

Oral History Interview
with
Dena Ander

Interview Conducted by
Tanya Finchum and Alex Bishop
May 6, 2015

Oklahoma 100 Year Life
Oral History Project

Oklahoma Oral History Research Program
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Oklahoma 100 Year Life

Oral History Project

Interview History

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Project Detail

The purpose of Oklahoma 100 Year Life Oral History Project is to preserve the historical memories and legacies of Oklahoma's oldest living citizens.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on May 13, 2013.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Dena Ander is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on May 6, 2015.

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About Dena Ander...

Dena Ander was born April 23, 1915 in Joplin, Missouri. Her parents were originally from Poland. At a young age the family moved to Picher, Oklahoma, where her father, Joe Ander, operated a ready-to-wear store. When Dena was fifteen, the family moved to Miami, Oklahoma where her father purchased and operated a shoe store. That shoe store, Ander's Shoes, is still in operation today and Dena is owner and manager. In fact, the oral history interview was conducted in the store as Dena still works in the store six days a week.

Dena graduated from Miami High School in 1932 and took a few business courses through Northeastern Oklahoma A & M College. She has worked in the shoe business all of her life and continues to enjoy the work and helping customers. In addition to her work, Dena has served on the board of the Miami Chamber of Commerce and was the first woman ever elected to the Miami Savings and Loan Board.

Oklahoma 100 Year Life

Oral History Project

Dena Ander

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Tanya Finchum
& Alex Bishop
May 6, 2015
Miami, Oklahoma



Finchum *Today is May 6, 2015. My name is Tanya Finchum, along with Alex Bishop. We're with Oklahoma State University, and today we're in Miami, Oklahoma, to speak with Dena Ander. This is part of our Oklahoma One Hundred Year Life project. Thank you for letting us come today. Let's start with having you tell us when and where you were born.*

Ander Okay, I was born in Joplin, Missouri, April 23, 1915.

Finchum *Okay, so happy birthday a little late.*

Ander Yeah, I'm counting the days now. (Laughs)

Finchum *Well, what brought you to Miami?*

Ander Well, my father was an immigrant from Poland. When Poland was possessed by the Russian Army, he had to make shoes and boots for the Russian Army. Then when he came to the United States, he came to Joplin, Missouri, because he had relatives there. Then, he took up shoe repairing.

Finchum *Then came to Miami?*

Ander Oh, you want to know that. Yeah, then in Joplin, my mother and father divorced. He moved four children to Picher, Oklahoma. Went in partnership with the ready-to-wear store in Picher during the boom days. We were, we were poor and deprived, but we did make a living there. Then, the partner committed suicide, so my father took over the store. Then, we went to school, and we lived over a laundry in Picher. Then, the Depression came and the banks closed and everything. We went broke, so he moved us to Miami. We moved down the next block.

He still had his show repair machinery. He opened up a shoe repair shop. I showed you the picture. We were there for a couple of years. We lived in the—there were five of us all living together, four children and my father, in the back of the shoe repair shop. Then, we got enough, accumulated a little bit of money, so we bought this building, so we moved here. Then, we had enough income then, because we started doing the RAF repairs, for the RAF [Royal Air Force] boys, England, during the war. [Spartan School of Aeronautics in Miami, Oklahoma, trained pilots.]

We started renting houses, fifteen dollars a month. We kept them so clean and nice and neat the landlord would then sell them. We'd have to move again. I don't know how many rent houses we rented, fifteen dollars a month. We never bought anything until we could pay cash. We would skimp and save. Then, he started repairing old work shoes, just regular old work shoes. He hired a shoe repairman. They put the soles and heels on those shoes. They shined them up, brought them up to first class shape, and started selling them for a dollar ninety-eight. We would sell the shoes the customers wouldn't pick up from repair. We would sell those. Some of them were ladies shoes.

Then, he started going to St. Louis, and buying damaged ladies shoes. They may have a cut or a slit, or the dye or something. He would buy cases of them. We had a different store front. I have the pictures of before. He would put those shoes in the window, the woman would see that shoe, and she would want it. Well, I had to wait on her. Because we didn't have another pair that size, I had to sell her that damaged shoe. After she made another selection, she would sit there and wait until he sewed or polished or whatever. These were elegant designer shoes. We'd sell them for around four or five dollars. That's how we got started in the ladies shoes.

Then, I had some friends, very close friends, had an elegant shoe store in the next block. This town was gorgeous at one time. They became very close friends. He went to market, the shoe show market. They would have all kinds of brands and designers. One time he took me with him. I bought a line of shoes, American Girl. I've got pictures.



They were all sizes. I could have my one style and buy all sizes, so I could fit a woman. I could get down on that foot stool and I could fit her, and talk her—make the shoe appealing, good enough that she would want to buy them. Then, I started to like that real well. Then, I started going to market more. The salesman started calling on me too, because I got to be a good account. We worked hard on selling them. I had a big following.

Bishop

Where was market usually? Where would you have to go?

Ander

St. Louis. I mean, excuse me, Dallas. I would take the plane from, drive to Tulsa. Then, I started going by myself, take the plane from Tulsa to Dallas. (Laughs) I can show you that picture of me with the big black eyes. We ran into an accident there. I was taking the cab to the hotel. I had stayed two or three days, when I was buying. These two little old ladies going to church, it was on a Sunday morning. They stopped right in front of the cab. The cab threw me against his seat. You got to see that picture. I had a concussion. I had to turn around and go home. (Laughs)

Bishop

Oh my gosh!

Ander

Anyway, that was another experience. Then, I started going to Kansas City Market. I've been to New York Market. I've been to Dallas and St. Louis. Then, I went in with this company, big company, International Shoe Company. They were the biggest in the world at the time. These two salesman, they'd come in here, the ladies and the men salesman. This company had a big offer for people that would just carry their lines. They were so good, they were wonderful shoes. You've heard of them, Poll-Parrot and Red Goose Shoes. They had set up a deal where if I would go on their plan, that they would remodel my store. They would fix my building design and windows for me. I would have to buy all the men's shoes from them, all the children's shoes from them, and the

ladies shoes, and the dress shoes, and the work shoes. Then I added the tap shoes, then I had cowboy boots all the way up there. We had a big, big business and a big shoe store.

Then, this company, they would send the salesmen. They helped me take inventory. They set up my bookkeeping plan. They gave me a new, they gave me a sign out there. That's new. It's just been replaced. They went out of business, so I'm on my own for several years now. Buying habits have changed. The salesman don't call on you anymore. You don't have the same one the next season. When it's time to buy your spring and summer shoes, you have to find them. You have to call in and find who they are.

Then, my Clarks salesman, he's the only one that's remaining that's still the salesman that I ever knew when I first started buying. I call him and he sends me the catalogs, sends me everything, and marks the shoes that he sold well at market. Then, Phyllis and I work it out. We will buy about seven thousand dollars' worth of shoes a season, get stuck with a lot of them. Anyway, that's how we started buying on our own. Now, it's hard being in business. The shoes are all on QVC, they're online, and every dress shop carries shoes. Then you have shoe catalogs. They pay the shipment and then the next time you get twenty percent off. Incentives, all have incentives. You stop me when you want to.

Finchum *You're right.*

Ander (Laughs) They have great incentives today. I can't compete with it. I had a pair of shoes on last month. This lady wanted me to get them for her. We carry the line. I have a whole wall of them. I ordered her a pair. They are out. Then, you pick up this magazine, and you can buy all you want to for ninety-dollars, but they refused me, and I have excellent credit rating. I just got a letter from SAS, San Antonio Shoe Company. They admire me and my bookkeeping and my fast payments and credit.

Bishop *You still keep the books today? On your own?*

Ander Well, I let her do the daily sheets. No, no, no. I have an accountant right down the street. She will be in, let's see today's the...

Finchum *Sixth.*

Ander Okay, she will be in the tenth and pick up everything, my whole monthly records, and my investments. Then I get my monthly statement and I check that off with my daily receipts. I don't balance because these credit card things drive me crazy. Anyway, I give them all to her, she will balance them. She will show me where my mistake was or

what I did. She does everything for me. I do nothing. Phyllis does daily sheets. I don't have to do that anymore, but boy if we run into a shortage or something, we start digging. (Laughter)

Finchum *Is your closet full of shoes at home?*

Ander Honey, people think I do. I'm the hardest person you ever saw. I've got customers that are nicer than I am but harder to fit. (Laughs) My foot is so long and narrow. I specialize in narrow widths. That is the secret, I mean not a secret, that's where my income and business comes from is from my narrow widths. You cannot buy a narrow width in Joplin. You can't all the way to Tulsa, then you have to get in designer two or three hundred dollar shoes. I don't buy shoes unless I can buy narrow widths. If they don't send my narrow widths, I'm right on top of them. Do you think they care? They couldn't care less. Anyway, that's where my business is, in narrow widths, fitting customers.

No, I don't have a closet. I do have, but you know why? These customers come in and they'll say, "Oh I don't need anything. You should see my closet, I've got a closet full of shoes." I say, "Honey, you stop right there. You've got shoes you can't wear, don't wear, won't wear, and won't get rid of." (Laughter) I say, "You only buy them because you want them." Women love shoes. (Laughs)

Finchum *How long did your dad work side by side with you?*

Ander He died in [1968], so he was a beginning of it all. He saw me when I started going to market first. After that, he was out of it. He would sit here and visit with the customers. Sometimes he would just look at the customer and see the way I was waiting on them and he'd say, "She's not going to buy them." We can smell them. (Laughter)

Finchum *Did you pick one style at some point that was just a total mistake?*

Ander Oh sure, see that right there. That's going back. I'm tired of keeping their misfits in their shoes. All we are waiting for is, Phyllis calls and gets the main information for that. That's International Shoe Company. We gave them the sizes and the pairage and everything. The shoes gap open before you even put them on them. I'm tired of keeping their mistakes.

Bishop *Now, you mentioned Phyllis, is she an employee?*

Ander She's been here thirty-nine years. She won the award at a big banquet the other night for being the oldest employee there. (Laughs)

Bishop *She's been with you for thirty-nine years.*

Ander Thirty-nine, the other one's been here twenty-[nine]. She's off today. Wednesday is her day off.

Bishop *When do you work?*

Ander Six days a week.

Bishop *How many hours a week?*

Ander I get here about ten thirty. Well, Monday I work until five. Tuesday I take off sometimes around three or four o'clock. Wednesday I'm full time. Friday and Saturday we used to stay open until ten o'clock at night. We had stores all a going here. People and the farmers and all came to town to buy groceries. Some of them would come early and park, to get a parking place. Then upstairs they would have the dances, Leon and the Boys, up there and the DeMolay dances and it was just mobs. And they had the movies next door, too. They would line up all the way around the corner, so we stayed open to ten o'clock at night.

We didn't have any transportation. We never owned a car, all the time I was grown. My father and I, after my sisters and brother married and left, we would walk home at ten o'clock at night. Everybody else was going out celebrating, but not me. I had to go home. (Laughs)

Bishop *How far a walk was it from your business? How far was your walk?*

Ander Sometimes, it was F Street. That's A, B, C, D, E, F and sometimes it was on B Northwest. We had different, just rental houses. We didn't own a house until 1960. Then, I bought a little house on F Street. I paid eleven thousand dollars for it, but I paid cash. Then later I bought a car. I went all through school, I walked every block all the way to school. It was way out east of town. I walked to college. Whether it rained or stormed. When we lived in Picher, I walked over the mining fields. I walked over chat piles. So I walked. It wasn't easy. (Laughs)

Finchum *Where did you go to school?*

Ander Well, I went to school in Joplin. I went to school at Picher. Then, I graduated here.

Finchum *From Miami?*

Ander I cried when we left Picher. I loved Picher. (Laughs)

Finchum *It sure has changed a lot.*

Ander Oh honey, it's dead. It's gone. It's gone.

Bishop *Was there a train? You said at one time or people have said...*

Ander The streetcar. I used to pay a nickel, when I could find one. I used to take the trolley all the way to the railroad tracks and then walk the rest of the way to the swimming pool. The swimming pool is way down there.

Finchum *Miami's changed some, too, hasn't it?*

Ander Well, yes. I've changed with it too. I'm lazy. If I can't find no good place to park, I don't care if you hit my car, I'm going to park as close as I can if I go to Walmart. (Laughter) I go to McDonald's every morning. I have for twenty years. All I have is coffee and orange juice, and I read my Tulsa paper. Then I go home and have breakfast, my bran, and milk, and bananas. (Laughs) Then I come to work, and I stay most of the day.

On one day, they have a group of old men that come around and sit around in the section there. They all have a good time. One of these guys—I parked one morning, and one of the waitresses came over to me and said, "Dena, somebody hit your car." She says, "I know who it is. Here's his tag number. You know who I'm talking about." I said, "Yes." He drove off. He hit the whole side. I mean that whole side of that car was dented in. Couldn't even open the door. He went out to The Stables, the gambling place, and didn't even say anything, so I had to call the police in order to report it. I told her where he was, and they went out there. He told them he had already talked to me about, which he didn't. He lied. Anyway, he had to pay for it.

Finchum *Good for you.*

Ander That was a big deal. Big deal! I got it fixed again, so I don't care. I was reading about that woman, talking about that, that bought a new car when she was a hundred. I got a notion. (Laughter) I got another one that will beat that one. I think I will keep this one.

Finchum *Well, did your brother and sisters not show any interest in the business?*

Ander They did. We were all active. They fell in love with other people and they had to leave. They left town. My one sister went to California, my oldest sister. My younger sister she went to Washington with her husband. They ran off and got married like they did years ago. My

brother did likewise in California. He loved this business. He worked out in California in the big shoe companies, and he was the highest paid man. He could have had this, but he died mad at me, because when my father died, I doled out the will. I made it all up because it was mine, I earned it. He didn't think he got his share, so he never felt good about it. He had nothing to do with it later.

Bishop *Have you ever been married?*

Ander No, that's my secret of success. (Laughs) And no kids! (Laughs)

Bishop *Your secret to longevity?*

Ander Longevity, that's right. Let me say here, my diet: onions, garlic, and jalapeño peppers.

Bishop *Really?*

Ander Really. The hotter the better. (Laughter)

Finchum *Not me.*

Ander You too?

Finchum *No, not me.*

Ander Coward. (Laughter)

Finchum *Pretty much.*

Ander I can eat those. I went out to Arby's and got one of their sandwiches, not too long ago. They had the peppers and the onions, and the pickles, you know. I got that little cup while they were making my order and filled that and stood there eating them while he was making my sandwich. He couldn't believe it. He said, "I'll give you a carton for those." (Laughter) It was fun.

Finchum *Did you ever think you would make it to a hundred?*

Ander Oh no. Oh, I didn't anticipate anything like that. I didn't know how or when I was going to die. I didn't make any plans until I got a lawyer last month, and I signed. Changed it all over, all over. All my wishes are in that, even how. I'm going to be cremated.

Finchum *You are Jewish?*

Ander Uh-huh.

Finchum *Cremation, is that something that they...*

Ander They don't want it, but I've got a plot in the Jewish cemetery out there at Joplin next to my father. It's all paid for. It's all mine. I asked them, "What are you going to do with me?" They said, "Well we'll see." I think they will take it. They're converts. Most of them are Conservative, not Conservative, what they call—there's the Orthodox, there's the Conservative, there's the next one [Reformed]. My mind, see there it goes again. But anyway, whatever. I don't care.

Finchum *That popped into my head too.*

Ander Yeah.

Finchum *You said you went to college. Where?*

Ander I went out here for a year. I couldn't pay any of my dues or anything. My bills, they kept billing my father. He was an immigrant and it didn't mean much to him. The language was so poor, he spoke more Jewish than he talked English. I ignored them, and went ahead and finished. I just had one year. After I got more successful, I gave them a scholarship to make up for it. I don't feel like I owe them anything.

Bishop *Are you talking Northeastern Oklahoma?*

Ander Uh-huh. Out here. It's beautiful out there, near Lake Miami. It's going to be a four-year college.

Finchum *When did you graduate from high school?*

Ander Nineteen thirty-two.

Finchum *Right during the Depression.*

Ander Yes, honey. That's when we lived, five of us, down there on that next block. I didn't even have a dress to wear. I had to wear my oldest sister's dress under my gown to graduate. I didn't go to the junior/senior banquet. We couldn't afford anything. We were just lucky to have meals and get to school to graduate.

Finchum *Where was your mother? I know you said they were divorced. Where was she during all of this?*

Ander She remarried and left the country. She had a world of her own. Yeah.

Finchum *Your dad stepped up and took care of...*

Ander He took care of us. God love him. I don't know how he did it. I don't know how that man could, how he could do that. Boy, if I would ever go out at night, after I got older and teenager, ooh wee, he would be setting there in the dark waiting for me, because the others had gone. He knew. He was afraid I would do the same thing and leave him. He would sit, and then he would rant and rave all night long. (Laughter)

Bishop *He was worried about you.*

Ander I knew I was going to get it and I did. (Laughs)

Bishop *He was worried.*

Ander He was worried about where I was and who I was with.

Finchum *Well, who did the cooking?*

Ander Me.

Finchum *For all five of you?*

Ander He taught us. He taught us how to cook. He kind of bached it for himself anyway, when he had the store in Picher, because we still lived in Joplin. I guess he cooked, but he taught me and my sisters and all of us. We'd have to go home after—one of us had to stay here and the rest of us would go home and cook or clean the house. The only thing we never had to do, in later years, was wash the laundry, like the sheets and stuff. The laundry was down there. He would let us do that. I tried washing the sheets. I couldn't even lift them after they got wet. (Laughter)

Finchum *You are a small child?*

Ander Oh no honey, I was a horse. (Laughs) I weighed a hundred and seventy pounds when I was in high school. I just determined I wasn't going to be that big. I couldn't stand it. I wouldn't even show anybody pictures today. They had a tire shop next door. They sold used bicycles. I bought one for eleven dollars, eleven or sixteen dollars. Paid a dollar every week and got up five o'clock in the morning and rode down to the park where the swimming pool and tennis courts are. I bought a racket. I didn't know how to play tennis, but my friend and I would go down there. I lost thirty pounds that year. I never gained it back. I was big and

fat. I cooked and ate all the time. That's all I did. Go home and eat.
(Laughs)

Finchum *It's the Coleman Theatre that is down the street. Is that what you were referring to earlier? The Coleman...*

Ander About what?

Finchum *When you said they were lined up?*

Ander No honey. Next door. Right next door was the Glory B Theater.

Finchum *Okay.*

Ander Glory B. They had all the cowboy pictures and all of them at that time. Then, they had a lot going on in that building next door upstairs, too. They had a business downstairs. The worst thing that happened was when they put that bank across the street and bought all those little buildings. We had a paint store. We had a little bowling alley. We had a creamery there, we had all kinds of little—and a drugstore, and a grocery store. Then he bought up all those, put that bank facing this way. Took up the whole block. You can't get retail business. You need competition. Nothing. We need industry. We need work. We need payrolls. We are dying just like all the other little towns, but we put up a big front.

Finchum *We were curious on what was the main business in town?*

Ander Goodrich. Oh, Goodrich, that made our [business]. People spent. First started by trying to outdo each other. They'd buy cars, and they'd take vacations. They'd buy boats and homes. They had good money, but you know when they went on strike, they wouldn't pay for their insurance. They marched up and down the street, rebelling. They come to the merchants for donations. You know what I gave them, one dollar. That was the worst thing they could do. They never saved a dime. They were always in debt. Not all of them, but most of them. I had some of them that I couldn't believe. They wouldn't pay for their insurance. They were spoiled. Then when Goodrich left, we've had nothing since. We are not the only ones, honey. All little towns are drying up. That's technically signs of the times.

Bishop *You can really tell that at one time Miami was a happening place. Miami was a happening town.*

Ander A happy town, a beautiful town. It was just lovely. It was, there was things to do, people that went and came and visited. It's all dried up. It's

just a sign of the times. I'm one of the very, very few merchants, independent shoe merchants, left. You go to any little town, see if you ever find any.

Finchum

Not many.

Ander

You can't find them. I'm here by the skin of my teeth. (Laughs)

Bishop

I want to know a little bit more about Picher, growing up in Picher.

Ander

Oh the boom days. The miners, my goodness. Yes, it was flooded. Business was just wonderful. We had a lot of really nice stores, department stores, really nice shoe stores, a good school. The miners would come down and walk around Main Street with their lanterns on, in their work clothes. You could even go down in the mines if you wanted to. I never wanted to.

Bishop

Was it dangerous?

Ander

You go down in that bucket, I guess. I wouldn't go.

Bishop

You never went?

Ander

No. I had not desire. (Laughter) It was a boom town. It was really flooded there. The school was nice. I went the first year of high school there. I was fifteen when I came to Miami.

Finchum

Okay.

Ander

So, I loved Picher. It was nice.

Bishop

I can't believe you walked on the chat. That amazes me.

Ander

Well, we did because the chat was there. We'd go to some of the ponds. We lived there over the laundry and then we would just have to walk and go to school way out. There were the ponds and then the chat piles and the chat all around there. In the winter time, we would get the pieces of paper, cardboard just like that. (Gestures) We would climb to the top of those chat piles and then slide down them. Oh my, got dizzy. One time I rolled down it. Oh, I was sick at my stomach. I couldn't stand up. (Laughs)

Bishop

You didn't get in trouble for doing that?

Ander No, we all did it. We all went. Some of them drowned in the pond. They had a pond there, from the mines. It was dangerous. It was very dangerous.

Finchum *And your father wouldn't worry about you? He'd just say, "Go."*

Ander Why sure. That's all he could do. We had to go to school. We had to walk. (Laughs)

Finchum *You couldn't stay out late when you got here?*

Ander Not when I got to be a teenager. Heavens no. He was afraid somebody was going to run off with me. (Laughs)

Finchum *Well, was there ever a time that you thought you would lose the store?*

Ander Never, ever thought about it later. I was doing so good, and I had enough help. I knew enough to use the right people to help me. I just went on with their—They were successful and I was successful. I wasn't worried ever after that. I never dreamed I would see this time again. I've been through the war. I've been through the Depression. I've been through fair times. Then, I have seen when Goodrich came. It was fabulous, fabulous.

Bishop *What was the war time like in 1940s? What was it like running a business?*

Ander Well, you know we've changed our Main Street three times. You know, we had snakes. Did you ever hear about that? They had a big meeting and everything and made little planters and planted trees on Main Street. Then you swerved in and out just like a snake, you know. Then, the times started changing. They wanted to change Main Street again. That was the last thing that they needed to do. Now it's like this. (Gestures diagonal) It's hard for the old people to back out, you know, to see the traffic.

Finchum *It is.*

Ander So, we've changed it three times.

Bishop *It terms of war time, World War II, how were things during that period of time?*

Ander They were just, oh golly. I forgot them. What were they?

Finchum *I'm sure there were more women.*

- Bishop** *Yeah, a lot of people told us you hardly saw a man on the street during World War II.*
- Ander** Well, I guess no. They were all in the service. They were all in the service when they came of age during World War II. Sure. I remember that.
- Finchum** *You mentioned taps, tap shoes.*
- Ander** Tap and dance shoes. Yeah, for the little girls, the ballet and the tap, and the little uniforms, and the bags to carry them in. They were so cute. These grandmothers would bring them in, you know, because the mothers were usually working or at school, you know. I would fit them. This grandmother would take the shoe out of my hands see. She'd say, "I've fit a lot of shoes. I've had enough kids." I fit more shoes in one day than she did in all her life. (Laughter) She was going to tell me how to fit shoes. Well, I learned a lot the hard way. My father taught me too. I even went, when I would go to Dallas, I would go to Neiman Marcus and shop, because I could afford to. Then, I would have lunch there. One time I even bought shoes there, because my foot was so narrow. I could find these famous brand, Ferrogamo, pay three hundred dollars for a pair of shoes. I wouldn't do it today. Anyway, this young man waited on me. I had to show him how to use a shoe horn. He was just starting, he didn't know. (Laughs) The clerk in Neiman Marcus, I haven't forgotten that. (Laughs) I got acquainted with all the people in Neiman's. The salespeople and all of them, and they all knew me. They'd call me if they got something in, had something I wanted or had ordered. I don't do that anymore. I'm still wearing some things from market now. (Laughs)
- Finchum** *When was the last time you went to market?*
- Ander** It's been about ten years ago.
- Finchum** *Do you mostly buy by catalog now?*
- Ander** I do. I try to catch a hold of the rep, the rep, they call them reps, one of the salespeople. Whoever they are. Sometimes they are women now. Sometimes it's a new one every season. Have to tell her how we want it, and how we want the catalogs. Now the market has changed so much that my Naturalizer brand, one of my bestselling brands, a salesperson, he called on me a couple of weeks ago. I've already placed my fall order for [several] thousand dollars, just for fall. He calls on me. I said, "How come?" He says, "There's only three of us left." He says, "We don't even go to the shoe show anymore in Dallas because the

attendance is so poor.” The shoes have—they don’t have the people like me anymore. They don’t have the merchants to come and buy anymore. The big boys are all buying them. They have meetings and get their own salesmen and they all have a meeting and they all agree on them. I’m glad I quit. I miss it. I had fun. One time it was elegant. Oh, it was wonderful. They entertained us so royally. Had a big banquet and dinner dance. Now, you are lucky if you get a sandwich. (Laughs) The last time I went, you stood in line. (Laughs)

Finchum *Well, styles have changed or come and gone.*

Ander Honey, I’ve seen all these styles that they are seeing today. I’ve crippled more women than they’ll ever see today. (Laughter)

Finchum *Crippled?*

Ander Yeah, because these high wedges, you know. I know the man, the designer. Years ago, when I was first going in the ’90s, he was there. He had his own room and had these high heel wedges and I would buy from him. He would sit there popping popcorn in his mouth and his salesman’s showing me the shoes. Women would buy those high heel wedges. One woman said I crippled her because she broke her ankle. It was so high she turned her... then we had those high heel five inches. I had those. They were gorgeous. They were elegant. They think they’re new today. We had little grates in the sidewalks years ago. They would get them caught in there and the heel would fall off. They would have to walk home without their shoes on because they were just—you couldn’t repair them. They think this is all new today. I’ve seen it all.

Finchum *In the earlier days, he repaired shoes as well as sold them. When did he stop doing repairs?*

Ander When I started going to market and we quit carrying the second hand shoes. Oh, we didn’t have any shelving, we just had tables then. We didn’t have any shelving when we moved here. This was first an old undertaker home. Then later it was a garage. It was terrible. It had holes in the concrete from the machines, you know. Then, we couldn’t afford any heat, so we had a coal stove right there in the middle. We had a big back door where the garage was, you know. They would deliver a ton of coal. We had another shoe repairman. He would get the coal bucket, then fill it, and heat the stove. You would have to sit this way (gestures) to get warm, then turn around this way (gestures) to [get the other side]. It was filthy. It was filthy. Later, this tire shop across the street, this fellow moved. He got to be big time. He had an electric heater up there. He felt sorry for my father. He gave us his heater, and we had it over there in the corner. That was our first heat. I’ve talked too much.

Finchum *No, you've doing great. The cowboy boots?*

Ander They were five deep high. I would have to climb up there five deep and get those. Sometime I couldn't even sell them. They wouldn't buy them. Then, one time I climbed in the window to get the size and I broke the window out. I fell. I didn't get hurt. It's a wonder I didn't cut myself to pieces, because I broke the class. Honey, I've done it all. I even had muscles. (Laughter)

Bishop *Do you have any stories about particular customers that you remember?*

Ander Well, I remember a lot of them, but I would have to be reminded.

Bishop *Any particular that stand out in your mind?*

Finchum *Difficult or quirky or...*

Ander We still get those. (Laughs) Most of them are really nice, really lovely ladies. Years ago, I guess I did have, but I don't remember.

Finchum *It's mostly women's shoes now or all women's?*

Ander All women's.

Finchum *Except for the Thunder shoe?*



Ander Except our Kevin Durant size eighteen. (Laughs) They gave me a whole kit. Did you see the one where I had the Thunder shirt on?

Bishop *No.*

Ander I went to a big reception they had for me out here. Well, they gave me a hundred roses. Each person would have a rose, and they would bring it to me. I stood up for three hours. Anyway, one gave me a whole caboodle from Thunder. You can order them. She gave me that, his shoe. I just went in the backroom and I said, “Honey, let’s put this on.” I will show you the picture. I put the whole shirt one. Thunder. It was in the paper. I guess you didn’t see it. Did you see the one with the whole back page?

Bishop *No, I haven’t seen that yet.*

Ander The whole back page of me.

Finchum *They couldn’t do any better.*

Ander I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe it.

Finchum *So, for your 100th, they had a celebration?*

Ander Oh, yeah. You should see all the proclamations. The president, I got a card from the president. I didn’t care about him. It did come from the White House. That made me proud. (Laughter) Out of the mouth of babes. (Laughter) The three commissioners from the courthouse, they came over. They were out there and the city manager. They gave me a proclamation. The Indians, I’m a Modoc now. There’s my proclamation right there. I am a Modoc, a member of the Modoc Pride. You know what I said, “When do I get my allotment?” (Laughter) You know what he said, “Your statement will be in the mail the first of the month.” (Laughter) They’re good friends of mine. He is the chief. Then another chief gave me a big celebration, the pictures with me. Gave me a big celebration, a blowout thing. There were five hundred and twenty people and they put me up on the stage. This Indian, he gave me the list of the nine tribes and the Modoc was accented, and a big proclamation, Dena Ander Day. I’ve got—you ought to see the proclamation stack. There’s no end to them. Mullin, Fallin, all of them. I got to make another display. (Laughs)

Bishop *Sounds like you had a couple of parties, not just one.*

Ander Oh, it’s been three. My Pilot Club, they had one for me, I’m a member of. That one wasn’t for me, but they put me up there and interviewed me. Then the reception I had out there. All the roses, the cakes. My gosh, I’ve had four big cakes that have been divided. It’s been unbelievable. It makes me tired just thinking about it. It’s wonderful. I just can’t—the cards, the wonderful things that people say. It’s unreal how fabulous they make me feel. (Laughs) They really, really are.

That's the most rewarding thing there is. I can't believe all those cards and more in the back because there was others. I don't know what to do with them. I've got to read them first. I can't get around to them.

Bishop *Thought maybe you would shake them first to make sure something didn't fall out.*

Ander I did. A candy bar fell out. I said, "Phyllis," —I had several of them in my lap, the cards, opening them. This big heavy bar of that Lindt candy—oh God, I love it. I buy it from them. It fell out. I said, "Which envelope did this come out of?" I found another one, I can't remember, I'm going to have to ask. Several people, I can't recognize the signature. Some of them, I can't read it.

Finchum *Well, when you're not working, what do you do for fun?*

Ander Well, tomorrow night I'm going to Josie's Italian Restaurant. It's in Kansas. Going with some friends. Every third Friday in every month, we have about twenty in a birthday group of women. We meet out to The Stables Casino. Their food is always good. They bring, if it's not only my birthday, happens to be mine alone this time, sometimes there's three or four. Everybody brings a card for them. You have to sit there and read all them around. (Laughs) Then you eat. We visit, that's part of it. There were twenty original. Almost all of them are gone now. They died, or they're in nursing homes, or else their children have moved them away. Given up their homes. It's different, but we have more that want to come and sit with us. We have a good evening.

Finchum *Kind of like the Red Hatters?*

Ander I was a Red Hat. We disbanded. I got a card from a lady friend of mine, she moved to Tulsa. They had a big, big, big Red Hat deal. I got a card from her. She says they've disbanded. There's no more. Ours has too. It's just gone. I loved it. It was fun. Oh it was so embarrassing to walk into those restaurants with those big red hats. Oh, I didn't mind the clothes, the purple clothes. Oh, I hated those big hats. Oh, that's just awful. (Laughter)

Finchum *Well, you are young enough you could wear pink instead of the red.*

Ander I wear both of them—not the red hats. Yeah, pink. (Laughs)

Bishop *Being a retail owner, were you ever like a member of the Chamber of Commerce? Did you ever do anything civically?*

Ander I was on the board of the Chamber of Commerce for two terms. I was the first woman ever elected to the Miami Savings and Loan Board, with all those men. For seventeen and a half years they've let me stay. It was a wonderful experience with the doctors and the lawyers. All those brilliant minds, my goodness. That was really something. That was. I've met the right people, for a lot of right things. It's been good, rewarding.

Finchum *When you were going to college, what was your major?*

Ander Business.

Finchum *Business. So you planned to get, to come back to the business?*

Ander I didn't know what I was going to do. Some friends of mine were going and I just went. (Laughs) Didn't cost me anything and I didn't pay anything, so I just went. I took business. Now I can't add two and two. (Laughter)

Finchum *Well, in high school, what was your favorite subject?*

Ander English and spelling. That was my best. In grade school, spelling. I won awards for spelling. That's helped me along the way.

Finchum *Did you play sports in high school?*

Ander Basketball. Yeah. I was the last—I lettered in basketball. That was the last year they had ladies teams. I lettered in, I got lettered. My brother, I had a brother, he was four years younger than I. He loved that letter. He had my oldest sister sew it on his sweater and he wore it to school. Boy, they got him down. Those football boys, they took that sweater off of him. He didn't earn it, so he couldn't wear it. Yes, I played basketball. I played baseball. I was tough. (Laughs)

Finchum *What kind of clothes would you wear when you were playing basketball?*

Ander You know, you inherited the ones [from] the last team. I got this woman's, her name was Nellie. She was so big. She was huge compared to me. I had to wear her suit and take it up as much as I could. We always took hand-me-downs and red and white.

Finchum *They came to your knees or longer?*

Ander Oh yeah, the tops, yeah.

Bishop *I think more appropriate question, what shoes did you wear to play basketball?*

Ander Let's see. I guess tennis shoes, because I was always so tall and I wanted to get in the theater for a dime. I was always so tall for my age that they would think I was past twelve. (Laughs) I'm sure it was tennis shoes. Had to be.

Finchum *And you would have gotten them from the store?*

Ander Yeah, I'm sure. Yeah. (Laughs)

Finchum *Good times, huh? Good times.*

Ander It was fun. It was fun. I loved sports. I loved sports.

Finchum *Did you win much?*

Ander At the casinos? (Laughs)

Finchum *No, when you were playing basketball?*

Ander I don't remember whether we won much of any games or not. I forget.

Finchum *What position did you play?*

Ander Oh, I was a guard. Tough. I was pretty heavy. (Laughs) Center, I was guard and center.

Finchum *Was the court inside or out?*

Ander Inside. Basketball, inside. Yeah. We had to go there at seven o'clock in the morning to practice because the boys always got the preference, the later time. We had to be there early to get the court.

Finchum *Well, what would you do for lunch in school? Take it or what?*

Ander Let's see. What did I get for lunch? I got a dime for chili, I think. Sometimes I would just buy a pickle, a big dill pickle. (Laughs) We didn't have any money, that's for sure. They had little places to eat chili and other stuff, but we couldn't afford it. We had a dime for chili.

Finchum *What do you attribute your long life to? What do you think?*

Ander What I've already said. (Laughs)

Finchum *Eating pickles, huh? (Laughter)*

Ander I told you, garlic, onions, and jalapeño peppers. See, she can't remember three things either. (Laughs) He asked me three words and I couldn't remember.

Finchum *I can't remember them either. I know one is before, but I don't remember the other two when he asks.*

Ander I remembered milk, I think was one of them.

Finchum *So what's the third one?*

Bishop *Sensible.*

Ander What was it?

Bishop *Milk, before, and sensible.*

Ander Sensible. Well, no wonder I didn't remember. (Laughter)

Finchum *You have a good sense of humor.*

Ander I try. I try.

Bishop *Growing up with your father and being Jewish, was going to the synagogue important?*

Ander He went. We couldn't go, because we couldn't afford it. We didn't have the transportation. He would go on the high holidays.

Bishop *Where would you go?*

Ander Joplin.

Bishop *Joplin.*

Ander I still go on. I go on the holidays, and I go when they have business meetings. I still go. In fact, they had a big deal for me the tenth of last—let's see, May the ninth, I think it was. I was there a couple of weeks ago, Sunday. They had a big deal for me. They had some of the little boys ask the questions, you know. They had the written questions. They would ask me different questions of my life style and my preferences. There were two other men, but we were brought up right to the podium, facing the audience. They had a big crowd that came and we had bagel and lox. I love it. (Laughs) Lunch, they had a nice lunch. Had a great

big cake. Had these two men, they were in their eighties, sat down. One section of the cake said Dena, and then it had their names on it, too. These three little boys would ask us questions. We would answer questions. It was at my church there. They had that especially for me and them.

Finchum *It's been a busy month or two hasn't it?*

Ander Honey, it's been hectic. It has, and it's not over yet.

Finchum *Time for a vacation.*

Ander I never had a vacation. I never went. I may have gone somewhere a couple of days or something. Like when I went to New York, you know, for the market, well, then I went to the Empire [State Building], then went to the great show, had wonderful food and stayed in the hotel. Weekends was probably about as long as I stayed away. My younger sister would come sometimes and stay with my father.

Finchum *It wasn't that you didn't trust someone with the store, you just had to take care of him?*

Ander Oh, I had managers later. I've trained them real good. They got the best jobs from other people. I trained them real good. This one is still with them. Yeah, both of them, three of them, four of them. I've trained several, but I will never do it again. I just fixed them up for somebody, and they thanked me. I would get letters and thanks for what they learned from me. I don't know what it was, but anyway, you had to learn it yourself, just by observation.

Finchum *And the cash registers have changed quite a bit?*

Ander Oh yeah. We are on credit cards. The girls take care of those. I don't have much to do with those. I don't think I could handle it. (Laughs) Well, I guess I could if I had to. They go on vacation. Phyllis does. She will get two weeks. She has already had a week, and another week. We manage. Yeah, vacations.

Bishop *Outside of business, going on business trips, have you ever missed a day of work?*

Ander Well, only in ill health. That would hardly ever keep me, because I would crawl to work if I could get here.

Bishop *My question is at hundred, why go to work? Why work at a hundred years of age?*

Ander Because I can't stay home. I'm not one to just look for something to do, outgoing. I get more invites than I invite, because I am a loner, really. I love being with people, and I still go with chosen friends and clubs and things. I would stay home. I would sleep till noon. I'm lazy. I don't do any house work. I've got a cleaning lady. I've got a yard man. The only thing I have to do is my sheets and clothes. (Laughs) And I hate to see Sunday. (Laughs)

Bishop *You wash your sheets? Are you still able to lift them?*

Ander In the washing machine. (Laughter) That's a chore for me anymore. I hate it. I have to throw them in there and wash them and dry them. I get up at six o'clock on Sunday. Well, I get up around six anyway. I do my sheets every week and make up my bed. I hate to make up that bed. I'm not very good at it. (Laughs) I can never get the top sheet the way I want it. (Laughter)

Finchum *Did you ever come close to getting married?*

Ander Oh, yeah. I've had offers. I would have had to have left my father and I couldn't do that, and the store, after I had done so much. No, nobody was good enough for me. (Laughs)

Bishop *Did you take care of your father in his older age?*

Ander I took care of him. I feel like I can live with myself, because his older years I would have to lay out his clothes, and I would come down and open the store. I would feed him breakfast before I'd leave. Then he would go back to bed. He would get up around noon, and I would, after the girls and boys were gone, were here, their lunch, I would go out and pick him up and bring him to town. I was always scared, because when I would open the door—I would come in the garage, and if the TV was on, I knew he was okay. If the TV was off, I knew it was something bad. He was always ready to come town. I would come take him. I would go across the street and get him a piece of pie and coffee. That was his lunch every day.

Then he had this dog, Queenie, you know. Queenie would, when he opened up, he would come here six thirty in the morning, and we had this dog named Queenie. She followed him to work every day. Then my sister and brother would take Queenie home. You'll see Queenie on that picture there on the counter with the shoe repairman. One morning, they came looking for Queenie and somebody had poisoned her in the alley back there, after eleven years.

No, I helped bathe him. He would bathe himself, and I would come in and wash his back and help him get up, put his clothes out, and fed him.

I was a bridge player. My lord, I played bridge almost every night. They would rap on my windows years ago. They would say, “Dena, we need a fourth.” (Laughs) I got to play regular bridge and we would go to tournaments in Tulsa and Joplin. I won an honor award with—I had this same partner I played Bridge constantly. I don’t play anymore. I never miss a bridge hand in the *Tulsa World*, they don’t do it in the Tulsa paper, in Miami paper. I always look for my bridge hand.

Bishop *Bridge is one of those card games that is kind of being lost. It’s kind of a game that isn’t being played as often.*

Ander It’s a science.

Bishop *Yeah.*

Ander It’s a scientific game.

Bishop *Yeah. The younger generations aren’t playing it.*

Ander They’re not in anything. They don’t care. We try to get them in clubs. You can’t get young people for anything. I keep saying we ought to—I belong to the senior center out here. It’s a lovely place. I’m going on a trip with them to Branson [Missouri], on this [Showboat Branson] Belle boat, the twenty-first. I tried to get somebody to teach bridge, and I don’t play anymore. I quit. My business took over everything. They won’t do it. Nobody wants to teach it, and they can’t get new members. Legion Hall can’t get new members. Our Pilot Club, we can’t get young members. They don’t want to join anything. I don’t know whether it’s this generation. I was reading an article in the *Tulsa World* this morning. This woman, she taught school, that went to school, this teacher in English, her English class, her teacher wouldn’t let any of them leave until they learned the difference between a salad fork and a dinner fork and how to introduce people. They don’t know how to do that anymore. The young ones are missing a lot. They’re rude, very rude.

Finchum *They are too attached to their cell phones.*

Ander That’s it. Another world.

Finchum *How much longer do you think you will have the store?*

Ander Honey, it looks like they are pushing me awful hard. It's getting real bad now because I'm holding on just by a shoestring. It's getting too hard. I have too many losses, the construction. I don't get any priority. She [Phyllis] called this morning. The lady was Phyllis. Nobody answers the phone. You have to call back and they leave a number. A big company like that. Honey, it's a different world today. It's too hard. It's too hard. I can't cope with all of them anymore. I feel left out. I'm left out.

Finchum *When you retire, what will you do?*

Ander Well, I told you I will probably eat. (Laughter)

Bishop *What is your favorite recipe or favorite dish to eat?*

Ander Let's see. There is so many. I eat a half an avocado every day because they say that's healthy. I eat strawberries every day. My favorite meal is hummus. Oh the red pepper, it's a sweet red pepper, cartons. Jalapeño dip, those are my favorites, and chips. I could live. I don't cook anymore.

Bishop *You said when you were younger you used to cook for your father. Did he have a particular meal that he enjoyed?*

Ander Oh, we always had meat. We always ate meat; roast, and stews, and chicken soup, and observed the holidays, the matzah balls. I cooked all those. In fact I did Tuesday. Our Passover was just lately, and I observed that for eight days.

Bishop *Matzah ball soup is an art.*

Ander Yeah. (Laughs) Well not anymore because they have the flour already ground and the matzahs and everything. Yeah, they call that the Jewish penicillin, when you are sick, you have chicken noodle soup.

Bishop *Jewish mothers would give it to their children, for sure.*

Ander Uh-huh. I still eat a lot of it, but I don't cook it. I get the ready-made.

Bishop *You cheat. (Laughter)*

Ander I cheat. You can tell it. My diet is just terrible.

Finchum *You can't tell it. I think you look great.*

Ander Well, I was sick last September. I had bronchitis. I was really sick because it was going around, still going around, and I'd go to the doctor and he'd give me a prescription. I'd take it two or three days and I was sick. I'd go up to him and I'd say, "I'm sick." He'd give me another prescription. (Laughs) They'd take my temperature. I know him real well. His mother was one of my best friends.

Bishop *If you could give advice to someone that wants to live a hundred years, what would you tell them?*

Ander Well, just keep busy. Keep busy. There's so many things other to think about other than yourself. Your family, just think about your family. You have to take care of your obligations. Then, just keep busy. It can be rewarding.

Finchum *Eat your hot pepper.*

Ander Don't forget your hot peppers. I forgot the tabasco sauce. (Laughs)

Bishop *Oh gosh, now you are getting into Louisiana territory.*

Ander Oh yeah. I've been there, too. (Laughter)

Bishop *When history is written, what would you like it to say about you?*

Ander They've already said it all. I'll let you read it. It's already there.

Bishop *How do you want to be remembered?*

Ander The way they remember me. Just as they are, as the way I am. From those cards, from the wonderful things they say about me. If they still feel about me, that's enough compensation. I couldn't ask for anything more. To have a hundred and some cards and every one of them fabulous. They're fabulous notes, fabulous notes. That's a reward in its self.

Finchum *It makes you feel good.*

Ander Oh, absolutely. I had no idea people cared that much. (Laughs) They were all at that reception. I'm telling you. Acquaintances, and telephone calls I get from people that were here years ago, good customers, and they still call me. I can't even think who they are, some of them.

Finchum *Need a picture to jog your memory.*

Ander Uh-huh.

Bishop *Or a foot.*

Ander Or a foot. Yeah, well, that's another thing. I learned that you could come in the store, I could look at your feet, and tell you what size you wear. I wouldn't miss it half a size. And men, too. I wouldn't try anymore because shoes don't fit like they did. We used to have shoes that were marked with four A's. Now it's S [Slim], N [Narrow], M [Medium], and W [Wide]. I don't even try to guess your size. I might make a stab at it, but it wouldn't work. You might tell me you wore an eight narrow and you might wear a seven and half or an eight and a half by the time I got through with you because I'll be sure it fits you. Not because you didn't know your size, but because the way the shoes are made, the way they are sized. It's all different. It's harder. It's harder.

Finchum *When you do an order, do you do cash?*

Ander No, no, I get dating. If I buy seven thousand dollars' worth of shoes, I'll get 7 percent and ninety days. I get dating. No, I don't have to pay Cash on Delivery.

Finchum *I was just thinking it's what your father did, so that's why I was asking?*

Ander Yeah, he did. That's right. He'd have to pay for them there before they even shipped them. Then he'd have to pay the freight after they came in. Yeah, no. I get dating. Companies are real nice about that. Wonderful, but when the time comes, that's a different story. That ninety days wasn't long enough. (Laughs) I always manage. I always try to keep my credit up. That's very important.

Finchum *Anything else you want to add before we close?*

Ander Honey, I already told you more than I already thought I even knew. (Laughs)

Finchum *You did great. We appreciate you talking with us.*

Ander It's been fun. I guess when I get started I can't stop me. (Laughter)

Finchum *You're great.*

----- End of interview -----