

Eileen Thiesse, Palo Alto County

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Interviewee: Eileen Thiesse

Interviewer: Kate Scott

Date of Interview: 08/27/07

Run Time: Approximately 20M

Cassette

Biographical Data Form

Oral History Release

Newsclippings

Photograph (1)

Transcript



In October of 1944, when Eileen was fifteen years old, she was diagnosed with polio. Her family lived on a grain and livestock farm with no indoor plumbing in Fairmont, Minnesota. She remembers going to bed with a headache and waking up the next morning unable to walk. The local doctor thought he could treat her from home, but after a couple of days they decided to seek help in Minneapolis. Her family was quarantined on the farm for six weeks. She recalls going by ambulance to Minneapolis with her mother. They stopped at the Minneapolis General Hospital for her spinal tap. The Sister Kenny Institute was full so she was admitted to The Sheltering Arms: A Hospital for Poliomyelitis for three months of treatment. The Sheltering Arms shared the same staff and technicians as the Sister Kenny Institute. Sheltering Arms was originally an orphanage founded in 1883 by Sister Annette Relf, the first Episcopal deaconess in Minnesota.

Before Eileen contracted polio, she happened to read an article in Look Magazine about the epidemics sweeping the South – particularly in Texas and Georgia. Eileen remembers the presence of southern patients who sought treatment at the Sister Kenny Institute. In her oral history, she recalled, “I remember at the time they asked a lot of questions of me - different interns and people doing research on polio. They were trying to find a source or a reason for it. There was a big thing about washing fruits and vegetables. The thinking was that it was carried possibly through food handling. They were searching for reasons.”