champagne all over everybody. Because we didn't know that we were always very careful about calling them "Ma and Pa." But Mrs. Kaufmann knew. I don't know when she heard it. Oh dear.

MS: How involved were the Kaufmanns with what you were cooking?

EH: Oh no, Mrs. Kaufmann. She said, "We had the best people all the time." She said, "How could I tell you what to prepare." She said, "You are the cook here." And they had a chef and had a kitchen maid. And I was always informed, "Elsie you're not to do anything, expect plan the meals, and do the baking."

KP: And Elsie you kept track of the guests and what they were eating?

EH: Yes. Say for instance you were our guest this weekend. Of course, my menus, everything is made up. And then if I got word in my letter, that you would be there in another thirty days, I would look and see what you ate when you were there and change everything. But Mrs. Kaufmann, she said she didn't know how to boil water. How could she tell me what to cook.

MS: Did you keep a recipe book?

EH: Oh yes. All of my recipes. Each year I would start a new book. And let me tell you what happened. When my husband died, I was in the beautiful five-bedroom house of my own huge place, and I had taken all of these books from year after year and put them on a shelf in my basement. And when the men came to clear out the basement, I tell them to take everything. You know they took all of those books. And, I almost had a heart attack. I called every place that I could of think of in Pittsburgh, to ask them about these books.

Because someone had them. You know. But no one knew anything. I said to myself, "There goes a part of my life." All those years, menus, kept year after year after year.

MS: When was that? That that happened?

EH: Oh lord, I don't know. I don't remember dates. But let me tell you one thing. Another thing that happened. I was in Kaufmann's store one day, and as I came out on the Fifth Avenue side, I happened to look down Fifth Avenue. And there's a real tall man there, and I said, "Oh that's John Heinz." And I said, "If he's still there I'll speak to him." So when I came out, I went down, and I'm trying to think of this man, who was in Pittsburgh. Very important, very high. But when I was talking to Heinz, this man had his back turned to us. He was talking to someone else. And, Johnny went over and he touched him on the shoulder, he said, "Here, I want you to meet one of the finest ladies I know." And this man turned around, and everything dropped. You can tell he didn't want to meet me. I'm trying to think of his name. But he's big in politics in Pittsburgh. Don't get old you forget (EH Laughs).

MS: So what was Fallingwater like to live at? Was it a comfortable place to be?

EH: Well, I spent a lot of time with the Mennonites. I've been at their place four; I thought it was four times. But they said no, I've been there six times. You know, the Mennonites aren't too far from Fallingwater. And when I'm with the Mennonites, one of the top men from Fallingwater always comes over to give me a little moral support. And, he told me, he said, "Elsie," he says, "your bedroom is now my office." So I said, "Well you got a nice office."

KP: To clarify that. The Mennonite Center is a retreat center, that Rhodes Scholars has a meeting every year when they study architecture, including Fallingwater. So it has nothing do with Fallingwater, necessarily. Elsie why don't you tell him about some of the people that came to Fallingwater.

EH: Oh, the main thing, while I'm thinking about it. When young Kaufmann passed away, they asked me to be there to receive the hundred and twenty-five people that were at his service. His memorial service at Fallingwater. So I was there. Oh my. It was a very sad time, and who must be there but Mrs. Hagan. The Hagans and the Kaufmanns were like this. But I hadn't seen Mrs. Hagan for a long time. And she said, "Elsie," she said, "you did a wonderful job today. Accepting all those people for the memorial service." And I didn't know she passed away not too long ago.

KP: Mrs. Hagan lived in Kentuck Knob that Frank Lloyd Wright designed in the fifties. After Fallingwater.

EH: And when you're in the back of Kentuck, you like look down into a valley. And that house down is where, who was the man who, I'm trying to think of his name. The man who bought Kentuck Knob, the Englishman. You know who I'm talking about?

KP: Mr. Palumbo?

EH: Palumbo. Lord Palumbo. Yes he bought Kentuck. And he always stays in that big house that you look down on. But you could put Kentuck inside of Fallingwater.

KP: You met Frank Lloyd Wright.

EH: Well, I'm trying to think of the year that Fallingwater was flooded. And the water came up to the sofa. The son was home that weekend. And we had to run for our lives up to the guesthouse. So we went up there. That's when he decided to have Frank Lloyd Wright to come in. It took him over two months, I believe to get that cleaned out and in pretty good shape. And then he said, he was going to have Frank Lloyd Wright come in to talk to some of the men on the property. And he said he wanted the men standing there, when Mr. Wright came in. We don't want to keep Mr. Wright waiting. And he said, "Elsie, if you will go to the airport with his top man." So we went, and Mr. Wright came out. When he stepped in the car, he said, "Well young lady," he said, "What do you do at Fallingwater?" I said, "Well I plan the meals and do the baking." And when he stepped [into the] car he said, "Well," he said, "If the food is as good as you look." He's kind of fresh, you know. I thought to myself, "that's why he was in so much trouble with so many women." (Laugh). But he wanted to come through Oakland to see what he called the "ugliest place." And I said, "Mr. Wright, you can't say that. Because when I was a little girl all children in the public schools gave ten cents toward that building. So I, got a big say in it." He said, "Well, it's still ugly."

KP: That was the Cathedral of Learning?

EH: Yes. Oh dear.

MS: When you were cooking at Fallingwater, I'm curious about where all the food was coming from?

EH: Well I tell you, where I live now, down on the corner of Center and Highland, there's a big building that still has the store's name on it. What is the? It was only rich people got their groceries there. They used to say. You know where I mean; it's right on the corner there.

MS: Right.

EH: I had a woman there, who did shopping for me, when I needed anything from a grocery store. And do you know that if she happened to be, maybe in the ladies' room or someplace. Nobody else would talk to me. They were so afraid of getting something of Kaufmann's wrong. You know. Of course, she was on the checkout, or those people who would get a hundred dollars every Christmas. And she was on that. And someone else, that's on the hundred-dollar check. The men at Donegal, where'd you turn off, and everybody liked to be in there around Christmas, because I had to get the names of all the people in those places. Because they all got.

KP: That was the Turnpike place?

EH: Yeah, at the Turnpike. Check for a hundred dollars there. Everyone wanted to be there near Christmas time.

KP: What about Mrs. Kaufmann's dachshunds? The dogs. And how were they fed?

EH: Oh yes. Don't want to forget about them. Mrs. Kaufmann's crazy about the dachshunds. And all of their names began with an "M." And when I first saw them, I asked them, "How can you tell them apart. They all look the same." But you know, when you come to know them, they're just like people. They have their personalities. And the oldest one, all of their names began with an "M." Mucho was the oldest one. Mira, but I don't remember; they were all "M." But, Mucho was the oldest one, and when Kaufmanns were in Palm Springs for the winter, Mr. Kaufmann would always call and he said, "Elsie," he said, "How's Mucho?" And I said, "Well his hind legs are dragging a bit." And Mr. Kaufmann says, "Well let's wait until the end of the week. And if he isn't any better, have Jones fly him out." He said, "I think the sunshine will do him good." You have to fly a dog to Palm Springs. I said, "Mucho, you know what, you may be going to Palm Springs." And Mucho says, "Ughhh, Ughhh, Ughhh!"

KP: But Elsie, what about their own chef for the dogs?

EH: Oh yes. We had a man. He died about three years ago. That leaves me the only one in all that [unclear]. Simon Burnworth, who was born and raised up there in Fayette County. And his job, I think, Fallingwater, was the only job he ever had. He came there, and he died up there, three or four years ago. When he came in the morning, he would stop at the greenhouse. And they had rooms there. One room for dogs' frozen roasted beef and then I had room there for everything that was put up. And let me see, Simon, when he came in in the morning, he would stop at the greenhouse, and get the roasted beef for the dogs. He would come down and put that on. And cook it slowly, while that is on, he would go through the whole house, and check every room to see if there was a leak in the windows. And then, he would feed the dogs later on. And then before he left, about four, or five he would recheck every room in Fallingwater, again, before he left. So there wouldn't be any leaks or anything wrong, he would know about it. So there was the only job Simon had. And he died up there.

MS: Did you, cook at Fallingwater until Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. sold it?

EH: Yes.

KP: Excuse me, he didn't sell it. It was donated to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

EH: The Western Conservancy. But I tell you, out of all the people that I have been with. The ones who have mistreated me is Fallingwater. About two months ago, I get a letter

from them, and there's a check in there for two hundred and fifty dollars. It's the only thing they ever gave me.

MS: The Conservancy?

EH: No, let me tell you what happened. If you were on Kaufmann's personal staff, when he died, you got fifty thousand dollars. You know about Nate Smith? Nate Smith and the Kaufmanns were like this. They even had an office for him in Pittsburgh. When Nate is under Kaufmann Sr. and when Senior died, that I'm trying to think of this woman's name. But there was a woman, who would call me every couple months, and she'd say, "Elsie," she said, "get your bills together. I will be out tomorrow." And she came out, at one point, and she said, "Nate Smith is coming with me." I said, "That's good I haven't seen him for a long time." He came with her. And people would say to me, "Oh my if someone comes to pay your bills you can just buy that." I said, "I would never think of doing anything like that." It was something that I needed, or maybe a little something that I wanted, but to go overboard. So Nate came with her, this particular time, and he said to me, "Elsie," he said, "when Senior died," he said, "He got his fifty thousand." And he says, "When Junior dies," he said, "as crazy as the Kaufmanns were about you, you'll probably get more." But you know young Kaufmann was homosexual. And the man that he was with, if you would put a black wig on him, he could pass for, Elizabeth. What's her name?

KP: I don't know?

EH: Who's the most beautiful movie star? Elizabeth?

MS: Taylor.

KP: Taylor.

EH: He could pass for Elizabeth Taylor's twin. That's how pretty he was. So when, young Kaufmann died, Nate Smith said to me, he said, "Elsie," he said, "You'll probably get more money than I did." Paul Mayén, who was Kaufmann's friend, took over, and now I'm under Mayén, and when young Kaufmann died, he called me and he said, "Elsie," he said, "before Kaufmann died" he gave him a list of names that he wanted Paul to take care, "so they would never be in need." He said, "Your name was at the top of the list." He sent me a check for ten thousand dollars. I'm saying to myself, "Where's the forty thousand?" You know I've seen it, you've seen it. And someone says to me, "Elsie," he says, "you know what. Everything happens for the best. When you hit the numbers for all that money." They said, "It takes up for the way the Conservancy has mistreated you." So two months ago, when I get this check for two hundred and fifty dollars. It's all I ever got from them. And someone says to me, "You should see an attorney. Somebody's got forty thousand dollars of your money. And you know who has it." Paul's nephew, who is just filthy with money. And when they send out their magazine, you know the Conservancy magazine, every two months or so. I almost had a heart attack, because, when I looked in their one day, I see Paul's nephew is on the board for the Conservancy. And then they had

a big affair, the museum in Pittsburgh. For many years I've been good friends with Beverly Schins (?), a black lady who's married to a German. Schins, who was a professor at Carnegie Mellon, they take me lots of place. So we went to this fair, the museum. And I'm trying to think who it was, had just written a book, and that's what this affair was about. And this man with the book, he said, "People in Pittsburgh were saying that when Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. died, he was broke. He didn't have any money." He said it's not true. He said he had at least eighty-seven million dollars. And then he said, "Is Elsie Henderson in the audience?" And the professor started laughing, and they said, "Stand up!" And I almost had a heart attack. But, Paul Mayén, his nephew, has had use of the forty thousand, so. I just said "Thank you Lord!" Because that hit covered it, if nobody else ever does.

MS: Did you have other cooking jobs after Fallingwater?

EH: No, I didn't do too much of anything. I tell you, I was friends with most everybody in Sewickley Heights. If they knew, that I was off two or three days, they would drive me crazy. And one of them that I went to all of the time was a family by the name of Painter. You know there was a Painter Steel Mill in Pittsburgh, many, many years ago. That's who these people were. And Mrs. Painter, all of the big people in Sewickley Heights, behind her back, they would kind of laugh at her. And she was famous for giving dinner parties. And I met a black man who lived in Sewickley, and he was a butler for a lot of these rich people. And I discovered that we worked very well together. So this Mrs. Painter was having a dinner party, and William, this man he had been at her place before. And everything was ready for this dinner party, and this Mrs. Painter, she was a little hyper, like the rich people in Sewickley knew her. And she'd come out to the pantry, she says, "Now William," she says, "I want you to be very careful with this service we're using this evening." And William, coming from the South, you know, he said, "Mrs. Painter," he said "if I break anything I'll tell you about it. And I'll pay ya for it." He couldn't pay for those dishes. She says, "William, I love you dearly," she says, "but if you break one of these dishes tonight," she says, "I'll never speak to you again." She said, "Do you realize the service we are using tonight belonged to the Emperor Napoleon, when he was he exiled on the Island of Elba." And William said, "Island of What?" (EH laughs) William didn't understand about history, but he was a good butler. But I tell you, the Painters passed away. They had a beautiful estate. And there's another family there. But, when I had three or four days, I was with them, and they always paid me double, of what they had their live-in cook at that time. So it has been something.

KP: When you worked for the Mellons, Elsie, you had a summer off?

EH: Oh I don't want to miss this one. I was with one of the Mellon's sons, and they couldn't keep a staff. They were nastiest people I have ever met. And the people just hated them. And the only way, they could keep a staff every summer; you got three months vacation with pay. Not three weeks, three months. It's the only way they could keep anyone. And when my three months came, I don't how this happened, but I was contacted by the, I'm trying to think of the name of these people. (To KP), Do you remember that name?

KP: The Kennedys? You mean Hyannis Port?

EH: But it was someone in the United States that had put me next to the Kennedys.

KP: I don't know.

EH: And I was asked if I would, substitute for Kennedy's French chef, while he was on vacation for the three months. So I went with, the Shrivvers first, who were nasty beyond belief. Eunice never spoke to me the whole time I was there. Until finally one day I said to her; I said, "How do you expect me to order?" I says, "You haven't even spoken to me." That didn't mean anything, she still didn't speak. And her sons at that time were young, like maybe sixteen and seventeen, and they were; they gave the police a fit in Hyannis. They were doing all kinds of terrible things. This particular time, if I baked a dessert; it's getting near dinnertime, I was putting out my dessert, if I could sit it out on the buffet. And the butler came to me and he says, "Elise," he said, "did you see your dessert?" And I says, "No." And when I went and looked, those boys had dug into it, with their hands. And the butler he's all upset and everything, he said, "What your going to do about dessert?" She liked to serve the dessert, you know he would take the plates, and set it in front of them. I said, "Don't worry." So when it came time to serve the dessert, I took it in, and sat it in front of her, and I said to her; I said, "If your sons ever do anything, to anything that I have baked, ever again," I said, "I will be on the first bus out of Hyannis." And she went, but she never said anything. Now this is the only time she ever spoke to me. She was getting ready to have her last child. And she had been to the hospital in Boston. I don't know why they didn't keep her there. And she came home, with all the Secret Service and everything there. There was, I'm trying to think, the name of this person. But anyhow, this particular day, it was only the laundress and myself that was in the house. And the laundress says to me as she comes down for breakfast. I said, "Even though she doesn't speak to me," I says, "I'll go up to see what's happening." So I went up, and she was in bed. She was moaning, "Uh! Call Ethel! Call Joan!" She moaned everyone. I said, "I can only call one. Do you want your mother?" "Yes!" She's speaking to me now. So I called over there, what they call the big house. And the mother, this is first time I saw Rose, when she came over. Shall I show him what she did? (EH laughs)

KP: Um-hum.

EH: She came in the backdoor, and she got close to me. She did this. Look me up and down like I'm dirt. She never said "Good morning," or "Kiss my behind," or anything. I'm thinking to myself, "This is the great Rose Kennedy. Who goes to church every day. All this money and everything, but no manners." And Shriver, they came up one weekend, and I asked his bodyguard, I said, "What happened to your folks last week? We were expecting you?" And the man says to me, well, he says, "I know you won't say anything," He says, "When Shriver is expected up here with Eunice, and he doesn't show up," he says, "He makes certain that Eunice is there. And then he has women live in with him over the weekend." I'm telling you they are really something.

KP: But you have wonderful things, in memory about Mrs. Ethel Kennedy?

EH: Oh Ethel. Ethel is the nicest one in that family. She had a woman who had been with her for close to twenty years. And I met her, and I was over at Ethel's several times. And this woman, she thought that her health was failing, and one day she said to Ethel. She said, she thought she should go into a nursing home. And Ethel put her hands on her hips, and she says, "Nina," she says, "When you die," she says, "You'll die in my house." And that's exactly what happened. And Ethel brought all of her relatives from all over into Hyannis. And put them up into a hotel, until after the funeral. And Ethel's sons were pallbearers. Ethel was like the Kaufmanns.

KP: When Edgar Junior invited you to New York sometime. And he had an apartment house there. There were some very prominent people who lived at that apartment.

EH: Oh yes. I'll tell you where he was. He was at 450 East 52nd Street across the street from the River Club that did not allow Jews in there. And guess who's been in there for years now? What's his name? I can't think of his name. His big in Jew and politics, but he's been in there for years now. So they changed their policy long time ago. I can't think of his name. Oh dear. And, I would go several times to New York, when young Kaufmann had very important people coming. And, I'm still trying to think of this man's name. And young Kaufmann said to me, he said, "Here over cross the street at the River Club, no Jews, and no blacks, could even work there." Henry Kissinger, he's been in there for years. Yeah, Kissinger, Henry Kissinger; he's pretty well up in age now is he?

KP: But, two prominent actors lived there?

EH: Well, when I would go over, this huge apartment house at 450 East 52nd Street is directly across from the River Club, and I discovered young Kaufmann owned the building. And all of his tenants were big time people. All the movie stars, had apartments there. I'm trying to think of what some of the names.

KP: Well, Greta Garbo.

EH: Greta Garbo, lived there. And Mary Martin. There was a whole host of very famous.

KP: And that was the time when she was really in South Pacific, and in Sound of Music.

EH: Yeah.

KP: So Mr. Kaufmann must have known her well.

EH: And then he would say to me, "Elsie, do you want to go shopping, before you go back home?" And I said, "Yes. I'm too well raised to refuse." So I said, "Give me your charge card." He said, "Elsie," he said, "you've been around here for ages." He said, "You know where everything is." Which I did, because I'm looking into everything. So I would go to Bergdorf Goodman's or Bomitella [?]. And, when I'm just walking around, looking

there's, some of the sales people in there, they're looking at me. They think I'm going to steal something, you know. Until one of them got on my nerves, so I asked her, I says, "Can I help you?" But I really didn't want anything, but I'd buy a little something. You know. And then when I showed them Edgar Kaufmann's charge cards, the attitude changed. They eat me up. I said, "Why are people like that?" Of course, I know why they're like that. (EH Laughs)

KP: You know, is it clear that you didn't live at Fallingwater? It was only their weekend residence, and that's when you were there Elsie, just for weekends right?

EH: Oh just weekends. And the good thing about that is, sometimes you wouldn't see Kaufmanns for weeks and weeks at a time, but your money keeps rolling.

KP: What about the time when the people from England came. And they were so complimentary.

EH: Oh well, young Kaufmann got to the point that he wasn't at home, at all. He said, "Elise you've been around here a hundred years. It's yours." So he says, "But next week were having very important people from England." He said, "But I won't be here." I said, "As usual," because it's easier for me to talk to him, than it is to talk to you. And I almost had a heart attack, when he told me who they were. It was the equerry and lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth. So, they came and I had them for five days, because I have all the help that I need, and my other Elsie, you know, she's still there. And then there's always another woman that I can depend on. If I can't get there in time, they know how I love the salads done. They know how to do it. And, I had them for five days, and the top chauffer was there, and we took them all around Fayette County. And when they got ready to leave, you know their accent? The lady-in-waiting says (imitating English accent), "Oh this it's a marvelous town. " She says, "We don't have this kind of service in Buckingham Palace." (End imitation English accent). I said "Oh Lord!"

MS: That's quite a compliment.

EH: Oh dear. I tell you another famous guest we had there. The birdman, what was his name?

KP: It wasn't Audubon it's the other one. I can't remember.

EH: I can't think of it, but when he was there, you couldn't get in there for television people, who came to Fallingwater to interview him. I can't think of his name.

KP: Yes, he was invited for a week to do his paintings. And have a rest. What was his name?

EH: And, let me see.

KP: Well you know Einstein was there one time.

EH: Who?

KP: Einstein came there. But not while you were there.

EH: But that was before my time.

KP: Before your time.

EH: There were a lot of them that were before my time. This Frida Kahlo, wasn't she a Spanish or something?

MS: Mexican, I think.

KP: She was the wife of Diego Rivera, is it? Yeah.

EH: Who was the world famous violinist?

KP: Yes, he was there.

EH: What was his name?

KP: He's contemporary violinist. I know you know it.

EH: I'm trying to think.

KP: Couldn't remember it. Write it down. Anyway, maybe you'll think of it. But you know, the Kaufmann's were so generous. And remember how they even had a building for their women employees. On Fallingwater property, before Fallingwater was built.

EH: There was a name for it. But listen, their head gardener, had been with them for, oh I don't know, how many years. But, at vacation time, he went somewhere to visit his daughter, and he passed away there. He had been with Kaufmanns for almost thirty years. And they're upset because what are they going to do about a gardener. They finally found a man. I believe he was from Ohio. And he said he was ready to come, when Kaufmanns were ready for him. And Junior says, "They could stay in the guest house." No, Mr. Kaufmann said they could stay in the guesthouse. And Junior put his foot down and said, "No!" He said, "Let them wait, until I build a house for them." So the weekends that young Kaufmann came to Fallingwater, you couldn't walk in the living room, because he and Paul Mayén had all these things laying out on the floor, designed for the house you know. So they built the house. It was about two months, and Mr. Kaufmann said, "Put this new man on salary." But he didn't want him on the property. Let him wait until he built a house. And he's on salary. George Greene, his name was. So when the house was ready, he and his wife they came. And, she had charge of all of my jelly making, because I'm not a jelly person. Mrs. Greene was; that was what she did. And when the house was flooded, I guess maybe, a couple weeks before, she had placed all of her jellies in the

basement. And all of that had to be thrown out, because the water was up to the ceiling in the basement. What a waste.

MS: Well thank you so much for chatting with us today. Do you have any other questions, Kitty?

KP: Um...well an interesting thing about Pittsburgh, which is what we're here for, is because the Kaufmanns were Jewish, they weren't permitted to be in the country clubs, certainly the Duquesne Clubs. So do you think that's a reason for them to want to go way out to Mill Valley, sixty miles away from Pittsburgh to have their weekend retreat?

EH: Well there was a limit to where Jews and blacks could go. You weren't allowed at all. But let me tell you, when my book came out, Suzanne, you know Suzanne Martin. She come, and she says "Elsie," she says, "There are some women from the *Washington Post*. Washington, D.C., that want to meet you, and they're coming to Pittsburgh. And they are going to be at the Duquesne Club." And I said, "No, no, no." She said, "Elsie that's all changed now. Blacks are allowed to work there and be there, you know." So I said, "Well, I'll tell you what, I haven't asked them to allow me to come. They have asked me. So, I'll go." So we had a big luncheon there, and these women from the *Washington Post*, they were in Pittsburgh. The menu, you've never seen such a menu. But anyhow, when I look around I'm the only dark face in the Duquesne Club. And when the affair was over, just before it was over, there was some woman from Sewickley Heights, came up to me with the biggest bowl of flowers I've ever seen. And the only way, I could get it home, Suzanne Martin's husband, who was alive then, and he carried it.

MS: You received a lot attention for that wonderful cookbook?

EH: Yes, from '08. "The Best Cookbook In Pittsburgh." "The Best Cookbook in Europe." It won the Gourmand Award that they give out once a year. You got those papers. I said, "I think I've just about send everything to you, but you can't walk in my apartment. And if I come across other things, that I haven't send, I'll send."

MS: Good to know thank you.

KP: Well a question, that's rather interesting. Elsie, do you remember the Depression? You know, you were only thirteen, sixteen; in your teenage years. That would have affected not only your family, but everybody's family. But particularly yours. Do you remember anything about it?

EH: I don't remember.

KP: Pretty early in life.

MS: Is there anything else we haven't talked about, that you'd like to add?

EH: I'm trying to think. I think we've covered most, and I signed that; what you sent to me.

MS: Well thank you so much, I think this will be wonderful oral history to have here at the History Center.

End of Interview