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**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Rosemary Higley, Age 67, Emmetsburg, Iowa
Mike Hicklin
Emmetsburg, Iowa
10-21-2010**

Mike Hicklin: Today we're interviewing Rosemary Higley from Emmetsburg, Iowa in Rosemary's home here in Emmetsburg. The date is October 21, 2010, and it's approximately 5:45 p.m. My name is Mike Hicklin.

Rosemary and I and our spouses have been friends for 35 years, at least. The purpose for the interview is that this interview is part of the Iowa Department for the Blind's History of Blindness in Iowa Oral History Project. Rosy, do I have your consent to record this interview?

Rosemary Higley: Yes, I do give my consent for the Iowa Department of the Blind to use this interview.

Hicklin: Thank you. What stories would you like to tell us?

Higley: Well, I have lots of stories to tell, because I am 67 years old, and I have been blind since the age of 28, is when I found out what my visual problem was. Now, I thought this was normal when my husband and I started to date. I would walk into theaters or walk into dark restaurants, and there would be a person that was sitting in that chair, and I would not know it. So, I'm probably the only person in the world that walked into a theater with a date and sat on somebody else's lap. This happened quite frequently, but my husband finally decided, well, my husband today, he wasn't at that time, decided that I needed more guidance and also he would apologize to the person that I was offending. Some of the experiences that I've had, I want to thank the Department of the Blind and the people for making my life enjoyable to live. Because, the training that I received there gave me the courage to be able to do the things that I have done throughout my life.

Some of the experiences that I have done, is when our youngest child started school, the clothes that he grew out of, I had given to a neighbor. Well, that neighbor boy wore those clothes on adult visitation day to school. And, it was

our younger son then that I was visiting that day in school, and this child happened to attend that visitation time, too, because his older brother was in school. Well, this younger child wearing the clothes that we had given away, decided to get up and disrupt the classroom. Well, I was totally shocked that this child was doing that, and I had forgotten that I had given the clothes away. And, of course, my lack of vision did not let me see this boy's face. So, when he come by me I grabbed him, knowing the shirt, put him across my lap, and went to paddle him, when I decided this wasn't my child that I was about to paddle. (Laughter)

Hicklin: I'll bet he was surprised, too.

Higley: He stopped running around the classroom, yes. And, another experience I had was when we went to church; this is quite a few years later. We went to church. Patrick would always open the door and I would walk through the doorway, and my eyes would never ever adjust to the darkness from the sunlight very fast. And so, I would walk in and stand to the left of the door. Patrick would walk in behind me, and walk over to my left side. I would take his arm and we would walk into the church area to find a pew to sit. Well, one Sunday, Patrick decided to keep the door open, so that he could let the elderly ladies that were walking behind us come in. Well, I thought Patrick was standing beside me, so I grabbed the first arm that was there. And, this gentleman was so nice, he didn't say a thing, he just let me hang on to his arm. And, finally, this voice standing directly in front of me was Patrick and he said, "Are you ready to go into church, Rose?" And, let me

tell you, who goes to church to pickup somebody else's husband?

But, those are some of the experiences and also, these people are very, very kind to you. But, I do use the cane and I wouldn't go anywhere without my cane, because it tells the people the reason I do these things. Now, one day I was walking. Well, I volunteered my time at the Senior Center in Spencer, while my husband was collecting the information at the Courthouse there. I got to know these people, and enjoy these people quite well. Well, Patrick had come and it was time for us to leave, and so I walked the hallway in the shopping center down to get to my car. And, Patrick had driven the car right up to the door, and I heard this man say, "Ma'am, ma'am," and I thought, well, there's a lot of people in this shopping center, so he's not talking to me. Well, little did I know he just kept saying, "Ma'am, ma'am." And, I turned and I said, "Sir, are you talking to me?" And, he said, "Yes, I am." And, I said, "Well, may I help you?" And, he said, "I didn't think I was going to get you stopped. There's a sign in front of you that says wet concrete, please do not walk here." And, I wouldn't have seen that sign if it wasn't for that lovely gentleman. I would have had both feet planted in the concrete, and my shoes ruined along with the sidewalk that they had so nicely finished there.

Another time was when I was shopping, and we went into this store. And, it was a ladies store, and so Patrick said to me, "Are you going to be okay here," and I said, "Oh sure, there's no problem. I see where my size is." It was a sale day, and so there was a lot of people that was there around the rack where I was at, but I still felt very comfortable there. And so, I found this beautiful blouse that I thought was just really neat. And, I thought, well, the only

way that blind people can really tell if something is what they want is they have to feel it. So, I reached for this lovely blouse to feel the material, and the blouse moved. It was on somebody. So, thankfully, I was carrying my cane, and the good Lord kept me from feeling the blouse, as this lady moved just at the right time.

Another story is when we were shopping, and we were going down this long corridor in the store and there was very few people there. Now, the best time for a blind person to shop is on Monday morning, because there's very few people at the stores. So, Patrick and I were walking down this aisle, and Patrick wears boots, so you can always hear him walking. And, of course, every wife knows their husband's walk. So, Patrick decided to stop and shop, but he didn't tell me. And, the guy behind him was wearing boots also. So, I just slowed down and I waited for the boots to catch up with me, and they did. So, I'm just walking along, talking and jabbering to what I think is my husband. And, pretty soon these boots are picking up pace, and they're going quite fast. And so, well hey, I can keep up with this; there's no problem, I'm used to doing this. So, I'm caning all the faster and this poor guy is just almost on a dead run. And, I'm keeping up with him, and so finally I looked up to him and said, "Patrick, why are we going so fast, the kids are raised?" This poor guy couldn't get rid of me. He was trying as hard as he could, and he thought he was going to have to take me home with him. But, like I said, I have my cane, so they know why.

Some of the experiences I've had too throughout life is, my husband was a farmer, and we have three children. And, when the children were being raised, well, we had beans most of the time when we farmed, soybeans. And so, I

would go out into the field with the kids and carry my corn knife along with the kids. Well, the kids were like seven, eight and twelve when we were walking these beans. Well, the story was if Mom will take her rows, but if you let me miss a weed, you have to go back after it, not Mom. So, the kids made sure I got every weed. And, of course, every weed that was left in the field had to be the kids' weeds, not Mom's, right? (Laughter)

Hicklin: Sounds good to me.

Higley: So, and some of the other experiences I've had...Now, for hobbies. I do read; I sew; I crochet; I do all the books for the businesses on the computer, which I enter all the material for the income tax records and give that to our CPA. Patrick doesn't like that part of the business, so that's always been my job for the last 42 years that we've been married.

Hicklin: What kind of businesses have you been involved in over the years, Rosy?

Higley: We have had, of course, we farmed. And, we had an upholstery business, of which I sewed. So, basically, I taught Patrick and the other employee how to do the sewing with the upholstery business. We have rental property, of which I did the bookkeeping with the rental property. Patrick did the physical work with that. Also, I would interview the tenants before they rented. And, he did the courthouse report for two counties here in Northwest Iowa.

Hicklin: What is a courthouse report? What does that entail?

Higley: That's all the public information that is at the courthouse is compiled and made into a booklet form, and then mailed to people that subscribe to it. So, they have to order it. It would be like a newspaper, to where they would order it and then we would compile that. And, Patrick would bring the information home from the courthouse, and I was the one that typed it on the computer and did the format part of it. And, this was a weekly publication.

15:00

Hicklin: Is this like when people bought or sold property, or what kind of records are we talking about?

Higley: It would be the sale of town and farm deeds, the mortgages, the mortgage releases, leans on property. It would be all court cases, which would be district, magistrate, marriage license, death solutions, births, traffic violations. And so, it was quite a booklet. Anything that was public information in the courthouse was what he published.

Hicklin: Sounds like an awfully lot of typing.

Higley: There was a lot of midnight oil burned there. And, it was fun, but it kept us busy, and hey, it kept the bills paid. So, that's important also.

The cane travel was absolutely an essential thing for me, which was taught by the Department of the Blind. I had

three small children, and my husband had problems; circulation problems and health problems with blood clots. And, he was hospitalized a month every year, usually the month of November. So, the Department of the Blind would come up and taught me cane travel, because Patrick was going to be hospitalized in Rochester, Minnesota and possibly have surgery. I was taught the cane travel, and of course, our kids were very young. We even had one preschooler. So, the neighbor was going to take care of the children, and I took post-its with me to Rochester. Now, I'm sure the janitor would have removed it, but the post-its were going to say turn here Rosemary; turn left to be able to find my way around the Mayo Clinic if they hospitalized Patrick, or the hospital up there also. So, this was short. And, the Department taught me cane travel.

And, they also taught me some techniques for the house, but the best teachers you have are your own children. Because, they knew that I was blind, so the punishment that I would give them when they did something wrong, is I'd say you will have to go to your bed for a half hour or 45 minutes, whatever for the punishment. And, of course, I would be sitting at the table and the kids would have to walk by me. Well, they would wait until my head was turned, and they would sneak by me. And, of course, you could hear their blue jeans rustle by you. So, they got another hour punishment, because I knew which one it was that was leaving. So, they think that they can get by, but they really can't. And, of course, you know, maybe they did fool me once in a while. But, they always told me that I caught them, and it wasn't worth the punishment they had to go through.

Hicklin: Sounds like they learned early that mom had really good hearing.

Higley: Yes, and that's another thing, also, is that they say that your other senses do pick up. Well, that's true; they do. But, I think it's through the training, because you depend on your other senses to be able to compensate for the lack of vision that you do have.

Now, my daughter got married when she was 23, and so by this time, I had been blind with Retinitis Pigmentosa, was what the diagnosis was for 20 years or so, or like 25 years I think. And, we just have the one daughter, and so she asked me if I would make her wedding gown. And, I said, "Well, I will make your wedding gown, but you know, please give me six months to be able to do it." So, she said yes, there's no problem with that. So, she went to town shopping and brought home five patterns to make this one wedding gown, and so it was quite a challenge with that. But, she said, "Mom, I have to have this neckline," and, "Mom, I want a heart in the back of the dress, and I want the pointed sleeves, and I want netting in the front of the dress." And so, then she took the pattern that we had decided on with the train, and she spread it in the living room, and she cut the pattern in half, because she said, "I want to extend this train seven foot mom, so that we can go ahead and cut up a heart in the train, so that I can write in this heart I Love B.J.," which is her husband's name. And, she gave all of that to me and said, "Mom I'm going to college." And so, we were able to get this dress done, this gown done.

And so, then she come home and she said, "I have five brides maids, Mom, would you be able to make their dresses for the wedding?" And, I said, well, yeah I would be able to.

So, I made the five bridesmaid dresses, also, and then two weeks before the wedding, she come home and said, “Mom, one of the girls cannot show up to be a bridesmaid.” So, I thought, well fine, this is great we’ll have four bridesmaids instead of five. And, she said, “But, I have another friend, and she said she would be bridesmaid, so can you make another brides maid dress?” And, I said yes I have the time and I would be able to do so. So, I made another bridesmaid dress and the gal come a week before the wedding to try it on.

And, the bridesmaid dresses had one strap that went across the left shoulder. Well, that bridesmaid tried the dress on backwards and I went over to inspect it. And, when she came out of the bedroom showing me the dress, so I would be able to hem it at the same length that all the other bridesmaid dresses were, she had the strap on the wrong shoulder. And, my old heart just sunk, thinking, oh no, I have to make another dress right away. Well, I went over to the bridesmaid, and she had the dress on backwards, fortunately. So, all we had to do, is she had to try the dress on the other way. We hemmed the dress, and the wedding went on just as it was suppose to. And, I only have one daughter, and that’s what I kept saying the whole time we were preparing for the wedding. Thank you, Lord, for giving us just one daughter.

Hicklin: When you’re sewing, Rosy, do you sew by hand, or do you use an electric sewing machine? And, like, how do you follow patterns and what skills have you developed for that?

Higley: Well, you...

Hicklin: Any secrets?

Higley: Yes. When you cutout a pattern you have to be very patient, because you have to follow the solid black line, and I also altered. So, I made a lot of my own patterns with them. So, I made them so where they were convenient for me. Now, after I lost vision, my husband went and bought me a magnet that would have a gauge on it, to where it would be raised and I would be able to put that magnet on the 5/8 inch seam, so I could not see the 5/8 inch gauge and the needle. So, I would just guide along the gauge that he had bought me. And, you soon learn techniques to where you can do these things, and enjoy it. And, that's what the Department also taught, is these techniques are to enjoy life; to be able to enjoy just like everybody else enjoys. And, believe me, I do.

Hicklin: I've seen pictures of the wedding gowns and they were just beautifully done. It's remarkable. It looks like something, particularly the bride's dress, looks like something that would have cost thousands of dollars to buy.

Higley: Well, thank you. Now, it was thousands of hours, not dollars. Yes, and I did enjoy that. That was something that was important to her, and she still has the dress and her daughters are talking about being able to wear that when they get married also.

We used to have poodle dogs when we lived out on the farm. Now, the poodles were very attentive to me, because I was a stay-at-home mom. I used to say I was the house plant, because I stayed at home to raise the kids, and really

enjoyed it. But, the poodles were just toy poodles, and they suddenly learned, and each one of them did this. When they stayed home with me they either had to stay asleep on a chair, or I had one shelf that was on our entertainment center at home that had a doily on it, and this is where the dogs would sleep when I was around home and they wanted some rest. They always stayed in the same room with me, but they also stayed up off the floor, so that I didn't kick them.

Hicklin: I can appreciate as a housewife you had a lot of other things going on, like helping with the farming and all the other business enterprises; and you were one very busy person. And, a mom to three, which is, to most of us would be very challenging.

Higley: I enjoyed, that was my enjoyment. And, I never felt that my blindness was a detriment or a handicap. It was just something that all of us had to adjust to, and if we wanted to live and enjoy, we did do so. And, that's what we're doing today also.

My husband and I do some traveling now that we're retired. And, three years ago I come down with stage four breast cancer and was told in Rochester Mayo Clinic that I had two to three weeks to live. Now, I did go on a special detox diet when I come home from there that was setup by my children and my husband. And, today, which it will be three years in March, this coming March that I was diagnosed. And, they won't tell me I'm cancer-free, but they will tell me that if I don't do this or that my cancer will come back. So, basically they're telling me that I am cancer-free, and I have no pain today, and I'm enjoying life.

Hicklin: That's excellent.

Higley: Thank you.

Hicklin: You've always been just an extremely resourceful, energetic person since we've known you over the years.

Higley: Thank you. Other things that I have done; when we had the farm crisis, my husband took odd jobs in town. One of them was court bailiff at the courthouse. And, we raised a large garden, and so I would do the canning. And, there was one year where I canned a thousand jars of fruits and vegetables and pickles; and if it grew we canned it. And, my husband would have to go through the produce and make sure that it was good produce and stuff, but other than that, I did all of the canning and freezing, because everybody...Either somebody was in school or Patrick was in town working, also. So, the canning was up to me and it was fun. And, hey, you do what you have to do, so you do it.

(End of Recording 1)

31:27

(Beginning of Recording 2)

Higley: When we were first married, well, I guess it was after the three children were born, and I was a full-fledged housewife. I decided that we had a very large home and that we could accommodate our children, and so we had nine foster children that we helped to raise for several years

also. These were emergency cases, to where the police would call us at night and say we have a foster child here that needs a home. And so, we would take that child and raise it right with our own children. So, we had nine of these foster children throughout the years that we have raised with our kids, which was very beneficial to all of us. It wasn't just for the foster children.

Now, later in years, I decided that I should be able to give back to the blind people that are coming up in this world that haven't been diagnosed, or the younger children, or even older people if they're bored and if they're blind also. So, I would give blind talks throughout the community to be able to tell people how I had adjusted to blindness. Now, I also was on two of the boards, that is, with the Department of the Blind in Des Moines. One of them was the Independent Living Advisory Board, and I was also one of the original members that helped get the Friends for the Iowa Department of the Blind and Physically Handicapped off the ground, and be able to get that organization running along with seven other people.

Now, I did have to resign both of these boards due to my cancer that I had three years ago, but I enjoyed that very much. And, I do do as much with the Friends. They have, you know, a garage sale, and we try to make it down there to take things for the garage sale; and also to work the garage sale, so that we can use these funds to help the Library for the Department of the Blind. And, a lot of these funds are used for Bibles, because the state is not able to contribute any money for any Bibles due to the separation of church and state. So, this is a very worthwhile project. And, also the Independent Living Board is a very rewarding

project that I was able to work with those people for a few years also.

Hicklin: Rumor has it, Rosy, that when Rosy shows up at the Friends garage sale, that you usually bring at least one truck load of good usable resalable items with you. So, it's a lot of fun.

Higley: Well, yes, we do enjoy it, and it's also fun to see people carry the things away. Patrick would just unload some things from the vehicle when we would go down there, and before he would get the vehicle unloaded, we would have some of the items sold and they were walking to a different car, which was, it was a very enjoyable time.

Hicklin: And, certainly very much appreciated.

Higley: Good, thank you.

(End of Recording 2)

4:57

(Beginning of Recording 3)

Hicklin: Well, Rosy, I think the train has now passed. Let's continue.

Higley: Okay. Another thing that we did do. We live in a small town and there's like 3,500 in our town here. Our counties are small, too. So, we started a support group for blind people, so that we would be able to get them all together. And, this was very rewarding. We have met some

friends and kept them, and this is how we met Mike and Carolyn Hicklin, and we're still friends today. I have a blind friend that's in West Bend, and she comes over and we swap stories about our blindness and how funny it is, and how we can laugh at these stories. So, these support groups are very, very important. And, we've been very rewarded with these support groups.

Some of the other things that I have done throughout my life is I love to swim. And so, we joined the Wellness Center when that was built in Emmetsburg. And, I would go up and swim every day. Well, when I got my cancer, which the way I found out about my cancer is we went out to the farm and the farmhouse had to be re-sided. So, I took a crowbar, and the house was a ranch house on three sides. And, I removed the bottom four boards of the siding. Well, I had...the tenants out there were not to have a dog, but they did have a dog. And, the reason I fell is this dog had dug a large hole on the east side of the house, and I fell down, stepping in this hole. Well, then I had to go for x-rays to find out what the problem was. So, tearing off the siding was a blessing in disguise, because it did find my cancer. But, you know what? I still got those four boards removed off the whole side of the house, except for the second story on the west side. So, you can do whatever you set your mind to do.

Blindness doesn't keep you from doing, it just gives you different techniques, or you have to find different techniques to be able to do. And, like I said, I had to stop swimming, when I got my cancer, because I had to be wheelchaired around my apartment. My husband had to help me out of the chair, and then he would help me get into a wheelchair, and then he would wheelchair me to my bed or to the restroom, or the table to be able to eat. Well, after I was diagnosed in

March; in July, I was back in the swimming pool, and I had to use a walker to get to the pool. Well, shortly thereafter, with much determination, I was able to build myself up to where I could swim 45 minutes every weekday morning, and enjoy it. And, my husband wasn't too happy with this, because I would always line up his honey-do list for the day while I was swimming. So, it was good for me, bad for him.

Hicklin: Pat should be happy that you weren't swimming eight hours a day.

Higley: He was; he was. But, I couldn't have done this without the support of him and our three children, and lots of good friends for a support group behind me.

Hicklin: Well, you certainly have a strong will and a strong desire to get out and do as much as you can do. And, that even helps you when you have cancer.

Higley: Yeah, it did. I wanted to live life. Patrick kind of wanted to protect me, but you have to live life, and enjoy life. And, that's our goal, and our duty to do so. So, thank you Department for the Blind and all the employees, and all the friends for the support, I've really appreciated it.

(End of Recording 3)

6:01

(Beginning of Recoding 4)

Hicklin: Rosy, can you tell me about your kids? You raised three children.

Higley: Yes. Our first born was a daughter, Sherre, and she is a CPA, and she is married to Brian Johnson, which is a very successful insurance agent. They have six children, Bailey, Cheney, Hattie, Kinsey, Asher, and the youngest is Lincoln. And, Sherre is a stay-at-home mom; she is a home school teacher for all six children. Our oldest son is Troy, and he is a chiropractor. He is married to a CPA also, and her name is Josie, and they have two children, Sydney and William, and they live in Minnesota. And, our third child is a son also and his name is Vin, and he's a chiropractor, and he's also married to a chiropractor, Tracy, and so far they do not have children, and they live in Nebraska City.

Hicklin: Sounds like they turned out really well.

Higley: Well, we are very proud of them. And, the grandchildren also, and that's our responsibility to spoil them. We do do a very good job of that, and the children will verify that for us also.

There is one thing that I would like to tell, and that is for any blind person that would happen to listen to that, the philosophy that I have used throughout life is you keep your troubles on one shoulder, and you keep God on the other. And, you live and enjoy life, and you will always, always make it through whatever you try to achieve. It works.

Hicklin: Sounds like really good advice.

Higley: Thank you. We are retired now and we still have apartment houses that Patrick has to maintain, and we have to do the bookwork and stuff, but we do travel a lot. A

couple years ago we went to the Keys in Florida, and we had a beautiful time there, as well as a beautiful time traveling down there. We came home, and I did my cancer treatment, and we took off for the South Padre Island, and spent time down there, as well as McAllen, Texas.

And, then last year I have a brother-in-law that's in Carlsbad, California, that is not as healthy as what we would like him to be. So, Patrick and I left and I think it was like January that we left, and we spent a week in Sedona, Arizona; went on to Yuma, Arizona, and into San Diego, California, and spent a week with my brother-in-law and went to Caliente, Nevada, and spent three days with my aunt. Now, Caliente is north of Las Vegas, and my aunt's 84, and with my cancer. They were afraid that they wouldn't be able to see me, but you know what, I kept up with them, and we're doing just fine.

Now, this fall, we had some maintenance that we had to do on the apartment house, and so we have gotten detained. But, we do want to go to the New England states for a trip. And, I'm not definite when that trip will be. And, of course, Patrick doesn't like Iowa winters, so we're debating which southern direction we go to this winter. But, travel...we both love to travel.

And, while I was in the southern part of the states, I'm used to exercising and swimming every day. So, when you get in a car and you travel, your legs get bombed out. So, we stopped at this convenience store, and we opened the door to go in, and the most wonderful smell hit you. And, they were making homemade pizzas with homemade bread. And so, Patrick said, "Do you want something?" And, I said, "Yes, whatever they're baking, buy it, because it smells really good." And, it was lunch time. So, Patrick was at the

counter. He showed me where the restroom was, and I come out and walked to the front door, or what I thought was the front door, but I was out of everybody's way. And, the clerk happened to see me standing there with a cane, and she dropped everybody at the cash register, which Patrick was off buying the pizza, and she went to Patrick and she said, "Your wife is waiting for you." And so, Patrick had to come and get me, he took me over to the pizza counter. And, the clerk was just very patient taking the money from the eight customers that she had just left standing there, when she went and got Patrick.

So, Patrick took me to the congested pizza counter to order the pizza, and it was so congested there, I said, "Patrick just open the car I want to go stand out by the vehicle, and I want to do some leg exercises." So, he flipped the button on the remote, got the car opened, and I went out to the car and I'm standing there doing some leg lifts, and you know, swinging your arms. I can do the exercises. And, one lady walked out and she said, "Oh you can't get in the car?" So, she went and got Patrick and she said, "Your wife cannot get in the car." And so, Patrick said, "Well she's okay, she's just exercising." Well, he got a dirty look from the other lady, and she came out she said, "Oh no, you can't get in the car?" So, she went and got Patrick, and she said, "Your wife can't get in the car." And so, Patrick comes out to the car and I said, "Yes I know, I'd better get in the car and be a good girl, or you're going to have to take me."

Hicklin: Well, did you ever get your pizza?

Higley: We got the pizza, but my legs were still cramped up, so we had to go to a remote area, just to do my exercising.

But, see, strangers help you, and you will never ever be abused as a blind person, because everybody watches you.

Hicklin: Maybe a lot more than they need to.

Higley: Yes. Yes. We've had some beautiful, wonderful trips. And, like I said, I'm never afraid anywhere, and I do everything that everybody else does. Sometimes you just have to find different techniques. But, I enjoy life, and we both enjoy traveling, and so we're going to do more of that in our retirement years. And, hey, the doctors will just have to catch up to us.

Hicklin: Sounds good. What advice would you have for maybe a newly blinded lady in a small town in rural Iowa? As far as what potential there is for having a good life and making a life. You've certainly lived that, and what advice would you give?

Higley: Just don't ever be afraid to do anything; do everything. And, in a small town, yes the people, when they get to know you they feel so bad that you've lost your eyesight. I did have one friend that I had worked every day with her side by side for four years, and when I moved back to Emmetsburg, she would walk on the opposite side of the street, rather than to meet me face to face, because she just didn't know how to approach any part of my blindness. And, she didn't want...Well, the best thing you can do is to make them speak to you, make them talk to you, and that would be your responsibility to make that happen. Because, they just don't know what to say or how to say it. And, it's your job to make people feel comfortable, but also it's your

responsibility to make sure that the person you're with knows how to help you, because they don't know. But, it's your job to teach them.

And, as far as being able to make it in a small town, it's a beautiful place to live. Just push your pencil when it comes to your finances. You have to, like my husband and I have always done, you have done; the checkbook runs your life, you know. If you want a cup of cappuccino, hey, you have to have the money first. And, you have to save during your years that you're younger, because your health isn't as good when you get older.

**(End of Recording 4)
12:30**

(Beginning of Recording 5)

Higley: Don't be afraid to learn everything. Challenge everything, you know. Challenge computers; they're made for you to use, and don't sit in a corner and waste any minute, because you don't know what tomorrow's going to bring. And, as far as the blindness goes, it's only a challenge. You can do whatever you want to do, just do it.

Hicklin: How do you keep track of all the financial information? All the bookwork and all of the other kinds of information like that that you have to keep track of on your rental properties, and doing all your book-related bookwork, paying bills. How do you accomplish that?

Higley: Okay. Today it's a lot easier than what it was when I first started to do books. That's what I did when I

graduated from high school. I went to Omaha, Nebraska to school for two months, and I had eye problems then, it just wasn't diagnosed, and I didn't realize what other people's vision was like. And so, I assumed I was normal. Well, I went to Omaha, and went to school for two months. Then I took a test and I was hired by the CIA in Washington, D.C., and before I left Omaha, Western Union from New York City come in and tested people. Well, hey, I had nothing to lose, so I took that test too, and passed it and was hired by Western Union. Well, Western Union paid more than what the CIA in Washington, D.C. paid. So, I took the job in New York City, and went out there, and they put us through school for six weeks to learn their routine for their business. And, I lived there for two years. And, like I said, I had visual problems then, too, but you just do whatever you have to do to accomplish what you want to accomplish, and you find different techniques to do so.

Well, after I worked out there for two years, well, then I moved back home because my mother had health problems. So, I wanted to help with that. And, I got a job as deputy county auditor at the courthouse here, and I worked there for four years. Well, I decided I hadn't been to the west coast and I wanted to go there before I got married. So, I just quit my job and got in my car, which I did have a driver's license at that time, and drove to San Francisco, California, and got a job and worked there for two years; saw the sites, and flew wherever I wanted to fly for vacations, and see the western part of the United States.

And, then I decided to move back home because I was getting married to a guy that was from Emmetsburg, and I couldn't find a guy in San Francisco. So, I come home and got married and we stayed in Omaha, and he was the deputy

sheriff, and there's where we decided that he was a deputy sheriff and I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom and raise the kids. Well, then is when we had one child, and I managed a trailer court in Omaha, when Sherre was born. Well, then we bought one house, and Patrick had to live in a different county. His job was with Douglas County and his house was in Sarpy County. So, we had to move into Douglas County with his job. So, we bought this house and we rented it out and the house payment was 85 dollars, and we were able to rent it out for 125 dollars. Now, this is 45 years ago.

Well, Patrick brought home his paycheck, and he was to get an increase in pay. And, of course, like all wives, I had his paycheck spent, even the increase. And, when he brought the paycheck home after the increase, he had jumped into a different tax bracket, and brought home less money than what he was making before he got the increase. So, I decided we had to go a different route, because I knew that I was losing my eyesight. I was already diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa by this time. And, we had foster children. So, my job was when Pat worked weekends, is to go through the Sunday paper, and I still had a driver's license during the daytime. So, I would pack the kids in the car, and I would drive by these houses that you were able to assume their mortgage of, because no banker was going to give us a loan on a house with one income coming into the house, and with three children and foster children. And so, we were able to buy four more houses in Omaha by assuming the loans that people had decided not to, did not want to own their house any longer. And, they had different reasons why they wanted to sell.

So, we were able to assume the loans of these homes. We fixed them up and rented them. Well, they started to bus

children from...this was during the Carter Administration, where they wanted the children bused. Well, Patrick come home with some really sad situations to where these children and these teachers were being bused. So, we decided that we wanted to move to a smaller town, to where we didn't have this situation. So, we had a farm that we were buying in Emmetsburg, just a couple miles outside Emmetsburg. So, we sold one house in Omaha, and were able to pay cash for farm machinery, and Patrick started farming. Also, he worked for the Police Department here in Emmetsburg for a few months until we could get our feet on the ground. And, after that, why then we built a new house in 1979, and we raised the three children in the bean field, and...

Hicklin: It's a good place for them to learn to work.

Higley: It was. Yes, but it was a fun time. And, then we expanded into real-estate here, too, because Patrick was a small farmer, and he had small machinery. Then the farm crisis hit. And so, then we decided to publish a numerical telephone book, which puts all the telephone numbers in the telephone book in numerical order. And so, we published that and that was quite profitable. But, during the farm crisis, you have to think of different things to be able to do to bring money into the house.

And, then also he was approached uptown by several people saying, well, you did the numerical book, so why don't you do the courthouse report. And so, we needed the money, so we started the courthouse report. And, Patrick would go and collect the information at the courthouse, and he would bring it home, and he would go Tuesdays and

Wednesdays and gather the information, and Tuesday and Wednesday nights we would put it on the computer. And, that was a lot of midnight oil that we burned in those years, but it was income. And, that's what you need when you live in the small towns like that. And, then also he published the directory for the area codes. He took all the towns and that was a prefix directory is what it was, and he published that for Minnesota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, Iowa, and Illinois. And, that was quite profitable also, but you have to; don't be afraid, just do it.

Hicklin: Sounds like you have to be very creative.

Higley: You do in a small town. But, the most important thing is don't waste your youth. You have to do it while you're young, and you want to make sure that you have a very good retirement that you have set aside, because you never know what somebody else is going to do when they run your money. So, you know, do it, and you will make mistakes along the way. But, if you run it close and keep it, you know, keep your shoulder to the grindstone and watch your money, you can make it happen, and you will.

Now, I do the books here. I'm also the one that calls for the repair person or whatever, when a tenant will call. And, I will call and have it, if it's something Patrick can't do. And, at the end of the month, I compile all the books together. And, at the end of the year, I have one sheet for each business that we have that I send to the CPA, and it has all of the expenses, it has all of the income for that piece of property or that business. And, I send like seven sheets to the CPA and they have very, very little work to do. And, they have informed me several times that I'm one of their best

clients because all of the information is on each page for that business, and they don't have to dig or call for any information, and I have it on our computer. And, like I said, you know during those lean years, we had to pencil 20 dollars was a lot of money back in those days, to be able to spend very wisely in order to get to the retirement years.

Hicklin: Well, thank you very much, Rosy. Is there anything else you can think of?

Higley: I don't think so. The only thing I can tell you is don't be afraid to do it and live. Thank you. I appreciate this opportunity.

Hicklin: Thank you.

(End of Recording 5)

14:19

(End of Interview)

Jo Ann Slayton

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