

Interview with Roxanne Grimm  
Interviewer: Jenny Herrell and Kelly Ungetheim  
October 28, 1989

**Q:** What was the year when your father was Sheriff?

**A:** He was Sheriff from 1944 to 1946, a two-year term.

**Q:** And, what about your husband?

**A:** My husband took office on January 1, 1960 and went out of office January 1, 1969.

**Q:** Could you go through a tour of the residence for us?

**A:** There was the entry hall and to the left there was a dining room and a very small kitchen. The dining room was large, and the ceilings there were very high, nine to ten-foot ceilings. Then to your right off the entry of the hall is the living room, a large room with a fireplace, two windows which face Fourth Street. Then to the left of the living room is huge den, which is where my husband had his office with a desk and all the radios, he got City, State, and County Police calls there. Then go out of into the hall from the den to your right and go back into the Jail which has barred doors, but we did not go out there too often. There are three bedrooms upstairs and a bath and a half. Downstairs there is also a half bath. The laundry room was downstairs. The Jail kitchen was to the right of that. They stored all of their canned goods off of the room which was off of my washroom. That's about the layout of the living quarters.

**Q:** How did you feel about this, excited?

**A:** Well, a little at first. My daughter might have mentioned this, but it was a dreary, very dark place. We had it all lightened up as much as we could. Downtown is a dark place. We had venetian blinds, and we kept them closed quite a bit. You walk into the entrance to the home and you know people are staring at you and wonder what you are going in there for. But after we got it fixed up and got our own furnishing in there it was livable for a few years.

**Q:** Can I have the dates of the terms of your husband and father?

**A:** My father from 1944 to 1946. My husband was from 1960 to 1969.

**Q:** Was there a change in how you felt between those two times?

**A:** That was when the war was on, and I was not down there too much when my father was the Sheriff because I traveled with my husband. The time he was Sheriff, about a year of that time, my husband was stationed up by Vincennes and we lived in Vincennes and we came home on weekends. I really did not see too much of it; I did not live there at that time. When I did live there, there was a big difference; I was there 24 hours a day. You have weird people coming up to your door; some of your ex-convicts, winos I call them, they are not mean people, but when they get out of Jail they come back and maybe give you 50 cents or a dollar. It was different when I lived there than when my father was Sheriff. It changed from a two-year term to a four-year term. After 2 four-year terms a Sheriff cannot run anymore, they have to lay out four years, then they can run again. But a two-year term is the limit.

**Q:** When your father was Sheriff who else lived with you?

**A:** Just my mother. I had a brother, but he was gone; he was in the war, too.

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**Q:** Did you mom enjoy living there?

**A:** Yes, she fixed it up real pretty, even from the outside she had her hanging plants out there and pots sitting up and down the steps; that was my mother. I didn't have stuff like that when I lived there; I just fixed it up on the inside.

**Q:** Do you remember any political visitors?

**A:** Yes, there was President Kennedy. They met him out at the airport. He came down to the west side of the Courthouse where they had a stand and all the dignitaries were sitting and the County and State were there. I do remember Harry S. Truman coming. He stayed at the Hotel McCurdy down the river. He stayed there and we all went down there, well, the committee; my husband at that time was County Chairman. It was his Committee, so we all went to the McCurdy and sat down there waited for President Truman to come up because he was going to join us for breakfast. He had gone out for his morning jog which he was known for and walked around down by the river on First Street near where the hotel was. Then he came up and he was very, very nice to talk to. I remember that; that was one of my highlights of my times down there. Kennedy also, but Harry Truman was like an old shoe; I just felt comfortable with him.

**Q:** Did you have any other political figures come down there?

**A:** I not sure there were any more I can think of.

**Q:** Can you describe any of the buildings that were around the Courthouse at that time?

**A:** Right next door was the Welfare Department. Across the street from that was a restaurant, I don't remember the name of it, but my daughter loved to go there and eat after she got off from school. Next door to the Jail was a car dealer. Next door to that was a dentist. Next door to that was the Coliseum.

**Q:** Were there any famous trials held at the Courthouse?

**A:** No.

**Q:** Did you watch any of them?

**A:** No, I never went; the only time I went was one time when I was subpoenaed. A girl had come up to the side door off the dining room and I recognized her immediately; an old friend, just a casual friend, from grade school, and she said somebody was chasing her. I told her to go right around to the front and go into the alley and up to the guards. She did and she subpoenaed me, why I don't know. I had to go over there, but it was never brought to trial, it was cancelled before because they settled out of court. That was sort of weird to me. You never know who will come to your door, friend or foe.

**Q:** What did the inside of the trial room look like, was it really ornate?

**A:** It had seats, and the witness and Judge's stand, tables for the defense.

**Q:** Was there a specific kind of wood used?

**A:** It was all dark wood, highly polished and shiny.

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**Q:** Could you tell us about the relationship with the women prisoners again?

**A:** This was soon after my husband took office. We did not have a matron yet who takes care of the women; well, he had a day one, but did not have a night one yet. So, I was always hoping that if they brought any women in that it would be in the daytime and I would not have to do this, but I knew there would come a time before he got this woman matron and I would have to go up, which I did. A guard went up there with me and he told me what to do. I put the girl in the cell which had the shower in it, told her to strip her clothes, and before she got under the shower, I sprayed her and I know that has to be very cold hitting your body, and she got under the show. Then I gave her a uniform and a sheet and a blanket. I did that a couple of times, which is not pleasant to do.

**Q:** Were you ever scared they were going to hurt you?

**A:** No, there was a guard there all the time. I felt safe, but it was an eerie feeling going up there when I had not done it before. Shortly after that he got a night matron.

**Q:** Were you ever really scared when your husband was out?

**A:** Well, there was one time they had a stakeout on a job in Evansville and they had their walkie talkies with them and was connected to our radios in our den at home. We could hear the conversation. They had their police dogs with them; we could hear the dogs in the background. They finally sniffed the guy out on top of a roof. It was scary to listen to all of that. We can hear all kinds of calls on our radios.

**Q:** Did you ever go with them on any of their stakeouts?

**A:** No, that was not my job. Your daughter told us of a story when she was getting into a sorority. They had contacted me first and told me that Gayle had been accepted and they were going to come down and get her, but I was not to say a word to her about it. The doorbell rang and Gayle went to the door. There was about 20 girls outside there all coming in and dragging her and off they went. She has had a lot of summer parties down there. I think her favorite record down there was the Jailhouse Blues. They played that record and I think they wore it out. My son did not have many parties down there; he had some, but not like my daughter. Girls have more slumber parties.

**Q:** What offices were in the Courthouse?

**A:** All the County offices were there. On Saturday the Sheriff's office was the only one open.

**Q:** Did John Kennedy or any politicals come into the Courthouse?

**A:** No, they never came into the Courthouse. In fact, Truman did not come over there at all. Kennedy was outside.

**Q:** Were there any kind of celebrations?

**A:** No, don't remember any.

**Q:** Did you explore the upper areas of the Courthouse at all?

**A:** No, just on the second floor. That's where the Courtrooms were. It is a lot of beautiful building inside.

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**Q:** What about the architecture on the outside?

**A:** It is beautiful.

**Q:** Did you have any other experiences that were significant?

**A:** No, not really. We had our own private parties there and we felt even kind of bad about doing that, but it was our life and we had to live it down there.

**Q:** Were people nervous when they came?

**A:** Some were at first. My husband had a big moose in the den, and everyone would come there to get their picture taken by the moose.

**Q:** Did any prisoners ever escape?

**A:** Oh yes. They were the trustees. They had the ones they could trust, but you get one every now and then that decides to run off. They have them run errands for them, nothing big. They had a few run off. They would wash squad cars and they would take off behind cars out of the alley. They weren't the mean ones. The mean ones never got to be a trustee.

**Q:** Did even of them ever escape or break out?

**A:** No, never did have any breakouts while we were there.

**Q:** Did the trustees ever threaten anybody?

**A:** There were winos and while they were in Jail, they were good people but when they got out, they got that wine in them and got arrested. I had one, when I was going down to pick up Gayle, and this one man who was a very good artist, but the wine just got to him. He could never do anything with his art. My husband has some of his pictures that he made; he made one of my husband which was very good. He said "Mrs. Grimm, do you have a dollar you could give me?" I told him no, that I didn't have a cent with me. Once you start giving them money, they can spot you. I was never afraid of any of them down there. I was just not a scared person.

**Q:** Did you ever take the passage going from the Jail to the Courthouse?

**A:** No, I never went down there. I heard there was rats down there, and just didn't care about going down there and going through it.

**Q:** Did you ever have to worry about gambling down there?

**A:** No, not there. My son went to the top, up through a trap door on the third floor, which was attic space. He did go up there and look around. I never did even go up there. My husband did.

**Q:** Were you ever concerned about your kids being around the prisoners?

**A:** No, they were not scared either. I think if I would have been scared, they would have been scared. They knew they could go back to the Jail into the office. That was as far as they could go; back to the coke machine, where they went several times a day.