Interviewer: We are here to hear the words of June Schroeder during her time at the Annie Wittenmyer House, which at that time was not called the Annie Wittenmyer House, but in 1929.

June Schroeder: January 21, 1929 my mother died in childbirth and she was the mother of twelve children. There were five of us from her first marriage and we were the five that went through the Iowa Soldiers Orphans Home. And we went there about in February or March of 1929. And, while there were four girls, none of us were allowed to be in the same cottage. We were all separated. And we were not allowed to talk to our brother or our sisters unless we went to the office and we had permission from the matron at that time. Uh, what I remember mostly about the Orphans Home and what I appreciated and am still using today is my schooling. We had very, very rigid teachers. We were told we were there to learn and, believe me, we did learn. Today my life has changed a lot of the things that I was taught in the Orphans Home in school. Uh, I was an older child and so I worked uh, two or three hours in the morning or in the afternoon, depending on when I went to school, and the other two or three hours that same day, I worked. I worked, uh, in the laundry and we had to iron these girls dresses that we wore every day. You wore that dress all week long and then on Sunday you got to put a clean one on. No matter what you did, you spilled whatever on your dress, you wore the same dress. And uh--but I was always very depressed when I was in the Orphans Home because I always felt if I didn't get out of here pretty soon I was going to lose my mind. It was the same thing every day. There wasn't any change. The biggest change that we had was on Saturday night. We got to see a movie and of course in 1929 there was no such thing as sound. And what the biggest punishment for any child in the Orphans Home was, on Saturday night, if they were to be punished, they had to sit reverse in the seat at the movie house so their back was to the screen. So of course they couldn't read what was going on because they couldn't see the pictures. And of course, in the meantime, mean kids, the kids that would sit around this child, would be poking the child and making faces and et cetera and if this child that was being punished made any kind of remark or turned their head around to look at the movie screen, believe me, when they got to the cottage, they got punished again. Now that's one of the most vivid things that I remember because--

Interviewer: Uh, the punishment, what kind of punishment did they receive?

June Schroeder: Well, they might have to have their back turned to the table when they age or they might have to uh, scrub the floor. They might have to scrub the bathroom. They would have to do, as a rule, something that was considered work. Uh, since we're talking about punishment, I'd like to say that any boy that ran away from the Orphan's Home, the superintendent had a wide belt in his office and they really got beat and I mean beaten. Uh, to my knowledge, I don't remember, I was only in the uh,Orphan's Home from the time I entered it until I was almost fifteen. And the day I left I was exactly sixteen years old. And of course there uh, wasn't any schooling at that time and I was uh, placed on a farm and I told the superintendent, "I don't want to go to a farm." But he said I was so thin that he wanted me uh, to get on a farm so I would have more food to eat. And what he didn't realize was, and which he probably should have known if he didn't, was in 1929 and '30 the uh, farmers were taking these children, the older children, from the Orphans Home for farmhands. He didn't know that this little year sixteen-year-old, skinny little girl had to milk eight cows in the morning before, before she went to
school. She had to get up and start the fire in the cookstove and then go down the barn and milk these cows and then come back and get supper ready, er, get her breakfast ready. And uh, after breakfast, then I had to go out and uh, wash the separator. In the wintertime or in the summertime, for some reason or another, I had to wash it outside.

Interviewer: And the jobs you had at the Iowa Soldiers Orphans Home, what kind of jobs did you have there?

June Schroeder: At the Orphans Home? Well, I worked in the laundry and ironed these dresses and then I must have done a pretty good job because I ended up being a little supervisor. When the girl had finished a dress, she would bring it up to me and I would tell her whether or not she did it well and I also took care of the head matron's room. Everyday I went up there and cleaned up her room. But the best job I had of all was, if I went to school in the morning and in the afternoon, I was the one who took the children downtown to the dentist or the doctor or whatever medical help that they had to have. And so, while I'm on that subject, I want to tell you an incident that happened regarding that that I will never forget. Here was this little skinny June, taking this strapping red-haired boy downtown on the street car. Those days we had streetcars. And so I was uh, I was the bigshot. I had money for that streetcar and I had money to come back. So I had this--to me he was six foot tall, with red hair. And as soon as I got him off of the trolley, he panicked. And, at that time, on the corner of Second and Main, right in the middle of the block, was a traffic light. And I don't know whether the boy had never been that close to a car in traffic or what, but he panicked and he ran away from me and ran up all the way up this traffic light. And there he was, just petrified. And two men saw this and they crawled up this pole and got this boy down. And of course, I'm embarrassed to death, but I was more so because, at that time, the boys as well as the girls, we had round garters to hold up our stockings. He wore long black stockings, I wore long black stockings. But somehow or another, when he either went up or went down, he broke his garters. And at that time, when the boys left the institution, for whatever reason, they were in uniform and they wore this gray uniform, and it had knickers, which meant you could see these long, black stockings. So there he was, with each hand holding up those stockings, as I took him in to this uh, building on uh, Second and Main uh, to the dentist or the eye doctor or whatever it was. And this little girl just couldn't wait until she got back to that Orphans Home so she could go in the office and tell the head matron what had happened. And I don't know whether he ever got punished or what, but the boy certainly was to be pitied because I don't think he ever had been downtown.

Interviewer: You, of course, do not remember the boy's name.
June Schroeder: Yes, his name was Bobby Martin.

Interviewer: Bobby Martin.

June Schroeder: And years later, many years later, I ran into him in downtown Davenport. And it just happened that the lady he was married to also had been in the Orphans Home. And they were married and we became very good friends.

Interviewer: That's quite interesting.

June Schroeder: So, I want to talk about the meals uh, what we had for meals. We never called it a meal. We never said, "It's time to go up and eat." We always said, "Well, I wonder what kind of slop we're going to have today. And the reason it was
called slop was because everything except the bread was dipped out with a dipper. And to this day I can not eat soft food. And I've had to go to the hospital several times in the last several years and they couldn't understand why I couldn't eat the food, that soft food. And I would have to tell them in the hospital. So they had to put me on a regular diet sooner than they should have because there was no way. I would just lay there and cry because I would tell myself when I would look at that food, "I'm an Orphan Home kid again and I can't stand this."

Interviewer: Did some of the food come from the farm?

June Schroeder: Oh yes--yes. A lot of the food, especially the fresh food came from the farm and the boys were the ones that uh, worked on the farm. And when it came, like the canning time, some of the girls, including me, we helped with the canning of the food and the head matron had charge of that. But I want to say, we were not allowed to eat anything. If there was cherries or apples or this and that that we were canning or if we were cleaning lettuce or radish or this and that and we were not allowed to eat it. You only ate up in the dining room. The girls were on one side in the dining room and the boys were on the other side in the dining room. And if you did something wrong in the dining room, the matron would have you leave the table and you had to stand up next to what we called the slop table. And that's where all this food was kept in the dining room that uh, where the younger children especially ate a little earlier and the next group ate a little earlier and all this was put, which was really garbage, at the slop table. And that was really a disgrace, to have to stand at the slop table. Uh, the only time that we ever had ice cream was on your birthday. And I don't remember ever, really, of every having cake. And I can't remember of ever having cookies. But we did have pie on Thursday. Now we wouldn't think of ever asking for a second piece of pie, but nobody would have want a second piece of pie because--I didn't know what was wrong with the pie, but I knew there was something. But in later years I found out they never used enough shortening. So it really was just like biscuit dough. And then of course the boys worked in the bakery and they were always circulating these stories that there were mice and rats and cockroaches in the bakery and of course right away, whether that was true or not, I don't know. But in those days and age, I wouldn't be surprised. And getting back to the birthday, when it was your birthday, you got to sit up in front on a special table and of course you had the regular meal, but you did get a cake and the ice cream.

Interviewer: Just you?

June Schroeder: No, whoever had a birthday.

Interviewer: And all the other people had ice cream too?

June Schroeder: No, no, no, no. No. The only time you ever got ice cream was on your birthday. And, to my knowledge, like I say, I can't remember of ever having cake, only on your birthday. So, of course, when I left the day of my birthday, when I was sixteen, I was on my way someplace else, so I didn't get any that day. But I did then in later years. I think that's why it's so hard for me today to go on a diet because we just didn't have that kind of food. We didn't know what it was to have candy, only what little bit we got at Christmas time or when your relatives came to visit. And you relatives could only come once a month. And then we'll say, for example, maybe one aunt came one week and maybe another aunt came the second week. The aunt that came second would have to go home because you were only allowed one visit a month. Also,
when you got a package in the mail, it was opened and you never got to see the wrapping. When you got a letter, they used something with black and I found out after I left the home, it was not crayon because I tried to melt the crayon off and it didn't work. So what they used I don't know, but what they would black out was the date and the address or anything that they felt would tell you where they were writing from or if there was something that they did not want you to know. And I know that different relatives had sent me stamps and I never ever saw the stamps. But to this day I have a terrible time with a diet because I'm thinking of I didn't have it when I was young and I certainly didn't have it when I was on the farm and I worked just like a hired man and what always got me so upset was you always had to have a reason why you wanted this child and these people gave the reason that they had this youngster that rode the school--what then was--they called it the school bus. But what it was, when I was there, it was drawn by a horse. And there were just maybe, oh, six at the very most was very small children that rode the bus. And this boy must have been in about the second grade. And there was no behavior problem. There was no reason why this child had to have somebody sit with him on the bus. But you see, the real reason was they wanted cheap farm help. And whenever I had to, uh, when they were haying, and I had to lead the horse on the hay fork, I always thought that horse was going to bite me and I was scared to death. And when they plowed the garden, there again I had to lead the horse.

Interviewer: Now this farm you worked on after you sixteenth birthday, this is right near your home town?

June Schroeder: No, I lived in Davenport.

Interviewer: What was the town you lived in to farm?

June Schroeder: I lived right with these people.

Interviewer: Where was the farm?

June Schroeder: At Hopkitton, Iowa.

Interviewer: Hopkitton.

June Schroeder: Right.

Interviewer: You were not born there at Hopkitton.

June Schroeder: No, no, I was born in Davenport.

Interviewer: All right.

June Schroeder: And that's what happened when I asked for my discharge. In the meantime I had been communicating with my sister all the time in Davenport. She lived in the west end and so I knew I had a place to go.

Interviewer: This Hopkitton farm, where in the world is Hopkitton?

June Schroeder: Hopkitton? I used to drive and I went there every year when they had a reunion of some sort. And it was exactly one mile from Hopkitton to my garage. And it's in northeastern Iowa in Delaware County.
Interviewer: You graduated from highschool there.

June Schroeder: Yes. And one of the nice things was, the families in this, these farmer people were very nice to me. And I got to go, uh, every once in awhile, with some girl and stay overnight. But the best part was, when these same kids would want to go to Cedar Rapids to a movie, I look back now, I did not think of this at that time. But today I think of this as what a nice thing. These girls could not go with their boyfriends unless I went along with my boyfriend. (Laughs). So that was nice. But I never let this boyfriend and I get very serious because I knew I was never going to be a farmer’s wife.

Interviewer: And at the Iowa Farmer's Orphans Home, uh, there was very little contact between the boys and girls living there?

June Schroeder: You mean at the Orphans Home in Davenport?

Interviewer: Yes, uh, huh.

June Schroeder: Uh, no, there was not at that time. As I say, you couldn't even speak to your brother. And the only way that you could get a contact, because all of us know when we got our eye on another boy or on another girl. (Laughs). And you’d write notes, but you’d say a little prayer that nobody would tattle that you passed a note to John Brown. Or you did get punished. Yes.

Interviewer: How many girls stayed in your home, in your home building?

June Schroeder: Well, when I was there, which would be a good year, there were almost six hundred children in the whole institution and there were something maybe like thirty-five girls. Now these girls were, every one of them went to school. But there were smaller girls and there were older girls. And when I think of the girls especially, what happened when I was there was the bathroom. The bathroom I thought was, at that time, a disgrace.

Interviewer: Just one bathroom for thirty-five girls?

June Schroeder: That's correct. Uh, there was no door on that small bathroom. There was no curtain when you took a bath.

Interviewer: There was no shower, just the bath.

June Schroeder: But there were two toilets and then you went into another room from the bathroom where the sinks were. But, just think, you had no privacy. No matter what you--there were things you did in the bathroom that you didn't want anybody to see but there was no way--it was just open sesame. But up in dormitory there was not any toilet or anything. And for years and years I have never forgotten this. We had a bucket up in the dormitory, no lid. And the older girls had to take turns every morning taking that down to the bathroom. And we had this one girl who just couldn't stand it. And every step she hit going down to that bathroom, she vomited. And this happened all the time. And it meant this. She also had to go back up and clean all this off. And I don't think, I really don't think she did this on purpose because she had to clean up the mess. And the trouble was, they did not have any thoughts about you as a person, as how these different things affected you. That's uh, there wasn't any consideration, uh, from the employees that would get very angry on you or they didn't even have to get angry. All you were ever told
was, "All you are is an expense to the taxpayers of Iowa." They didn't stop to think, as I did in later years, if it wasn't for us they wouldn't have a job. And another thing, it took me many, many, many years to figure this one out. We went to school. We were not allowed, if we had to go to the bathroom, we had to go to the cottage because we were told that there wasn't any bathroom in the schoolhouse.

Interviewer: How far was the schoolhouse from your home?

June Schroeder: Well, it was maybe a quarter of a block for me 'cuz the school was on the girl's side. But the boys had to go on the other side. And they had quite a little walk. And it wasn't until about 1970, when I was tutoring as a volunteer at a school, at Hayes School in Davenport, that it dawned on me one day. They had to lie to us because there had to be a bathroom in the school because we had teachers all day. But you have to understand we were told something, we never were allowed to question it. And if this made me very angry at myself that I wasn't that alert at that time to think there had to be a bathroom. Now that is just one of the things of abuse.

Interviewer: To get back to where you lived, it was a two-story? The dormitory was on top, where you slept? And you had a little dresser or something downstairs?

June Schroeder: We had to dress and undress downstairs. Off of this bathroom was this room where you washed your face and then, once a week, I, as a older girl, I got to give all these girls a teaspoon of cod liver oil. Now, the thing was, you thought nothing of it because you didn't question what you were told to do. And when I became a mother, I told myself, "How terrible!" Every girl, you know, we all used the same spoon. Of course, I was smart enough, when I got all done, I wiped the spoon off and then I put the spoon in my mouth.

Interviewer: (Laughs)

June Schroeder: But, see, that was one of the reasons why they had so many infections. If you like to talk about our cottage downstairs, when I was there we were never allowed in the sitting room. Never. In fact, the matron never, nobody went in there. And talk about a radio. Yes, we had radios in 1929 and '30. But they had control of the radio in the main building. And if they didn't turn it on, we never had a radio. And it was very, very rare--I want to say once a month that radio was turned on.

Interviewer: Oh!

June Schroeder: And then if the matron in your cottage didn't turn it on, you didn't know it anyway.

Interviewer: Now the matron in each of the cottages was the one in charge of that cottage. Who were the matrons?

June Schroeder: You mean their names?

Interviewer: No, were they employees?

June Schroeder: They were employees.

Interviewer: And what was your relationship to the matron? Did she tell you what to

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do and when to do?

June Schroeder: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But, you see, you got so you were oriented. When you got up in the morning you knew what to do, you do this. And--

Interviewer: And you always got up at the same time in the morning? Early?

June Schroeder: Early, yes. You did not worry about oversleeping because they had a huge bell in the main building and that bell rang at five o'clock in the morning and you got up right now. And the matron would come in every morning and check the beds. And if you weren't out of that bed, you went to bed early same night.

Interviewer: And how late in the evenings were you allowed to stay awake?

June Schroeder: I believe we went to bed like about seven o'clock. After we had done our studying. Because, you see, we did no studying in school at all. And the good part about that was, it taught me to listen. It taught me to pay attention because the teacher that you had would give you the instructions of what you had to do that night in you cottage for your homework. And then when we were in this room we were not allowed, while we were doing our studying or homework, because we did no studying, no homework in school whatsoever. So you had to pay attention. You had to know, when you sat down in that chair at night with your pencil, what you had to do. And you would not dare ask the girl that sat next to you, who was in your class, you couldn't say, "Oh, I forgot, what were we to do?"

Interviewer: What would happen if you said that?

June Schroeder: You would get punished. But, you see, you knew this, so you didn't ask. There were just things that you didn't do because you were trained. You knew better.

Interviewer: Obviously some of the students were better students than others. What happened to the girls or boys that were very, very poor students--could not learn for some reason?

June Schroeder: Well, there was a lot of that and they really were just ignored. And I just remember one thing. They had like the, say the seventh and eighth grade in the same room. And my one sister was in a year below me and she was just a little bit of a behavior problem. And the teacher used to say to her, "Lena(?), June doesn't do this. Why do you do it?" And even then I used to say to myself, "Why does the teacher say that?" But of course, you know, you wouldn't dare say anything. But the teacher--the school. All this time I was thinking, "I'm gonna lose me mind if they don't get me out of here." But I could always look forward to Monday and go to school. And this is why I was always such an outstanding student because that schoolhouse, that was my life. And I got the foundation for my highschool education from the Orphan's Home because I knew I had to depend on myself. I knew I couldn't ask anybody for help.

Interviewer: Uh, you mentioned earlier about occasionally you had the responsibility for taking someone to a doctor or a dentist?

June Schroeder: Yes.

Interviewer: But the average student there at that time, did they ever leave the area
if they did not became sick? Could they go anywhere? Could they go for walks if they chose?

June Schroeder: Oh no. We were not even allowed on the sidewalk. And to tell you the truth, you know what we did on Sunday afternoons for recreation? We walked over and through the Oakdale Cemetery. Now was that anything for these children to have to go through? Every Sunday? There was not any recreation program. I will say, when I came in '65 and I decided I was going to go out there and get a job and I was going to show those people how to run this institution, then I found out the children were running the institution. They wasn't any discipline. They didn't work. If you got up in the morning and put a dress on and decided you wanted to change it, you just threw that one in the basket, you got a clean one. It was something for these girls to change their clothes three times a day. We weren't allowed that. In the early part of '66, it really started in '65, two parents, two house parents--at that time they had couples in the cottages. And two couples made a protest to the Board of Control the way these children had taken over the home. The boys and girls were allowed to kiss. They were allowed to have their little dates right there on the grounds. They were able to do and talk to the matrons, the staff, any way they pleased. And I tried to be the mother to these children that they didn't have. I did a lot of nice things and I was called every kind of a name you could think of and if they didn't want to do something, they didn't do it. And I just got to the point in life, I decided I didn't have to do this. I could do something else. And so in five or six months at the most, I quit.

Interviewer: When you were in school, which subjects did you learn from? English, obviously, what else?

June Schroeder: Yes. We had the regular state approved education. The education was, like I say, if it hadn't been for my school and what I learned at the school, uh--. I would like to say, if I may say this, I haven't been known, ever since I left the Orphan's Home, for my sewing. And I still sew today. There’s a sewing machine in my living room and there’s a sewing machine in my bedroom and the reason--I had such a good teacher. We had outstanding teachers. They didn't show us any love, but they were there to teach and they taught. And, to this day, my sewing teacher is still looking over my shoulder. And this is why I still sew, at eighty years, today as well as I did when she was my teacher.

Interviewer: How excellent. As far as classes, you had English and Math and History and you were learning things that were very utilitarian (?)--make to do things, like your sewing excellent--

June Schroeder: And may I say that that schooling that I had, I was so far advanced. And like I want to say I was a very good student because this was my life. That when I was placed out in this school, I was so far advanced they couldn't teach me anything. And so the principal wrote a letter to the Orphans Home to get permission to put me a year ahead. And here we had child abuse. They refused. And so what happened the year I was in the school, the first year? I was in the principal's office answering the telephone. I was in the library. I read every encyclopedia book they had.

Interviewer: And where was this?

June Schroeder: At Hopkitton, Iowa.
Interviewer: Okay, fine. Where you have your highschool degree from.

June Schroeder: Yes, right.

Interviewer: Here we are for our second interview on June 23rd of 1994 and June Schroeder's been nice enough to give us more information about her experiences at the Iowa Orphans Home. June?

June Schroeder: I'd like to talk a little bit today about the difference when I was a housemother in the same cottage that I was a child in 1929 and '30. I wanted to be a housemother out there because I wanted to show the staff how it should be done because we were never given any love, we were never given any attention, we were never given any encouragement. And so I took the job and the first hour I was there I never heard so much obscenities in my life. And in the meantime the day before I got there a girl had run away and I was shocked at the language that the girls in my cottage were talking about the things that they knew that this girl was doing since she had left the Orphan's Home. One of the biggest things that I noticed was the children were not taught any kind of responsibility whatsoever. If they didn't want to go to school, they didn't go to school. If you wanted to get up in the morning and you changed your dress and you go to go up to breakfast and then you decided, "Well, I don't like this color," then you went to your little room there, your little place and you got another dress, took that off and you threw it in the dirty clothes. You went up to breakfast and then maybe you decided you wanted to wear something different, you took that off. And that shocked me because when I was out there, you had this one dress. Every girl had the same dress, the same heavy blue denim dress and you wore that dress all week long until Sunday and then you got to change it into a better dress. But here these girls were, changing them, throwing them into the dirty clothes and of course, they didn't have to iron them because at that time, in '65, the girls did little or no work at all. And they went to school all day. Then another big thing I noticed was they let the girls--which it should be a normal thing--when you're a teen-aged girl or a teen-aged boy you should have your eye on the other sex, I'm not against that. But then they made it a rule that when the boy took the girl back to the cottage, then he could kiss her. And of course we matrons, some of us were shocked and some of us weren't. And I was only concerned about what could happen when their kissing and what else could have happened. And the girls, if they didn't feel like making their bed, they didn't make their bed. Some of the girls slept on top of the bedspread so they wouldn't have to make the bed.

Interviewer: And they suffered no penalties?

June Schroeder: They suffered no penalties. In fact, in my way of thinking, the children ran the Iowa Soldiers Orphans Home in 1965. In fact, it was so bad at that time they had couples in the cottage. There would be a man and a woman. In fact, two of the couples had gone in front of the Board of Control in Des Moines to protest what these children were getting by with. And the day that these two couples went to Des Moines, which everybody on the campus was very much aware of, the executive director called a meeting of all of the houseparents.

Interviewer: By couples, you do not mean man and wife. Just two friends.
June Schroeder: No, a man and a wife. There was one cottage of smaller children where there was two women. But other than that it was always a man and a wife. And the first thing this director said when he called this meeting was, "Don't worry about your job. Everybody's going to have a job. Nothing will be done." And nothing was done. So, as time went on, I had parties for the girls and I did this and I
did that and I really tried to make them feel that I was not a matron, that I was their friend. But they didn't want me as a friend, no matter how much kindness. It seemed like the more kindness I showed, the more things that I did, and I have always been very good at crafts and very good at sewing. I would sew anything I could for the girls and all I got called at any time was bad, bad names, no matter how much goodness I did.

Interviewer: Very seldom were you given thanks for what you did.

June Schroeder: I never was given thanks. Ever. And so I just decided one day I didn't deserve this. And if this is the kind of life these girls wanted, this is the kind of life they could have. And this was the reason why so many of these girls and boys who were placed out in a private home would come back because they just didn't feel that they had to work. And of course when I was out there we only went to school for maybe two hours a day and, like maybe in the morning and then in the afternoon, then we would work and vice versa. But these kids didn't do anything. They went to school all day. And, like I say, everything was, everything was handed to them. They had absolutely no responsibility and then the state of Iowa wonders, "What's happening to all these children are coming back to the Orphans Home?" And of course they loved it there. And when these people took these children, they didn't expect to wait on them hand and foot like they did in the Orphans Home. When I was in the Orphans Home and placed out I had to work. But I much rather would be out of the home and work than to be in that Orphans Home.

Interviewer: And work!

June Schroeder: Yes, yes. And I used to tell myself, if I don't get out of here, I'm going to lose my mind. And the only thing, that good year that I was in the Orphans Home, the only thing that kept me going was I knew on Monday I would go to school. And the school was my life. And I have always, to this day, I'm eighty years old, but I have always been grateful for the education I got at the Orphans Home.

Interviewer: And you have used it all very well.

June Schroeder: Yes, right. And it made me--I'm the mother of four children, it's made me a better mother and it's made me also more understanding of other people's children. And when I received this award in '91 as the outstanding volunteer for the Davenport Public Schools and the schools in the state of Iowa--I got that award. It wasn't that I was a good tutor because I loved these children and I got attached to them. And I could always tell when this child put his face up to the window and the door where I was, I could tell right now when that child had a problem. And that was the day I was not a tutor. I felt, "I am this child's grandmother and I understand this child." Perhaps he, uh, in this day and age when there isn't a daddy in the home, that makes a difference. And nothing makes me happier when I am out in the public today and I run across one of my former pupils and they put their arms around me and say, "June, I really miss you."

Interviewer: Uh-huh, excellent. One thing that kind of goes back a week ago, you mentioned this one really important chair that you were assigned, you always spend so much time in?

June Schroeder: Right.

Interviewer: Were you assigned that chair or did you pick out one? Did they seat
you alphabetically or did you become very familiar with the people on either side of you or what not?

June Schroeder: They had one one room and it had the long tables and we each had our own chair. It was--every chair was like every other chair. But it was just the idea that that was your chair. Also, what shocked me the first night that I was in this cottage as a housemother was that the girls got to go into the living room. We were never, ever allowed in that living room. In this room where we had the table and chairs, that was our living room. And we didn't have TV and we did not have a radio unless very, very rarely. Not even once a month would the radio be turned on in the main building so that the housemother could just trip a switch. And you never knew whether you were going to be able to listen to the radio or not. And it was such a treat that everybody was quiet. And here I was in '65 with a nice colored TV and I would have the boys take my TV, if I had been in their cottage for three days, then they would move that colored TV over on the girl's side and we could sit in the living room. They really enjoyed the TV. That was the only thing that I ever did, I felt, for those girls that they really enjoyed. Something else I'd like to get into is, we were never trained or taught or anything about what was going to happen when we were going to go into this home from the Iowa Soldier's Orphan's Home. In my case, all I was told was I was going on a farm. And, believe it or not, I've often wondered about these children, a lot of them I'm sure didn't know what a penny or a nickel or a quarter even looked like. I often wondered, in later years, did they think that you went to a store and they just handed you what you wanted. Because they weren't trained that you had to pay for this.

Interviewer: You never earned a penny or any money of any kind.

June Schroeder: Not of any kind.

Interviewer: And nor could you go into anyplace and buy a candy bar or anything else like that.

June Schroeder: No, you could not, you could not. In fact, to be real honest, I can't ever remember in the good year that I was in the home that I ever saw a candy bar. The only way you ever got any candy was, you got a little candy at Christmastime and if you were very fortunate like I was, I had a sister that lived in Davenport and she did come to see us once a month and she would bring us candy and things.

Interviewer: And you got ice cream on your birthday. (Laughs)

June Schroeder: Yeah, that was the only time you ever got ice cream.

Interviewer: That's hard to believe.

June Schroeder: And it's hard to believe that those children out there, some of them, didn't even know what an ice cream cone was. And I can't remember of ever getting a cookie. And I think of that many, many times because where I live here in the Heritage highrise, when we have some kind of an entertainment, I always make cookies. And they only way I'm known at the Heritage highrise is, I'm the cookie lady. And I want to make these cookies because I want to feel that for every cookie that I make, maybe somebody's daughter or some relative will make cookies for a child because I can't ever remember of making cookies.

Interviewer:: And you also said the meal was very sloppy and you rarely got any
form of meat whatsoever?

June Schroeder: That's correct. The meals were served, it looked to me like it would be a huge tin can that they sawed off part of it. It was metal and they used a dipper and the food was dipped out with a dipper. And the only time we got a dessert was on Thursday and it was pie and of course the boys, they worked in the basement in the bakery and they always told us girls, "Well, the cockroaches and the rats and the mice were running all over." So when you had the piece of pie you really didn't want it anyway because you know that they were just kidding us, however, it could be true in that day and age.

Interviewer: Another idea that we have not as yet mentioned, supposing one of the student became ill, was there a place they were sent, did they ever go to the hospital?

June Schroeder: Yes, they had a hospital there. But you see you only got sick in the morning. And I know I had a little breaking out and a sore throat and the matron sent me up to the hospital. They had one head nurse there and I don't really know how many other nurses. Very few, I'm sure of that. And the head nurse decided that she thought maybe I had scarlet fever. So I was put in a room by myself in the morning and, believe it or not, by the next morning nobody had been in that room for twenty-four hours. I didn't even have a drink of water.

Interviewer: Oh, that's terrible.

June Schroeder: And I wasn't even shown where the bathroom was. So what I did, I waited 'til it got dark and when there wasn't any noise, and then I opened one of the doors in my room and there was a bathroom in there.

Interviewer: This hospital was right on the grounds, right?

June Schroeder: Right on the grounds, right.

Interviewer: There were no doctors around though?

June Schroeder: No, I don't know how often the doctor came around. I really don't know because I was really very well. What happened then, this head nurse then decided that since there were kids in the next room that had scarlet fever, I might as well go in there and then that would prove whether I had it or I didn't! One thing that also--we were never told anything about money so that a lot of these children, if you would give them a dime or a quarter or a penny they wouldn't even know what it was or what it was for. There was absolutely no training whatsoever so that when you left that orphan's home you would be able to function at least a little bit on your own. You were just like an animal out of water, absolutely.

Interviewer: Did you become quite friendly with some people in your cottage, that you corresponded with after you left the cottage, for a few years?

June Schroeder: See, no, you couldn't do that. You really couldn't do that because if you would write a letter to this person they would take this black material, whatever it was, it was not a crayon. And they would block out all the addresses, anything that you would say, anything that would remotely say you were on a farm or you were a hundred miles away. But in later years I was able to run in accidentally to a boy and a girl that had been in the Orphans Home when I was.
just wish that they would put your name, like in case of my name. My name was Pieper and I've been thinking that what they should do when they interview these women that have married, it would be a good idea for them to mention their maiden names so that a lot of people would be--uh.

Interviewer: Certainly, yes.

June Schroeder: In my case, I live in Davenport and I will be going to the library and I will be seeing if I can run some of these tapes and maybe find somebody that was in the cottage. There was a little girl that I had when I was a housemother and I would love to get in touch with her and maybe I could accidentally just do that.

Interviewer: Good luck.

June Schroeder: Right. So but now I'm eighty years old, but I would maybe be able to find somebody that I had in a cottage. That's what I'm hoping for. I have not been able to reach anybody when I have gone to the picnics. I have never been able to reach anybody that was at the home at the time that I was. And so that's why this year I'm not going to go to the picnic because now I'm eighty and it would be practically impossible.

Interviewer: Just the dinner this year.

June Schroeder: I'm going to the dinner, right. The average child that was in the Wittenmyer Home when I was in there was because it was the depression and parents just could not support their children. And something else that might be interesting is when I was a child in the Orphans Home they had three babies that were left at the hospital door.

Interviewer: Oh.

June Schroeder: And there was in my cottage a little girl, she must have been about ten, and I knew at the time that there was something mentally wrong with the girl. However, it was never mentioned. And her name was Betty Door. And they named her that because she had been left on the doorstep of the hospital.

Interviewer: Oh, ho. I was going to say Doerr, but just Door. (Laughs)

June Schroeder: Right, right.

Interviewer: Okay, do you have any idea of the procedure people went through to get a child admitted to the Orphans Home?

June Schroeder: Well, I want to say that most of the children that were admitted were admitted through the Juvenile Court. In my case, I was. What happened with me was my mother died in childbirth and I did have a stepfather. And my stepfather did want to keep us and my father, who lived in Davenport, absolutely ignored us, even when we became adults, still ignored us. When my mother died and my stepfather wanted to keep us and my father, he is the one that took us to court. And he wanted the jurisdiction of these five children. And I can remember the judge telling my father, "Well, you certainly have not paid the support money like you should for the children. You have not seen your children and the stepfather who wants the children doesn't have anybody except an elderly sister in the house." And there's no way, with my stepfather being the father of three children, and this
newborn baby, there was no way that they could cope, and his elderly sister, with all these children.

Interviewer: So by an order of the court you were all sent to the Orphans Home.

June Schroeder: Right. And nothing was more pitiful in the Orphans Home, in fact, I want to cry now when I think about this, these children that would cry and cry all night long because Mama was going to come and get them. Mama was coming back.

Interviewer: And it never happened.

June Schroeder: And it just never happened. And that was always so sad for me. And this is why today I want to see happy children. And this is why when my children had a birthday or Christmas or anything I worked real hard and so did my husband so we could provide well for our children. Matter of fact, my boy, my older son was just telling me Saturday about how, as a child, he always had, as a rule, he didn't always get everything he wanted, but the children were always well taken care of.

Interviewer: Of course, they say, a child does better if he is not always given everything he wants. (laughs) Right.

June Schroeder: Right. That's correct. So I think I've about run out of what to say.

Interviewer: Well, I think we've done pretty well on our second interview here. There are other things, but I think we've done all right with what you've done. Thankyou so much.

June Schroeder: All right. You're more than welcome.