

Interview with Lula Rheinhardt
Interviewer: Mary Herron
n.d.

A: I said, "Mary, I know that poem," I said, "Do you want me to say it for you?" She said, "I'd like to hear it." I said, "Alright, I'll say it." "Old Santa Claus lived all alone in his den with his leg crossed over his knee, While a comical look he got in his eye, for a funny old fellow was he. His queer little cap was all tumbled and torn and his wig was all awry, And he sat and mused the whole night long while the hours were flying by. But he had been busy the whole day through filling his pack with toys And gathering nuts and baking pies for the good little girls and boys. (And Christmas...and let's see now) And candied kuchen twisted and striped he had furnished with plenty to store, While grapes and figs and prunes and dates hung up on a peg by the door. "I'm almost ready" quoth he, quoth he, "and Christmas is almost here, But one thing more, I must write a book and give to each one this year." So, he clapped his...on his little round nose, and...the...from his pen, He wrote more lines in one little hour than you and I could ever write in ten. And Christmas Eve when all were in bed, why, down the chimney he flew, And stretching a stocking leg out at the top, he...a book for you." And I was about eight years old when I said that...in school.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: Now let me get to the people.

Q: Alright.

A: ...write-up in the paper...

Q: When was that?

A: ...now here is where...

Q: It says here that you were ninety years old.

A: Yeah, see, that happened, that was before Christmas, see, and I wasn't ninety-one 'til June of this year, the fourth of June, I was ninety-one.

Q: Now what do you remember back about your life during the Depression in the thirties?

A: About what?

Q: The Depression in the thirties. Was your husband out of work? Was your husband unemployed?

A: No, in 1930 he was a farmer. Course, we had hard days, I'll tell you those were bad years.

Q: Was this where your farm was? Out here?

A: No, he farmed in the bottoms, oh, he farmed in the bottoms.

Q: Well, where did your children go to school?

A: They went to school at Lodge.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: What?

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Q: Where did you go to school?

A: Well, now, let me tell you...now he said, "She is Mrs. Lula Rheinhardt, 2900 South Weinbach Avenue, and when she said she learned a poem many years ago, she means many years ago. She is ninety years old now, and she learned "Old Santa Claus" when she was just a tiny girl attending Old Blankenburg School, which today we call Cedar Hall." Do you know where Cedar Hall is?

Q: Yes, I do. Yes, I do.

A: And when I told him that, he said, "Where did you go to school, Mrs. Rheinhardt?" and when I told him "Blankenburg" he said, "Blankenburg? I didn't know anything about that." He said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, I can tell you, it's now called Cedar Hall." So, you see that's all in there.

Q: Yes, it is. Did you ever work outside the home? Did you ever have a job?

A: Oh, just a little while, for a little while, when I...my home, but I didn't stay long. My mother and brother...

Q: What did you do?

A: What did I do? Where, at home?

Q: No when you worked out.

A: I worked at what they called a cotton mill.

Q: Yes, was that on the west side?

A: Yes.

Q: What did you do there?

A: Well, I worked in what they called a...getting the cotton all ready that they make sheets and...

Q: Oh. What did they pay you?

A: How much what?

Q: How much did you get paid?

A: You want me to tell you? Ninety cents a day.

Q: Ninety cents a day?

A: Five dollars and forty cents a week.

Q: How many hours a day?

A: Going to work at 6:30 in the morning, work till twelve at noon; went back at ten minutes till one and worked till ten after six; and worked on Saturday morning from 6:30 to 12:30, to make six whole days.

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Q: That's a lot different from now, isn't it? (They make that much now an hour.) Oh, more than that. I can't get over that demonstration...

A: You remember her?

Q: Seems to me that when I went to the club Mrs. Little was president.

A: I remember her.

Q: Where were you married?

A: Where was I married? Do you know where St. John's Church is?

Q: Yes.

A: I was married at the Parsonage at St. John's Church. I was baptized there, I was married there, I was confirmed there, and the minister from St. John's Church buried my husband. I went...from baby on through...and I've got things made up with Alexander's Funeral Home for when I pass on. They way I've thought of one thing, and the other man asked me, "Mrs. Rheinhardt, do you have any certain minister, that is, a church?" and I said, "Yes, regardless of who the minister is, when I pass away, from St. John's Church, I want him at my funeral."

Q: Well, sure, you've always been out there. I know where... I know St. John's.

A: And the nice thing about it, he said, "You mean you belong to St. John's Church?" And I said, "I sure do," I said, "I was baptized there and all." He says, "Mrs. Rheinhardt, I belong to St. Johns Church."

Q: Where is St. John's?

A: What?

Q: Where is St. John's Church?

A: At Third and Engle.

Q: Yeah, I knew it was downtown, but I didn't know what street. That's an old church...

A: Yes. And I have my confirmation certificate from when I was...had been confirmed fifty years and in '79 I got my confirmation ticket for being there my seventy-fifth year.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: I've got those both right in my room where I...in my desk drawer where I have them...

Q: How many children did you have?

A: How many? Two.

Q: Were they born at home?

A: What? Yes. I had three, but the youngest boy we lost in World War II.

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Q: I was going to ask if you had any in the war.

A: Yes, one. I had three children, and the youngest one was lost...

Q: When you were young, did you do much traveling?

A: Do what?

Q: Did you do much traveling, or...

A: No. Just a homebody.

Q: I thought maybe you and your husband took trips...

A: No, my husband wasn't one to care to go too much and I never was. We just stayed right around home. And I'm still that way... I'm here until... And it'll soon be eleven years now that I've been here.

Q: I was noticing your gas stove over there.

A: What?

Q: I was noticing your gas stove over here...what did you use when you first were married? What did you cook on?

A: What did I cook on?

Q: When you were first married?

A: A range, coal range.

Q: Coal range?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: And what did you use for heating the house?

A: Stove...heating stove.

Q: I know, we had the same thing, had a big old gas...had a big old coal range. And how about your water, did you have well water?

A: Yes.

Q: Did it draw any water from...

A: ...Mrs. Blake...they belonged to Reverend Schwambach's church, but I don't know how they ever got to Sunday School. I was on the phone one Sunday, and someone knocked on my door, and I went to the door and it's about five here at the door, and it's a man and a lady standing out on the back step there, and they said, "Mrs. Rheinhardt?" And I said, "Yes," and they said...told me who they were, and...Reverend Schwambach's church. And they said, "would you mind if we would come in your house?" And I said, "No, not at all." And they came in and they stayed a while and we just talked...just things that we'd known...and they still...did you notice me this morning when you said who you were and I said, "Mrs. Blake? When did you get home?" Well, they'd been gone to Wisconsin and Michigan,

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and I got a card from...and I thought, well, they sure got home in a hurry...me just getting their card. And so now this is the way I got my water...when I first come out here.

Q: With a pump.

A: An old-fashioned pump. And that's the reason I kept that, and we had a sprinkling can standing by where we watered the things with and all, and that was just so much like my old pump that I had. And we had that for...in fact, we had two of them...we finally built a big barn back there in the yard for our stock that they had used to farm with in the bottoms, and they put another pump back there, so we had one at the house. And this is my old-fashioned mailbox...that was a...now that come from another lady where we both go to church and I've still got my...that's our first mailbox...and that was out in front for years, and that was moved in there back here for my mailbox, and that was on the farm, and I kept that. And I just won't part with it.

Q: What was this neighborhood like when you first moved out here?

A: What?

Q: What was this neighborhood like when you first moved out...

A: Well, just a country neighborhood.

Q: I thought so.

A: Now, I'll tell you this, from Riverside, ours was the first house, there wasn't another house. There wasn't another house. And one house over here...this one...one up here is still there, and one over here, and two a little further down. Between riverside Avenue and the levy down here...the levy down here...there were six houses.

Q: ...

A: And I come from...out here, I was...I was born in the county, but is was taken into the city when I was a little bit of a thing, and I was in the city then.

Q: What street was that on?

A: What?

Q: What street was that on?

A: Lawrence Street. And I had a sister-in-law that said to me, "Lula, I don't know how you can stand it, to come from the town and go out there, the way you're living." I said, "Listen, I didn't...get married to think that I couldn't live out there." I said "... " and I'm still here.

Q: How'd he get back and forth to work?

A: Well, when he...when he worked in the bottoms, he went with his team. When he went to work in town, he had a horse and buggy that he drove. And when I wanted to go to town, I walked from here down to Kentucky and Riverside. And when I had my first two little children and wanted to go out to my mom's, I'd always take a change of clothes along, so that they could have something to play in out there

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during the day, then I'd have their other clothes and I'd take them in, you know, on the streetcar, I'd take them off, I'd dress them of a morning when I'd want to go and then I'd change their clothes to go out to mom's. And then I'd take clothes along for them to play in, and I'd change them when I got ready to...and I'd take Clarence by the hand and Ellen and my shopping bag on my arm and away we'd go and I'd walk down to Riverside...Now that's my life.

Q: Well, that sounds like a pretty good life.

A: And you can see from this, that I remember things.

Q: Let me ask you something else then. How have things changed, like, oh, funerals, and...

A: How did what?

Q: How have things changed in the way we do, like having a funeral at the funeral home now? When you had...someone died in your family, did they go to a funeral home?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Or did you have the body at home?

A: We had them right here. My mother passed away in 1937, she was with me at the time when she passed away and I had her in my home...I was one of nine children my mother had. And I lost a brother four years ago in February and he would have been just a little older than I am now. He wasn't ninety-two yet when he died, but he was past ninety-one. And so, I'm the next one that lived the longest. If I live just a little longer, I'll live longer than the longest one of my brothers.

Q: Are any of them living now?

A: What?

Q: Do you have any brothers and sisters living now?

A: Any brothers?

Q: Are they living now?

A: No, I'm the only one...the only one out of the family.

Q: What was your maiden name?

A: Schweitzer. Did you see that in the paper about that Schweitzer, just yesterday, where he talked out of his turn? You didn't see that?

Q: Oh...

A: Oh, it was big headlines in the paper...did you see it?

Q: Yes, it was the morning paper...

A: That was the way my name was spelled...when I was that Schweitzer, I thought, what on earth's happened? And then I read a little bit, and I saw he...he was in Washington...but that's my name.

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Q: Were your parents from Germany?

A: What?

Q: Were your parents born here, or from Germany?

A: Yes.

Q: Which...Germany?

A: "Ich...Deutsch."

Q: Were any of your brothers or sisters born in Germany?

A: What?

Q: Were any of your brothers or sisters born in German?

A: No.

Q: How old were your parents when they came?

A: When they came? Well, that's far back, they were small. My father was just a tiny baby when his mother passed away, just a little bit of a thing. And I think that his dad tried to keep the children together, and I believe my dad was around five years old when they...when his father brought the children and come to America. And my mother...and I don't know just exactly how old she was...but she was small too...

Q: Was she born over here?

A: What?

Q: Was your mother born over here?

A: Oh, no, my mother was born in Germany. My mother and father both. Yeah, my mother was...

Q: Well, were they married over in Germany, or were they married over here?

A: They were married at St. John's Church!

Q: Well, how did they meet over here when both of them came from...

A: I don't know. They met after they were over here!

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: How did I? Well, you know the man where I worked at the cotton mill, he told me one day, I said, "If anything that ever happened like that again." He was talking to me there and he would say, "Oh, you'll meet your husband one of these days, he'll be a country boy and he'll come along with an armload of hay." And I'll tell you, when that happened, after I started to go with Dad, I couldn't understand that that old man told me something like that, but that's true the way... I didn't meet him like that, understand, but my sister and her husband and my husband's mother and father were such awful good friends, and they visited back and forth a lot, and they...one time, they were going to my sister and her

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husband, they were going to come out here to my husband's folks, they lived down below me where I am now and they said, "Why, bring Lula along and let her spend the day," that's how that started.

Q: How long did you know him before you were married?

A: How long? We started going together in June of one year and we was married the next year. We didn't start to go...well, I guess you could say that we just about started going together then, and we were married the next year.

Q: And then you moved right out here.

A: And we come right out here, whenever we were married, yes. But I think it's really something to say, that I was married in the same church where my mother and daddy were, and of course, there wasn't so many...quite a few years, but my mother and daddy, I guess it's been about a hundred and thirteen years since they were married; they were married in 1868.

Q: That is a while back.

A: What's that you say? You couldn't remember all that?

Q: Could you tell me how your days were spent when you were first married?

A: How what?

Q: How your days were spent...did you get up in the morning and have to build a fire?

A: Oh, we had...now, listen, you know, I'd get up some mornings at 3:30 so that I could get breakfast, and I had to fix a lunch when he wouldn't come home, you know, from down there for lunch, because he had to get up and get his breakfast and we didn't have a barn here then, he had to go up to his father's and get the stock ready, you know, to go out to work, and he'd have to get up there and feed them and curry them and all, and get them hitched up and go for the father. Many a time I'd get up...

Q: What did you do the rest of the day?

A: I used to...at suppertime I used to... We didn't have a grocery store to run to just whenever we wanted. Our grocery stores were far away...

Q: You had chickens then?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Did you bake your own bread?

A: What?

Q: Did you bake your own bread?

A: Oh, I hope to tell you I did, I hope to tell you I did. And in that book that I told about reading...Mrs. Haskell, she always did... And there was a story in there about World War I and how things were rationed, you know, and the different kind of stuff that you would get to bake with and all, and about how it was...you couldn't bake the kind of bread you used to like to live on. I told Rhoda in there, I told

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her, "I remember those days well, when we had to get rye flour, and, oh, different kinds of stuff like that." You couldn't bake your bread then as you did when you had the regular four, you just couldn't do it. I used to bake kuchen pies and I used to bake kuchen pies...

Q: Well, you didn't have any members of your family in World War I?

A: Was I?

Q: Did you have any of your family...brothers...in World War I?

A: I had one brother in World War I, and I had nephews in World War I. And brothers-in-law, yeah, I had one brother.

Q: Things have kind of changed now, the way that we live, haven't they?

A: What?

Q: Things have kind of changed now, the way we live, as far as your cooking and...

A: As far as my cooking?

Q: Things have changed now, your cooking has...has...

A: Oh my, yes. I don't do the first cooking part... Oh, understand, I don't go hungry...

Q: No, we know that.

A: But I don't cook like I used to, that's all.

Q: Do you still can?

A: I canned five pints of beets this year, and I had three tomato stalks. I've had three tomato stalks for many years, but I didn't can any tomatoes. My son and his wife, my son Jimmy, has such a nice garden and all, and he and his wife, you know, worry about them. We've got plenty. I tell you; I haven't been what you call well.

Q: What do you do all day now?

A: What do I do all day? Well, I read when I feel like...that's the reason I say I'm so glad that I've got my eyesight... But my TV, I don't operate too much during the day. There's too much on TV I don't like, there's just too much on TV I don't like at all, and I just won't waste the electric or my time to watch it. And I just pass my time...

Q: That's what I'm having trouble with.

A: Another thing... I'll have to say Mrs. Phelps because I just don't know...

Q: That's okay.

A: As far as my phone, all of my friends...old time friends...you say well, I've got a letter out in the box, unless he's been here... No, I believe the flag is still up. And I have two old friends...they're both just a little bit older than I am...one lives in Jacksonville, North Carolina, and one lives in Monroe... And we still

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correspond through the mail, and I had a letter from the one, day before yesterday, in North Carolina, so I thought, well, I'd better answer it. And I just don't have any of my old friends left anymore, oh no, they're just about gone...

Q: Do you have very much company come in now?

A: What?

Q: Do you have very much company?

A: Not too much. These folks, the younger people, they don't bother. And I don't know, it just seems kind of these days everybody... But I have one wonderful lady...she's the one that I give this book to, and she brings me packages over, you know, free, and...

Q: Who is she? Who is she?

A: Mrs. Haskell.

Q: You know...

A: She's been living there since '46, so you know she's...

Q: You know Mazell and Tony Vanbibber?

A: What?

Q: You know Mazell and Tony Vanbibber?

A: Yeah, I said I don't see them...once in a while I see them walk out. And I used to see Mazell with my dog when She'd come by and we'd stand out, you know, and talk, but I don't know the time...

Q: Do you go to club meetings now? To the Knight Club?

A: No.

Q: I didn't know if you were still active or inactive or...

A: No, I don't even go to church. See, my hearing is bad, and I said, for me to have to go and try to strain to hear and all, and on a Sunday morning, I turn my TV on and I listen, I said, Schwambach comes on, Oral Roberts comes on, Rex Humbard comes on, a Catholic priest comes on, and a colored family...a colored minister comes on, but he said a week ago Sunday that will be their last Sunday...he didn't say why, whether it was on account of money, or what. But I didn't leave any of it bother me, what their religion was, I could listen to every bit of it. I go in there, and they first come on at seven; well, then... and they start at 8:00 with Reverend Schwambach, and I go in there and I sit down at 8:00 and start to watching church, and I sit there until after 11:00...11:00, that's when church is over. And I feel like I get more out of church that way than trying to go to church and not being able to hear. I can turn my TV up louder or I can turn it down, whichever way I want.

Q: Some of the churches now have hearing aids on each bench.

A: Yeah. They do have their names.

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Q: The hearing aids.

A: Oh, hearing aids. Well, I don't know whether they've got them down at church or not.

Q: Well, it's still a problem getting up the steps and all that stuff, too.

A: Yeah, that's just it. And there's one lady who...she calls me... I'm on the sick list...she called me yesterday afternoon; Clarence was down and hauled up the leaves in the yard. I says, "Clarence, Mary asked me this morning whether the lady from St. John's called me the day before, and I said, "Oh, no, Mary, she calls me of a Wednesday," and she said, "Oh, I forgot which day we went to." I said, "Well, she calls me every Wednesday afternoon." And she wanted to know, had either one of the ministers been out yet, you know, to see about communion, and I said, "No, not yet." And she said, "Well, they'll be out there..." I said, I feel like I've been doing pretty good or better in the way that I'm going because I'd sit there and I just couldn't hear, and that would worry me more than just me sitting here and listening...

Q: You said there were a lot of things on TV that you didn't like. What do you think of this generation, their morals?

A: What do I?

Q: What do you think of the morals of the younger people? The way the younger people are these days? What do you think of it?

A: What was it?

Q: The morals of the young people, what do you think about them, the way the young people are living today?

A: The younger people...that's what I will not watch on TV...a lot of that stuff...the way they do. I think it's a shame, I think it's a shame. I had said times over, if people like my mother and daddy...maybe your folks, or you know, your parents are dead now...but like mine are so much older now, I tell you, if they could come back to this world and see how the young people are living, and how things are going on, they wouldn't want to stay here, they'd be ready to go back where they came. That's just the way I feel. I don't approve of one bit of it. None of it.

Q: Oh, I don't either.

A: I tell you, when you see how they go, and how they do, and think that you have to live like that...understand, I don't have to live with them, but that's the reason I say I don't like my TV on too much in the daytime, because there's too much I don't like, too much I don't like.

Q: What did you like best about being a homemaker?

A: About being a homemaker?

Q: Uh-huh. What did you like the best about being home with your children, about being a homemaker?

A: Me staying here?

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Q: Uh-huh. What did you like the best about it?

A: Well, I just enjoyed it.

Q: You just loved home...

A: I just enjoyed it.

Q: Anything you disliked?

A: What?

Q: Was there any part of it you disliked?

A: Well, all the...maybe something come up someway or other, but I don't know, we were just more... I can't say to ourselves, now, or anything like that...but back when we, our first years, up until '37, I didn't have a phone in my house, and that's when I lost my mother...and we didn't have electric...electric in our home...we didn't have a furnace. And there was so many things we didn't have, but in with our children, we'd do things with them to pass their time of a night, we'd...in the winter we'd pop a big can of popcorn, sit it on the table, and we'd sit around that table with a lantern sitting on the table.

Q: Was your house this big when your husband built it?

A: Yeah, just like it is now.

Q: Really?

A: Just like it is now.

Q: You didn't have gas lights. You had lamps?

A: No. Coal oil.

Q: Oh. Saved on electricity, didn't it.

A: And cleaned the glass chimneys when they'd get smoked black. That was a neat job.

Q: Sometimes they would smoke?

A: What?

Q: Sometimes they would smoke?

A: Oh, yes. I've got one of my old lanterns down to the basement.

Q: Do you keep one up here filled with oil?

A: Well, I guess I should... I got me a little candle there, that was my mom's old candle holder, she gave that to me and I put a piece of candle in it...if I happen to need a light, I can light that.

Q: I keep a lamp full of oil all the time.

A: What?

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Q: I keep a lamp full of coal oil all the time. Where do your children live now?

A: What?

Q: Where do your children live?

A: One lives on Weinbach and one lives over on Herbert Avenue.

Q: How many grandchildren do you have? Oh...three grandchildren? How many great-grandchildren?

A: Two grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren...and said...listen, she...did get that all down there?

Q: She's trying to.

A: That don't none of that come in no paper or anything, does it?

Q: No, this isn't to be in any paper.

A: Understand... I don't care if...every word that I'm telling you, I'm telling you the truth. But...

Q: It's just not good to let everybody know you're living by yourself. I mean, you don't want it published in the paper that you're living by yourself.

A: No.

Q: We just want to go back and see what you can remember.

A: Where is my piece? Here it is.

Q: If you had a chance to take a space ride to the moon, would you go?

A: No, ma'am. It didn't take me long to say that.

Q: Have you ever been on an airplane?

A: What?

Q: Have you ever been on a plane?

A: One time.

Q: Where did you go?

A: And my...just, out at the airport, it was on Mother's Day, and both my boys were in World War II, and they were both in airplanes, both of them. And when my oldest son come home, the...out at the airport, they were giving free rides to mothers for Mother's Day. And Clarence said, "Mom, I want to take you out in the airplane." And I said, "Oh, Clarence, I didn't think I'd ever want to go on a plane." He said, "Well, I'd like to take you." And I said, "Well, if you want to take me, I'll go." So, we went out to the airport, so when we got ready to go, I said, "Well, I say, if we don't come back just send me some red roses." So, we came back. And that's the only time I was ever in an airplane. And I didn't go no more. Clarence, when he said, "Mom, I know..." I said, "Clarence, that's the only reason I am going." I say listen, you and... I was just trying to... He had interviews about these here...you know, about me living here or something. And about me still living in the same old...but he didn't say I was living by myself,

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that's what I appreciated so much. Even though he did write that I was still living in the same home. But he didn't have anything about me living by myself, and I was so glad of that...You know that gets too many a good chance, I guess to...

Q: Do you answer your phone when it rings at night?

A: Well, I didn't, but I had a bad spell here about two weeks ago, and my daughter-in-law and son called...

Q: Do you answer it if it rings in the middle of the night?

A: Well, see...No, I don't, my folks all know that I won't answer the phone at night.