

Interview of Renee Kraemer-Rhoads

November 10, 1998

Renee is the eldest grandchild and only granddaughter of Nelda Jaeger Kraemer. The following is a selection from her complete interview. This section reinforces the oral interviews of Robert Richard Kraemer II (only grandson of Nelda Jaeger Kraemer) and Betty Jean Dahl Kraemer (daughter in law of Nelda)

**Q. What is your full name?**

Renee Jean Kraemer, now Rhoads. Originally, Mom wanted to name me Roberta. Jean is mom's middle name. Roberta is the feminine of Robert, which was after my dad. But, for some reason, Renee came through. I was born March 17, 1943, in Tacoma. Tacoma is my home. Mt. Rainier is my home. I remember always being able to look out and see Mt. Rainier from wherever we lived.

**Q. As a girl or a young adult, did you have any favorite relative?**

Oh yes! Grandma Kraemer was a very special person in my life. Grandma and Grandpa Kitchen were my second parents. I have always felt that they were my second parents. I had a very close fondness for Grandma Kraemer too. Grandma was the lady who always came and read stories to us at night when we still lived in town before we moved out to University Place. Before, we lived at 614, (3rd St.) right behind Grandma. The house on 303 S. G St. I was told that it used to be a carriage house. It was a big house. I can remember the old toilets. (Laughter) This is really funny. The old toilets had the old, old plumbing and they did not have the goose neck type of trap. They were straight pipes that went from the bowl straight down the wall to where ever it was collected. I can remember feeling like I was going to fall through. I guess all children worry about falling into the toilet when they are little.... I can remember as a very small child taking baths with my dad in the big old claw leg bathtub. My bedroom was on the wall where the bathroom was. It overlooked the coal shed that was attached to the house. It would either have wood or coal, depending on what Mom and Dad were burning at the time.

1133 There was always a little bit of light coming through the shade in my bedroom. We were fairly  
1134 close to what used to be the old First Interstate Bank building, there was another building down  
1135 there and it used to have the flying horse in, the red flying horse for the Mobile gas station. It  
1136 use to flicker on and off, it was the red horse with flying wings and I used to sit, if I could get up  
1137 out of bed I would pull the shade up a little bit so I could see the horse blinking on and off. That  
1138 light coming through would show up on my wallpaper. I could see all kinds of things in the  
1139 wallpaper at night.

1140 Oh, my Dad used to have...up off of my bedroom, I guess you would call it, almost like a  
1141 closet...Dad used to have some of his radio equipment in there. Sometimes at night, he would  
1142 come up and work on radio stuff and electronic stuff in there. I was not supposed to be awake, I  
1143 was supposed to be going to sleep. I can remember him being up there in his closet. I know that  
1144 he use to do some kind of work for KVI on occasion. It was just nice to know he was there  
1145 working.

1146 It was a neat home. It felt really good. There was a big pear tree in the backyard next to  
1147 Grandma's garage. There was a type of pipe right next to the side of the house, opposite of the  
1148 alley side of the house. It was covered with ivy. Since then ivy has always been kind of special  
1149 to me. Now in my adult years, I have a neighbor down the road that has ivy in the front of his  
1150 place. I have gotten starts from him several times, but they just never seem to get in the dirt at  
1151 the right time.

1152 Grandma's house was neat. I loved it. It was full of so many things. Grandma was a  
1153 collector. I am afraid I have taken after the Jaeger side of the family. It had window alcoves and  
1154 window seats. They were not exactly window seats, but they were alcoves, you could put a  
1155 rocking chair in them. It was so beautiful; it was so big and magnificent. It had kind of a  
1156 circular...not really a circular stairwell, but it had a beautiful dark wood, beautiful handwork of  
1157 the era of when the house was built. Because it was built, I understand, before 1900. It was just  
1158 big, and of course as a child everything is always bigger. I loved Grandma's house.

1159 I remember Grandma talking about when Great-Grandpa Jaeger sat with a riding crop on  
1160 his dinner table. The children were not allowed to speak English at the table. They had to speak  
1161 in German at the table and there were very strict rules when they dined together. Some of those  
1162 things, I have always felt that, Grandpa Jaeger was a very devout disciplinarian and that women  
1163 were submissive to the men. I do not remember how I got the feeling that Grandma Jaeger was

1164 kind of looked down on and an insignificant person in the family, through her daughter's eyes  
1165 and also through my Uncle Charlie's eyes.

1166         When we moved to University Place, and when my brother and I were old enough, we  
1167 took the bus down to stay with Grandma overnight occasionally. I remember her telling  
1168 me...tell us...about the first bedroom. It is where Rich and I used to stay with the big brass bed  
1169 and the horse rocking chair, that room also had the alcove type of windows. But, as you come  
1170 into the bedroom on the left-hand side, there was a great big alcove where another bed was  
1171 separated by kind of a sheer curtain. I guess that was my dad's room in the big room. Then the  
1172 nanny slept in this alcove. It was like a small room connected to a room. That was for the  
1173 nursemaid, nanny, or whatever. But, that was always the room that my brother and I stayed in  
1174 with the big brass bed. That was always a special place for us.

1175         The upstairs was so much fun. There were two bedrooms on the same side of the house,  
1176 the bedroom I just described and the front bedroom. Grandma moved in across the hall just  
1177 down a little bit from the stairwell. But, on the same side of the bedroom as the front bedroom  
1178 were two other huge rooms. Grandma Kraemer had all of her law books up there. From wall to  
1179 wall to wall were bookcases full of legal books or law books. Of course being the hoarder that  
1180 she was the whole room was filled with boxes and all sorts of other stuff. I know that there was  
1181 furniture in there hidden under things.

1182         I guess we were pretty nice (children) because we never snooped into those sorts of  
1183 things. We would go into those rooms every once in a while like Grandma's rooms. The  
1184 bathroom was on the same side of the house as Grandma's bedroom upstairs. The bathroom,  
1185 again, had that old plumbing. It had a beautiful sink with a marble pedestal holding the sinks.  
1186 Well maybe the whole thing, maybe the sink was marble too. It looked a bit like all one piece. I  
1187 can remember it was like the handles I bought for our bathroom, 'cause it kind of reminded me  
1188 of the porcelain handles at Grandma's. There was a big bathtub and of course there was no  
1189 shower. The toilet was the kind with the big tank above the toilet. It was the kind that was over  
1190 in the other house too. It had the big water closet above, and you had a big pull chain with a big  
1191 handle. Those were neat.

1192         The house was huge. It felt huge; it was very, very tall. Do you believe that they had a  
1193 kitchen upstairs? There was a little gas stove with two elements on it and a sink. On the main  
1194 floor there was a sitting room, a formal dinning room, there was a maid's quarters, that was what

1195 she called her office. There were big sliding doors from floor to ceiling all through the formal  
1196 dinning room. I am sure they must have entertained. I feel like that was part of the family  
1197 history.

1198 The house was three stories. Actually, it had a basement and three stories. Two main  
1199 floors and then there was an attic. I understand that part of the attic had actually a finished room  
1200 that dad used to have. As a boy, that was one of his rooms. The stairs were real, real steep. I  
1201 guess when he was a teenager; he went down into the basement and made a room with all of his  
1202 radios and stuff. Dad was really into electronics and radios. Part of the floor was dirt. It seemed  
1203 like there was mostly dirt floors downstairs in the basement. That is where Grandma had her  
1204 ringer washer.

1205 Dad used to make root beer down there. He talked about how he and Rudy, one of his  
1206 boyhood friends, they were friends all their lives until Dad died, would go down and do all kinds  
1207 of things in the basement. Rudy was into radios too. He was in the Navy. He was a  
1208 commander. Dad had some stories. Dad had some fond memories of his years there.

1209

1210 **Q. Did your dad ever speak about his Grandma Jaeger? Herman's wife Lina?**

1211

1212 Yes, Dad had fond memories of her. He thought she was really neat from what I  
1213 remember of his stories. She really babied Dad. Dad was, I understand, a very spoiled little boy.

1214 Grandma Kraemer used to, if Dad misbehaved, if he had any toys, Grandma Kraemer  
1215 would take the new toy away from him. We found those toys when my brother and I were  
1216 growing up. I think we found some in the attic in Dad's old bedroom upstairs. Grandma would  
1217 break them out and give them to Rich. You know, metal trucks and things like that. Dad would  
1218 say, "Oh, I remember that!" It was like brand new. Well it was brand new because if he didn't  
1219 pick it up when he was a little boy, Grandma would abscond with it like that...tuck it away and  
1220 not give it back. Yeah, but Grandpa Kraemer, Great Grandma Jaeger, and the nanny, they  
1221 spoiled him rotten.

1222

1223 **Q. Do you remember stories about Wright Park?**

1224

1225 Grandma took us on long walks. I have lots of fond memories of going through the  
1226 Arboretum. I have an affinity for swans because of my childhood days and going over to Wright  
1227 Park and the ponds where they had swans. There were two ponds and they were connected  
1228 under a kind of footbridge. They had large swans. They looked beautiful. Big, black, trumpeter  
1229 swans. They were just gorgeous. I still love swans to this day, I guess because of their beauty  
1230 and grace. I used to go down with Grandma Kraemer and feed the pigeons. To this day, I love  
1231 to listen to them “coo” as they go around on the ground. I know that they are supposed to be  
1232 dirty, but I like them.

1233 Wright Park is a very big part of my youth. I can remember my Dad during some of  
1234 those nature walks. Mom used to go out and make some of the most beautiful snow angels and  
1235 snowmen. I can remember being out in the snow and Dad skiing over at Wright Park in the  
1236 field. He would give me rides on the back of his skis. I can remember standing on his skis and  
1237 going down hill with him. It was fun. There was a little wading pool there that was always real  
1238 special, the swings, and the teeter-totter. It was so much fun in the fall with all the leaves on the  
1239 ground. We would go crunching through them. It was just a real special spot.

1240 Grandma instilled so many beautiful things in my life. She loved literature. She was  
1241 usually one of the first 3 people in Tacoma to get the Dr. Suess books from the library. She  
1242 would be on the waiting list before the books were even released. She would be one of the three,  
1243 at that time they would stamp inside the book on a little piece of paper and we were always the  
1244 only ones. She would read to us a lot. She had some beautiful oil paintings in the front sitting  
1245 room of her house. Where the piano was and the love seat was, I used to sit at the piano, which  
1246 was an old piano, it came around Cape Horn for I think it was a wedding gift that Grandpa gave  
1247 to my Grandma or maybe it was his first wife's?<sup>43</sup> I use to sit at that piano; I loved that piano,  
1248 and play music and look at the oil paintings. She made a beautiful waterfall painting. She was  
1249 the most talented poet. She wrote the most beautiful poetry that you could ever ask for. She  
1250 wrote us poems almost on every special occasion. She used to take us to live performances  
1251 down at the theater, “Puss in Boots” and all these different plays.

1252 As a pre-teen, I was real active in church, and church youth groups. She would ask me  
1253 about how I felt about going and what I got out of them. She did not seem to have any religious

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<sup>43</sup> Appendix B. Picture of Herman Jaeger's first wife. Pg. 73.

1254 beliefs. I am sure that that is not totally true because my Dad went to the Lutheran Church  
1255 across the park which is still there. That is were I was baptized as a babe. Yet, she acted as if  
1256 she did not understand how someone could care for a creator and know that they have a real  
1257 creator. It was funny, after Grandma died and Mom and Dad got some of Grandma's things,  
1258 personal effects, Dad and I were going through them one day and there was an old German bible.  
1259 Come to find out that one of our relatives was a Lutheran minister. I do not know exactly who it  
1260 was, but it was one of the Jaeger family members. Yet, Grandma always acted as if she had no  
1261 Christian upbringing, understanding, or anything like that. It really boggles me, I would love to  
1262 turn the clock back and have the knowledge I have now and be able to ask her some of these  
1263 things.

1264 I knew she was an attorney. Because of all the law books in the house in different rooms  
1265 and I would hear about her doing small legal things but it was not like she was real active in the  
1266 law. By the time, we were really conscious of that sort of thing she was already close to 60.  
1267 Although, she had all of the makings of an active practice, she had a big globe safe, she had the  
1268 check protector and all these wonderful things as kids we would see and play with. She was not  
1269 too generous with us playing with them. She would tell us to be very careful. I did not know  
1270 much about her law career until we were older. The fact that she was a judge I did not know  
1271 until I was older. Although in my youth, she did tell us...I can remember her telling us that she  
1272 was one of the first woman attorneys that graduated from the University of Washington. In her  
1273 bedroom, she had photos of her graduating class and she would spend time telling us about that.  
1274 We always felt, or I always felt very proud of her for that and I always felt that that was  
1275 important as a woman and that it was important to her because she was a woman and that she  
1276 achieved something in a man's world that not many had accomplished. You know it is like the  
1277 article that you read in your notebook about her putting her feelings under the desk. I think when  
1278 she did that...she allowed feelings to come back into her life. She did not do that very much.  
1279 She would show it through little things, as if she took my brother and I to Point Defiance Park a  
1280 lot. She would fix egg-salad sandwiches; that was her favorite thing to have at Point Defiance  
1281 Park. She would take us around to all the animals. We would sit and have a picnic in one of the  
1282 big lawn swings. We had our one favorite place.

1283 She would drive. She drove. She was, yeah. I think she was a go-getter. Yes, I think  
1284 she really did a lot with us. I was trying to think of how old she was; she was really active

1285 during that time. It was funny, there were times when she seemed to want to...that she had quite  
1286 a bit of energy and then there were other times when she was so funny, an old grandma. She had  
1287 tried to get sympathy that way. I feel like maybe she did not feel like she was loved.

1288 The concept I could never quite understand, was what happened to make her so grumpy.  
1289 She used to, at one time in her life have such a drive and love of things. She loved poetry, art,  
1290 music, the humanities, theater, and all these wonderful happy things and then it seemed that like  
1291 in her later years she had lost all of that happiness of life.

1292 It would be like one week she'd be out at our house and she'd be going a 100 miles an hour and  
1293 then the next week it was, oh, please help Old Grandma up the stairs to get in the house type of  
1294 thing. She'd just be barely able to move, but she drove, she drove out to University Place, but  
1295 she could barely get up the stairs. The next week we would be hearing from somebody that she  
1296 was charging up St. Helen's hill in downtown Tacoma. Grandma had gone to all these places  
1297 and was just charging around town 'cause she was out with her money and this was good. It was  
1298 a good thing for her to be out attending to her money.

1299 One other thing that was really funny, I remember Grandma was Old Grandma, just so  
1300 weak, just cannot do anything. Then she would move out of the house at 303, then she would  
1301 come back to the house for a while, then she would move out because she just could not get up  
1302 and down the stairs. Her bedroom was upstairs. Things like that. Mom and Dad where trying to  
1303 clean out some things and Mom had gone down and had gone to the back of what was the coat  
1304 closet. It was this long deep closet underneath the stairs, and it went all the way to the back or  
1305 the base of the stairs...and it was so funny because Mom found this big bag. She was dragging it  
1306 because it was really heavy. She said she had to literally drag it. Mom was strong. Mom and  
1307 Dad had built two houses. Mom was really strong and capable. But, she was dragging this big  
1308 heavy bag out of the back of this closet and she says, "I wonder what's in this?" It was really  
1309 heavy, Grandma Kraemer comes by, and Mom says she just grabbed it with one hand, whipped it  
1310 up, and said, "These are some coins I've saved," and she took off with them. They were heavy  
1311 silver coins. Mom said she did not seem old and decrepit. She was just going gangbusters.  
1312 When it came to money she was okay, she had all her senses about her.

1313 Yes. Oh dear that is really funny. Grandma was a real special lady in our lives.  
1314 Certainly was, I have a lot of very fond memories of the things we did together, but I know that  
1315 she always, always in my mind, was always a very, very, smart lady, very, very bright. Yet,

1316 sometimes unhappy. As I matured, I found that she was sometimes very unkind. I do not know  
1317 where that part of her ever came from or why. Some of the comments she made, she made me  
1318 feel she had hurt feelings I think. After seeing the wedding pictures of her and Riley I think she  
1319 was truly in love with that man. She is smiling and they are fun pictures. She really was not a  
1320 beauty but she looked, she had a softer look about her then. Definitely, a happy look and I do  
1321 not remember her being extremely happy when I grew up. I respect the part of her that always  
1322 enjoyed humanities and things and she was very kind to me. She was very unkind to my brother  
1323 and mother and that upset me. She would call my brother a prune pie. She always called me  
1324 angel. Sometimes it got to the point where I would be angry with her.

1325           She was very unkind to Uncle Charlie at that time. She literally stole stocks and  
1326 investments that were his. I can remember when Uncle Charlie told us about that. We had gone  
1327 to the beach place to visit, probably during the wintertime, because we always went over, got  
1328 greens, and sent them back to family relative's back in Columbus Ohio. We would box up holly,  
1329 cedar, and things like that. Uncle Charlie told Mom and Dad about it and he cried and said that  
1330 he had signed some papers that she had given to him, because she acted as his attorney. What  
1331 she had done is given him a whole bunch of papers to sign and then Uncle Charlie couldn't see  
1332 very well at all, he couldn't read anymore. Gave him these papers and told him that he needed to  
1333 sign them; they were legal papers. So he signed all of them, then she told him that they were  
1334 stock that he owned that he had just signed them over to her. Uncle Charlie had given Mom and  
1335 Dad the beach place when they got married said it was theirs as long as they would let him stay  
1336 on the property as long as he could. Which he did. He was only off the beach place a couple of  
1337 years before he died.

1338           She didn't approve of my Mom for whatever reason. Whether it was because Mom came  
1339 from a blue-collar family I don't know. Grandma and Grandpa Kitchen worked at the match  
1340 factory. They had their store, and I loved that store, it was a really neat thing to be there. But,  
1341 Grandma rather looked down on Mom, although she didn't say very much, certainly not to us  
1342 about Mom. I think she was jealous of Grandma and Grandpa and their relationship with me.  
1343 Because I felt like Grandma and Grandpa, they were my second parents, they were very special.

1344           Grandma never talked about her marriages, and the only time I remember her talking  
1345 about Grandpa Kraemer, it was about his bakery. I remember growing up at 614 and Dad and  
1346 Mom making peanut butter cookies. They were the best peanut butter cookies I have ever tasted.



1347 But, they used Grandpa's recipe from the bakery. I can remember my Mom saying that it made  
1348 thousands of cookies. We ate them for a long time. Yes. They were Dad's favorite. Mom used  
1349 to make them a lot when we were little kids. I can remember the wonderful sweet rolls. Bear  
1350 claws, things like that with almonds. She had the dining room table filled, more than once, with  
1351 all of these wonderful coffeecakes. It was all raised dough. Wonderful smell. They reminded  
1352 Dad of his dad. There is one picture of him. He was this dapper man with his hat. That is how I  
1353 remember Grandpa too, wearing this hat. He was somewhat square faced he reminded me of  
1354 Dad. It was that square face, I don't know, there was something about Grandpa Kraemer that  
1355 went on into Dad, definitely.

1356 Grandpa Kraemer happened to own one of the worst new cars that were out way back in  
1357 the 20s. He was in the paper to tell people what a bad car it was after the company had used him  
1358 in their advertising. It was really a neat newspaper clipping of Grandpa Kraemer with this car  
1359 that was when he had the bakery. I think he was pretty well known in town.

1360  
1361 **Q. Knowing that your great-great grandchildren will read this, is there**  
1362 **something that you would like to pass on to them?**

1363  
1364 Oh, wow! That's a heavy question. I have been very interested in our family. It is a  
1365 very strong family history on my Grandmother Kraemer's side and the Jaeger side. I happen to  
1366 be very pleased to say that my husband, Dusty, his actual legal name is Marvin.<sup>44</sup> He comes  
1367 from an old German family too. My mother-in-law is from Germany. I feel we have a great deal  
1368 of German ancestry there, and it seems like the German is a more non-feeling or non...what's  
1369 the word, not just dominant but unemotional. At least my mother-in-law rather reminds me of  
1370 Grandma Kraemer. She really hides her feelings a lot. She is more or less a person who is a  
1371 non-touching type of person. So, it has gone through his family, and I know Grandma Kraemer  
1372 was a great deal that way. Although my Dad was very, very romantic and a touching type  
1373 person, very warm. I would want our family to know that we also got a lot of love from the  
1374 French, my Grandpa Kraemer. Maybe that is where Dad got it, from Grandpa Kraemer.  
1375 Because I guess, he was quite a dapper Frenchman. I would like our family to know that. That

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<sup>44</sup> Appendix B. pg. 114.

1376 we have loving family ties. Of myself, again I am very religious and very aware of my creator  
1377 and that I have a very close relationship with my creator. It seems like for some reason the  
1378 German family may feel a religious connection, but they certainly do not discuss it. I want my  
1379 family to know that it really is a great life. Love one another, ask questions, talk about things,  
1380 ask what they did when they were growing up. It is really important to remember and to love the  
1381 family members, because you never know when they might not be there with you.

1382           This is a really neat picture, neat. (Renee is looking at a picture of herself and her  
1383 Grandmother when Renee was about 10 years old) <sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Appendix B. pg. 120.