

## Marie Skodak Crissey

- Born January 10, 1910 in Lorain, Ohio; died December 5, 2000 in Flint, Michigan
- Spouse: Orlo Crissey
- Bachelor's and Master's degrees from The Ohio State University (1931); Ph.D. from the University of Iowa (1938)

### Major Employment

- Assistant Director and Director, Flint Guidance Center: 1938-1946
- Director, Division of Psychological Services, Dearborn Schools: 1948-1969

### Major Areas of Work

- Intelligence, measurement of intelligence, school psychological service administration, mental retardation, special education, infancy, assessment



## SRCD ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

### Marie Skodak Crissey

Interviewed by Alice Smuts  
In Ann Arbor, Michigan  
June 19, 1996

**Smuts:** This is Alice Smuts on June 19, 1996 about to interview Marie Skodak Crissey who very graciously has driven in from her farm in Swartz Creek to Ann Arbor to do this interview for the Society for Research in Child Development and we do appreciate it, Marie. It is a very hot stormy day I might add. Shall we follow the questions that we were both given Marie? Describe your family background along with any childhood and adolescent experiences that may be of interest.

**Crissey:** Well, in the first place I was born in Lorain, Ohio, which is a lake port town that has an interesting social background. It was one of the areas that was part of the so-called Western Reserve, which was land distributed to those people from the Eastern states who had lost land as a result of the revolution. So there were old Americans there who had the usual kind of a rather strict religious hard working background. Lorain became a port town where the coal from West Virginia and Pennsylvania came up by rail and met the iron ore that came down from Michigan and Minnesota and so the high school song included a line where coal and iron meet! Now in order for the iron and the coal to be made into steel they had to have a lot of immigrants, most of whom came from eastern Europe, Poland, Austria, Italy, the Ukraine. My people were Hungarians, my parents were Hungarians and we lived in a part of town that was half way between the old Americans and the immigrants who spoke all these strange languages. Now my parents had been trained as teachers and they had a great deal of interest in the education of their children. So that, for example, we learned Hungarian as children and that was the family language. My father was sure that when once we got into school we would learn English, so that in order to be able to speak and understand; German, that was the Sunday language. From the time that I was about ten or twelve I was in and out of my father's office. He had a kind of business that catered to foreigners because they traveled by steamship back to their home countries, they sent money to their families and since he spoke about eleven languages from that part of the world he was a popular businessman among the foreigners. So he trained me to type in these various languages, although I didn't always understand what it was I was typing, but because I was in the office and worked there all through junior and senior high school I got to know a lot of these people. What was fascinating to me at that time was that these people that my father dealt with as customers were basically peasant people with little or no education and yet their children not only went through high school but a large number of them went to college and became eventually the lawyers and the

physicians of the town. So that there was a view of the two kinds of people, the old Americans and the immigrant peasant people and to see that eventually they melded together and constituted this town. This was the kind of background that at that time I did not appreciate or understand but it has fascinated me since because it really is the basic concept of my view of the amalgamation of nature and nurture in the development of the individual.

**Smuts: That's fascinating. What you didn't mention is the period you were born in.**

Crissey: I was born in this country in Lorain.

**Smuts: The date, you didn't mention the date.**

Crissey: Oh the date; January 10, 1910.

**Smuts: So this period of your childhood was the years before and after World War I, America's entrance into WWI.**

Crissey: Right and of course my family kept in touch with the Europeans and we were very close to what was going on in Europe and I have some very clear memories of the correspondence that came from Europe after the war and my understanding of circumstances, for instance, in what is now happening in Yugoslavia is very much colored by an appreciation of the hostilities and of the feelings of people in these various enclaves within these countries and their negative feelings toward each other.

**Smuts: I might interrupt now to say that during recent years I've heard a lot about Hungary from you because you never cease to keep in touch with your relatives there and you help support the education of many of these relatives and two years ago was it you returned to Hungary?**

Crissey: To see what was going on.

**Smuts: To see what was going on. Early work experience. Excuse me did you want to talk about how this new assimilation of immigrants to the American culture affected you?**

Crissey: -- that it has not only colored my view of this but has made it possible to see how the two can meld together and influence each other, because after World War I in 1922 my mother took my sister and myself to Europe and the train still went through towns that were just nothing but rubble and my uncles and other relatives came and talked to my mother and although my sister and I were supposedly sound asleep in the next room, I stayed awake to hear these men talk about their experiences in Russian prison camps and what the war was like and what they experienced in these other countries and so on. We lived with both relatives and others in homes where the floors were just dirt floors and you swept those every day with a little sprinkling of water on them and it gave me a view of peoples' lives that you don't get in sanitized America. It's the same kind of thing that you can experience with people who have had limited backgrounds even though they may be very generous and affluent. But too, I don't know how to say these things, for instance the people in Iowa and the people in the Grand Blanc's and suburbs of this country anywhere who have had no experience outside of their own limited sphere are surprised that hostilities, that misunderstandings can arise simply because they have had no experience with other ways of living, others' ways of looking at things. It was in this kind of a way that I had a rich experience as a child with various kinds of people from various nationalities, various religions, various ways of looking at life that made it, I think, easier for me to understand that there would be influences which were either genetic or environmental which would create differences in people.

**Smuts: That's extremely interesting. Did you work at all before you went on to college, Marie?**

Crissey: All the time that I was in junior and senior high school I worked in my father's office and occasionally some of his other business friends would need help. For instance, I worked in a florist shop

during the busy seasons for a friend of his. I did some typing for a very junior lawyer who was just getting started and who didn't mind my stumbling with the typewriter. Those were the kinds of jobs that I had. After I went to college -- although supposedly I had some property that was going to take care of my college education, with the debacle in Wall Street that was one of the things that was lost. The second semester I had to get a job and one of the jobs, well many of the jobs that I got were housekeeping jobs so that I got to see insides of the professors' homes and this sort of revised my awe of professors, especially the ones whose housekeeping standards were not quite the same as my mother's. I worked all the way through college.

**Smuts: I don't think you've said what college you attended.**

Crissey: Ohio State University. Initially my family was thinking of very elegant girls' schools in the East and of course that didn't work out.

**Smuts: I gather from your experiences you are rather glad it didn't work out.**

Crissey: Oh yes, I don't think I would have been happy at Vassar or Smith.

**Smuts: But also because of what you learned at Ohio State. Could you talk a little bit about what you got out of your college experience?**

Crissey: I suppose in some ways you would think of my college experience as being really quite narrow and limited because the fact that I had to work in order to cover my expenses and took on various kinds of jobs, not just housework and waiting tables and that sort of thing, but other things too, limited my activities. I was also not particularly socially skillful or interested. I had no particular interest in boys, I had no idea what sororities were or why anybody would be so excited about being rushed to a sorority. The first dormitory that I lived in because I enrolled late was not only expensive but included more socially sophisticated people and I found very little in common with them and found more interest in the library and the facilities of the university. One of the unfortunate things that happened was that there was a girl whose name was similar to mine and in these pre-computer days it was easy to get names mixed up so that for example having won As and honors in high school in writing I found myself in a remedial English class. One of the first assignments that we had was to write an impression of what we felt about the university and since he wanted to know, I told him, which was not particularly flattering.

**Smuts: He didn't give you an A?**

Crissey: He passed the material back with the marks on periods and the semicolons and the misspellings but no mark on mine but he told me to stay after class which I did of course, scared to death. He said that it was obvious that I didn't belong in his class and I didn't need to come to class any further but he would give me assignments in reading and I was supposed to write critiques of what I read.

**Smuts: And did you do that?**

Crissey: Yes.

**Smuts: You never got out of the remedial class.**

Crissey: It was too late so he simply gave me an A and called it good.

**Smuts: Now did you go on to graduate school right after college?**

Crissey: No, what I did, I started out with a major in chemistry that was very quickly evident that I didn't belong there. I couldn't handle the mathematics and the precision of measurements and so on.

So I shopped around and by that time I had gotten over my awe of the university people having taken care of their kids and their houses so I made the rounds of the various so-called junior deans who were supposedly in charge of counseling to try to see what I could get. It was evident too that the work that I was doing I could carry extra hours and have no problem so I tried the various colleges. The obvious one was the liberal arts college and the man simply told me to read in the library, it was all there and no I wouldn't get extra credit and no I couldn't get through the university sooner by taking extra hours, so I decided that wasn't for me. Then I went over to the School of Agriculture to see what they had in the way of home economics and that sort of thing and decided that the farm girls were not my potential friends so I decided that well after all my parents and other relatives had been teachers so maybe the School of Education. There I found the man who eventually became the president of the University of Minnesota. He said yes, if I wanted to carry extra hours that was fine with them, it was up to me. If I failed them, that would be my problem. So from then on I carried usually an extra four-hour credit so that made it possible for me to gather all of my credits in education and elsewhere so that I could graduate in three years. Well in the meantime then, what to take, so I took history and I think German as the two majors that I would potentially teach but I got a job in the Faculty Club and as being one of the younger more naive waitresses I got two tables and I couldn't figure out what they taught. Well, it turned out they were at the psychology department.

**Smuts: That was your introduction to psychology.**

Crissey: That was my introduction to psychology because not only did they talk about very interesting things --

**Smuts: And you listened in while you were waiting tables?**

Crissey: Well, you've got to keep their water and their coffee filled and they were so busy talking, they didn't realize that I was very close. So I decided that was kind of interesting and the first term that I took I had Sophie Rogers who was one of the few women professors and she had a joint appointment in medicine and psychology. She really was very good.

**Smuts: Did she teach anything about the child? I remember Nancy Bayley and Lois Meek-Stolz and Mary Cover Jones saying they got nothing about the child.**

Crissey: No she gave a straight. I think I learned more of the classical psychology there than anything else. but she was very good and she was an excellent teacher and I became quite friendly with her teaching assistant who did the grading of the papers and decided that that was what I wanted to do. Well, it was obvious that if I was going to do anything in psychology I would have to have a master's and since I was able to collapse all my credits I got the bachelor's and the master's in a span of four years.

**Smuts: So you got your master's from Ohio State too in psychology?**

Crissey: Yes and by that time I had taken all of the courses in psychology except the animal and the experimentals and the statistics. I had more statistics than many but that was not because I was very good at it. Those were the only courses in which I got the Bs.

**Smuts: How old were you when you got this B.A. and this master's, do you remember?**

Crissey: 21.

**Smuts: 21, quite an achievement, Marie, and then what did you do?**

Crissey: That was 1931, there were no jobs anywhere. The Ph.D.s were coming back for grants and so on but I had really worked hard because I not only got the two degrees and Phi Beta and Sigma Si and all the rest of the stuff and worked so that I earned everything, including some for my sister who was already in college at the same time. So everybody agreed that I deserved a year off, so I got in touch

with the international student thing and got a scholarship to the University of Budapest which was pretty much available because who could talk Hungarian? Very few, I was one of them. So I got a Rockefeller Scholarship which provided my room and board and a place to stay in the public health facility and a scholarship at the university in, again, joint School of Medicine for psychology and Special Education so that all I had to provide was my travel and my father being in the steamship business was able to get me that and we had enough relatives there that I could spend the vacations with them and my mother put together nickel by nickel ten dollars a month that she sent me for spending money and so I had my year. I learned nothing as far as any technical or professional thing but it made a big difference in my world outlook and gave me the kind of maturity I think that --

**Smuts: Very few women of 21 were able to obtain.**

Crissey: Right and things were getting kind of exciting in Europe. Hitler was just getting started. Just about Christmas time when we were all taking off for wherever we got word from the American Embassy that things didn't look good in the east. Japan was invading China and that we should be ready to go home anytime, this was in '31/'32. So then in the spring of that year I wrote probably a hundred applications looking for a job.

**Smuts: In the United States.**

Crissey: In the United States. Schools, special education, clinics, institutions and so on. But then just when I was getting very discouraged I got two letters. One of them from Ohio State saying that I was appointed to the assistantship in the clinic which is the senior assistantship and it would involve assisting Goddard and Maxfield.

**Smuts: Henry Goddard.**

Crissey: Henry Goddard and Francis Maxfield with anything that was necessary and also supervising the trainees in the clinic and a half-time appointment that I could take classes half-time, so the assumption was that I would go on for a Ph.D. Almost at the same time, now that would not begin until September.

**Smuts: September '32?**

Crissey: September '32. So then at the same time I got a letter from the Rome State School which is the institution in Rome, New York, for the mentally retarded that was probably regarded as the most outstanding, forward-looking kind of institution for the mentally retarded, again a summer appointment. I think the summer appointment was for whenever I could get there in June, July and August and the Ohio State one would begin in September so that that filled in that and I think it included for only room and board and maintenance but one hundred dollars for the summer. I don't remember what Ohio State paid, but hardly had school gotten started when they cut the salary in half.

**Smuts: Oh, dear and it was very little to begin with I'm sure.**

Crissey: Not very much to begin with and my sister was finishing law school. My father, by that time, had no income to speak of so I got back my job as hostess at the Faculty Club in addition. So my social life in the university was nil, but anyway it got two people through college.

**Smuts: Did you learn anything in particular at Rome and let me ask you --**

Crissey: What did I do at Rome?

**Smuts: Well, I know of course about Goddard's Vineland School, was Rome modeled on Vineland?**

Crissey: Sort of, Bemstein had been there and he was a good friend of Goddard's and he and that whole group that were active in the first 20, 30 years of the century were really very active, very capable and very resourceful people. The Rome program was not only bigger but it emphasized living together and working together, so for instance most of the brighter kids and adults lived in so-called colonies. These were often just nice old Victorian homes in the small towns of northern New York and there would be ten, twelve people living there with the house parents. Some of them, for instance, one that I was in quite a lot, they lived in Gloversville which at that time was the center of glove making industries in New York and these girls worked in the factories or they worked in the homes of people who worked in the factory. My job at Rome was to retest the people in these colonies so that I saw school kids, boys, girls, workers.

**Smuts: What tests would you use?**

Crissey: Intelligence.

**Smuts: Terman?**

Crissey: The Binet.

**Smuts: The Binet, adapted by Terman, that one?**

Crissey: Yes, we used the 1916 and also gave student achievement tests to those who were school kids. I also did the testing of incoming students. There were, I think, six psychologists there at that time and I was expected to socialize with the inmates just like everybody else was and that was an excellent experience. I would recommend it for anybody. You don't understand mentally retarded people until you live with them and work with them -- that's what I did.

**Smuts: At any time during this period and the period you worked with Goddard did you meet Arnold Gesell or hear him speak? I know he was very close to Goddard.**

Crissey: No, I don't remember having ever heard him, I knew about him of course. I think the person who really had more influence on me in many respects, he was an excellent clinician, was Francis Maxfield. He is someone that I don't -- that he is as well-known as he should be but he was an excellent teacher and he could evaluate children's performance in ways, well, Goddard couldn't come up to.

**Smuts: Did Goddard perhaps not have quite the feeling for the children that --**

Crissey: He was a much more formal, dignified kind of gentleman and Maxfield could get down on the floor with them and play with them and he'd say, "Now you see what he did, you see how he did that, show me again, how did you do that?" and he would point out things that you wouldn't forget.

**Smuts: That the child wouldn't forget?**

Crissey: That the student examiner wouldn't forget.

**Smuts: I see. So talk more about your experience with Goddard and Maxfield, please.**

Crissey: Well, at the time that Goddard was at Ohio State when I was there, he was becoming much more interested in the gifted and he was a consultant for the Cleveland Schools and did a lot with them.

**Smuts: Was this Terman's influence do you think? They went to Clark together.**

Crissey: I don't know.

**Smuts: But anyway he was working with the Cleveland schools --**

Crissey: And Goddard, he was supposedly my supervisor for my master's thesis but he was gone during all that time that I was working on it and it was a comparison of the activities of gifted and non-gifted girls in a private school. Not a very exciting thing and it had nothing to do with mental retardation but it was something that I could finish in the time that I had. One of the good things that both Maxfield, well particularly Maxfield because Maxfield was much more social and for instance he was the one who turned up at the faculty parties at the Faculty Club, not Goddard. He knew the people downtown who were in charge of court cases, but anyway it was primarily through Maxfield that I had experience in the state school at Ohio State in the way of not only observing and being with the kids but also doing a lot of testing. I did testing in the, well we don't have anything like that anymore but they were like social centers in a combination of YW/YMCA activity centers for kids and it was there that I had the first child that I ever tested that had an IQ of 150, she was about twelve. I did some work in the juvenile court so that you had a lot of these kinds of experiences and you had a chance to see kids from different backgrounds and different activities. I think that the fact that I'd had not only the view of the foreign kids in Lorain, had all kinds of kids in Europe because I did get around to a lot of the schools there because I wanted to see what was going on. There weren't classes that I was interested in taking at the university, I didn't need them, there was nothing that would contribute to my --

**Smuts: You mean when you were in Budapest University, so you went instead to look --**

Crissey: I did these things on my own.

**Smuts: Mostly in Hungary?**

Crissey: Yes, Hungary and to some extent to Czechoslovakia at that time. Well, anyway when I came back I went right to Rome and then when I was through there I went home and found myself in the situation that so many people were at that time, there simply were not jobs in psychology, anywhere.

**Smuts: You mean after you finished your work with Goddard?**

Crissey: After I finished my work with Goddard, after I got my master's, after I had a year in Europe, after I had had a summer at Rome State School and came back to an assistantship. Which was fine, I was glad I had that as a job. It simply paid the maintenance for my sister and myself, that was all.

**Smuts: How long did you stay at Ohio State?**

Crissey: I was there that year and that summer I passed the bulletin board and there was something new on the bulletin board.

**Smuts: Would it be the summer of 1933?**

Crissey: 1933, yes.

**Smuts: Yes.**

Crissey: A letter from Harold Skeels, signed by Stoddard.

**Smuts: From, of the Iowa State Welfare Research Station.**

Crissey: Saying that there was a summer position for someone interested in doing intelligence testing and assessments of school age children in institutions for maintenance and \$30.00 a month.

**Smuts: That's not even as much as they paid you at Rome, Marie, is it?**

Crissey: No, but it was a job and I did have the position back at Ohio State until I had gotten my degree I had taken some courses in social work I think.

**Smuts: Did you get a second degree at Ohio State, because you got you master's and B.A.?**

Crissey: And I had started on a Ph.D.

**Smuts: Oh, this is the Ph.D. you were working on, I see.**

Crissey: But the thing was that I had already taken all the courses, I'd had more work in industrial psych than Orlo had.

**Smuts: Orlo, you should say was your future husband!**

Crissey: I had all the clinical courses. I had all the counseling courses.

**Smuts: There was nothing really left for you.**

Crissey: Except for the grad courses and the statistics which I really was not interested in. Plus I discovered that not only was I a woman just over 21 with a background in institutional work, a student of Goddard's, and there was a problem between clinical and the rat group. The rat group failed all their exams, all their preliminaries in clinical. The clinicals failed all theirs, I was not about to fail.

**Smuts: You mean there was animosity between the phases, as you said the rat people, and they were failing the students from the other field?**

Crissey: If this is true, who knows, that was general knowledge.

**Smuts: It is unbelievable.**

Crissey: It was general knowledge. It was generally felt that the professors in one department didn't care for the others.

**Smuts: And made it very tough for them to pass is what you are saying.**

Crissey: You've never heard of that?

**Smuts: No, I guess I haven't. I'm sure it occurred many times but this is the first I've heard of it.**

Crissey: It was one of those things, I gave the usual summary which was of course just what they wanted and I went out there for the summer. I had never been farther west than Toledo. This was in the period of the dust bowl days, draught, anyway it was a different world again. I got out there and I squandered \$0.75 for taxi fare from the bus stations because obviously I went by bus to the union, the student union where Harold Skeels met me and Orlo was with him. The graduate student was prepared to show --

**Smuts: This is Orlo Crissey. So you met Orlo as soon as you arrived.**

Crissey: Yes and they both took me to a former Ohio State student whom I had known who was working with Arvis Irwin in infant speech and we had to walk up three flights in a student apartment complex and I will never forget those two guys sweating and I brought everything I owned.

**Smuts: And they were carrying it up three flights!**



Crissey: Because the understanding was of course that we had maintenance at the institutions but not at Iowa City because nobody had anything at Iowa City, I mean everybody was poor. So there I met the two girls who were also there on the same basis. Had a background very similar to mine. One was from Pennsylvania and the other one was from Minnesota and we had the use of a car and the institutions could house two of us but not three. So whoever had the car was alone at an institution and the other two were staying at another institution and we would switch of course. I learned Iowa and the Iowa people and the Iowa institutions and I learned to love them. They really were salt of the earth kind of people. I got to know the people at the station because the station was where Harold Skeels had his office and where the secretarial work that was part of our job was done there, but otherwise we went out to the institutions which were all over the state and we stayed out there.

**Smuts: Testing children who were in institutions.**

Crissey: In the institutions and two of them were institutions for the mentally retarded, two were for dependent children, basically these were orphanages dating back to the civil war.

**Smuts: But they separated the mentally retarded and the orphans?**

Crissey: Yes, there were two institutions, two facilities for the mentally retarded. One was at Woodward and the other one was at Glenwood, two different places. Then there were two facilities for these so-called orphans. One was in Davenport and one was near Des Moines. Then there were two facilities for delinquents and one was for boys and that was at Eldora and the other was for girls and that was at Mitchellville which is near Des Moines. So there were the six institutions that we were supposed to service. Actually since there had been no psychologist in any of these facilities we only really worked in four institutions, eventually in all six. But anyway, that summer you can imagine three people trying to test about 7,000 kids.

**Smuts: And going home and eating beans living on \$30.00 a month.**

Crissey: Well no because we had institution food so during the summer we had lots of tomatoes and corn on the cob, new potatoes and we had chicken on Sunday.

**Smuts: Sounds like what they call today a healthful diet, doesn't it! So 7,000 children, did you succeed in testing most of them?**

Crissey: No, well no I don't think so but it was a production line. We had no problem as far as any problems as far as seeing kids. The kids were so delighted to have somebody one on one that the kids had a good time.

**Smuts: So you enjoyed doing it. Did you discover anything in particular, anything new? Not there?**

Crissey: No, because there it was really a matter of getting a base data for the kids because these were eventually the children who were part of the Iowa studies.

**Smuts: So you really started testing that was the basis for this, you and your two friends, and at the end of the summer?**

Crissey: At the end of the summer Paige went to Iowa, she already had basically a stipend there and she got her Ph.D. there, and the gal from Pennsylvania already had a master's and she had her basic special education teaching certificate and so she went back and worked and I think she has worked in that one county all of her career.

**Smuts: What did you do?**

Crissey: And I went back to Ohio State.

**Smuts: They couldn't retain you at Iowa?**

Crissey: No, this was a one-time deal. So I went back to Ohio State and decided that well I could always clobber out a Ph.D. Now Harold was a very good maneuverer and he had established very good relationships --

**Smuts: You're talking about Harold Skeels now.**

Crissey: Harold Skeels. He had established good relations not only in the institutions but with the Board of Control which was a political board and he persuaded them that there should be a psychologist available not only to test the incoming students but periodically those for whom special arrangements were needed and particularly a group of children who were being placed for adoption. So he arranged for a job as psychologist for the children's institutions, these six children's institutions at a very modest salary and maintenance so that it was an attractive job and offered it to me. I accepted and resigned at Ohio State, went out to Iowa, and I'll have to figure this out, because to put these dates in some perspective, I was in Budapest from the fall of '31 to June of '32. That following summer of '32 I spent at the Rome State School, which is an institution for the mentally handicapped, doing routine testing. From September of '32 to the spring of '33 I was graduate assistant at the Ohio State University responsible for the supervision and training of graduate students in the administration of tests and working in the clinic counseling parents, teachers, and children. The summer of '33 I went to Iowa as one of three people who were doing basic testing in the six children's institutions. Returned to Ohio State in the fall of '33 and was there until January of '34, again, as a graduate assistant in the clinic. In January of '34 I received an offer of a position from Harold Skeels as State Psychologist working in the six children's institutions. I remained on that job from January of '34 through 1935 working in the institutions at which point I decided that I wanted to complete a Ph.D. and left the position at the institutions and in 1936, so that I was actually in the institution for about 2 years, and received an assistantship at the Child Welfare Station and for the following two years, that is from '36/'37, '37/'38 completed a Ph.D. and received the degree in August of 1938. August of '38 I went to Flint, Michigan, as Assistant Director of the Guidance Center.

**Smuts: Fine, now tell us about the subject of your Ph.D. and how you came to do it.**

Crissey: That's kind of a long story, but Harold Skeels, as one of the professors at the Child Welfare Station, was responsible for developing projects in research areas for the graduate students. As one of the sources for subjects he went to the orphanage at Davenport and found that there was a great deal of unhappiness there because a family that had received a child, did an adoption some years earlier, was threatening to sue the state because the child was retarded. He found that there had been no assessment of children before they were placed in adoptions so that if they had the right number of fingers and toes and were not otherwise obviously disabled they were placed in adoption. This particular child was rejected by the public schools when he applied for kindergarten because he was seriously mentally retarded and the family threatened to sue that they had been misled about the capabilities about this child. Harold Skeels was there and in discussing the situation, which was very threatening to the institution, said that of course there were tests that assessed a child and that it would have been possible to determine in this child's earlier months and that this whole problem could have been avoided. So the politically-inclined Board decided that if there was a way to determine this it was inevitable that they had to have some means of doing this and so they agreed to have the child, all children, before the completion of adoption, evaluated to be sure that they were normal and that was how the position was established. My major responsibility in addition to keeping all the children tested was to evaluate the children after they had been in an adoptive home for a year when the family could complete legal adoption.

**Smuts: Excuse me, was this during the two and a half years that you were testing the children before you left to take the assistantship for your Ph.D.?**

Crissey: Well that was my job, the major part of my job.

**Smuts: With the Board of Control?**

Crissey: This was all the Board of Control but all the children who were placed for adoption through the Board of Control had been originally placed from the institution by the Board. The way adoption occurred, and this probably could not quite have happened this way elsewhere, the child became a ward of the state; most of the illegitimate youngsters were placed from the hospital into the institution at that point.

**Smuts: The dependent children.**

Crissey: Yes, supposedly they were normal children, if they were not normal they went to one of the other institutions. I never knew of a child that went directly from the hospital to either Glenwood or Woodward.

**Smuts: Which were?**

Crissey: These were the institutions for the mentally retarded. The child would then be in the infant hospital at Davenport where the very experienced nurse really assessed the child and if she felt that there were any problems she would hold the child. Then again a very experienced pediatrician would decide whether the child was place-able or not. Usually there would be several weeks that would intervene while they would see to it that the various papers were in order; that the release had been signed by the mother, whoever was responsible; and then the word would go out to, there were at that time, four placement agents. These were supposedly social workers but they were not trained. They were just good politically-appointed people and they were the ones who were out in the communities evaluating the applicants or children and they would know who needed a boy, who needed a girl, a Catholic child or a Lutheran child or whatever.

**Smuts: Were those the main criteria, sex and religion?**

Crissey: Sex, blond or brunette, and religion.

**Smuts: And there were probably no black children.**

Crissey: There were no black children. I don't think at that time there were any black families in all of Iowa.

**Smuts: And what about ethnic minorities, did that make any difference?**

Crissey: What kind of ethnic, out there? There were Irish, there were Germans, there were Lutherans.

**Smuts: They didn't specify this?**

Crissey: No.

**Smuts: Okay.**

Crissey: These women knew their communities, they knew the people. They had gotten the two required recommendations, one from the minister and the other from the local banker. So then they would be informed as to what children were available and the match was made back at the institution by the superintendent of the institution, by the nurse and usually by the head of, what we would now call the Family Service Agency, at that time it was called something else. All this communication would take place, usually by mail so it took forever and in the meantime often the children became ill and they were removed from the placement series but eventually a connection would be made and child A

would be assigned to family A and the placement worker would quite often be the one who would take the child out to the family, and there they were, give them a few words of wisdom on feeding and say see you next month. They would stop in usually two to three times in the following year, when the year was up if the family had the money and everything was all right they would contact their lawyer and complete the adoption and that was it. So now there was an intervening step in which a psychologist would go out to the family.

**Smuts: That was you.**

Crissey: Either me or Harold.

**Smuts: I see, Harold Skeels too.**

Crissey: Yes and give the tests and do the interpreting. We usually spent a couple of hours with the family so that they would not feel threatened by a psychologist testing the child.

**Smuts: Did you meet any objections after going?**

Crissey: I never did.

**Smuts: Never did.**

Crissey: We had the family watching whenever we could. We usually played on the floor with the kids.

**Smuts: So it was not at all threatening to them or to the children.**

Crissey: We didn't have them come into a white clinic and we didn't wear white clothes.

**Smuts: Did it in their homes.**

Crissey: We did it in their home.

**Smuts: So you tested the child after the child had been placed in the family.**

Crissey: Yes, this was their final step to completion of adoption.

**Smuts: But you didn't test the child before the child was assigned.**

Crissey: Most of the children were placed before they were six months of age, all of them before they were six months and therefore most of them were about two or three months. Now the children who were older, this was a little different story, because the children came in on court order. It was a little different situation. They were tested before they went out. We did look at the infants and if they were obviously we said, well, let's hold them until the next assignment meeting.

**Smuts: Nancy Bayley questioned, you know, the ability to tell very much from babies. The baby would have been eighteen months or so?**

Crissey: More of them were close to two

**Smuts: Did you feel fairly secure when you went back.**

Crissey: No problem.

**Smuts: No problem and you didn't say any were okay that later turned out to be mentally retarded, it all worked out?**

Crissey: Yes and I can't understand why Nancy had any objections because --

**Smuts: Well, maybe I'm misquoting her. Maybe it was actual prediction of later IQ.**

Crissey: Yes, well that was a different story because it depends on what the child experiences. Actually more of the children were closer to two.

**Smuts: By the time you tested them.**

Crissey: By the time we tested them, partly because of the economic situation. Families just didn't have the means to go through, for a farm family that was just making it, to involve the legal expenses which would run a hundred dollars or so. Do you know what it costs to adopt a child now? You better have closer to \$20,000.00 and the hundred dollars then meant as much to families who did have much.

**Smuts: Still in a depression, of course. So how did you get from your testing of these children to the thesis of you --**

Crissey: Both Harold and I knew the backgrounds of the children and before we went out we decided what we were going to say when we had to trade the children back. That part you didn't know.

**Smuts: No, has anybody told this part of the story?**

Crissey: I've written it many times, I don't know whether anybody's got it.

**Smuts: Tell me now.**

Crissey: Because when the mother, I would say that 30% of the mothers had had tests or we were able to get tests from school.

**Smuts: You are talking about the natural mother.**

Crissey: We had their school records, we had their test scores when they were available and we had the family history, none of it very good. It was no secret then that children came from superior families were general placed by the physician or the family or the local lawyer who knew so we didn't get the prize kids in the state.

**Smuts: In these institutions for the dependent child.**

Crissey: That's right. The children that nobody else wanted. So we were well aware that that was a possibility. You couldn't tell looking at a three month old infant, when you got to an eighteen month old who was not walking, who was not talking, you could get some test scores on that child without any problem. You didn't have to be very much of a psychologist if you knew anything about child development and we found that we had children to bring back because we found, well this child is really not developing very well, by now he ought to be doing such and such.

**Smuts: You mean you are saying this to the adoptive parents.**

Crissey: To the adoptive parents, we are discussing it or when the kid was playing with the test material we could say, "Well now, most children are about two before they can do this, here's an eighteen month who is doing it." So they would be happy. Or we would say, "Have you been talking to him very much? Well maybe you could talk to him a little bit more so that he can develop his language a little bit better because any children at this age can say this and this and this." It was an instructional affair too, it was not just the matter of his score or such and such but it was an explanation of what we were looking for, what we were looking at and of what a normal sequence --

**Smuts:** And also giving the adoptive parents the idea they could influence this child's test scores.

Crissey: Or we would say, "Have you been reading to him? It's wonderful," and we'd use a picture book and see what he knew from that. They would feel very pleased to think that they'd been doing the right thing. Well, the result was that we had no problem about --

**Smuts:** There were none who were really --

Crissey: There were none who were retarded. The story changed a little bit later when we got into some of the problem cases whose adoption had not been completed and here they were six and seven. Why hadn't it been? Well, the families themselves were very much aware that things were not really going right and that they knew they better keep contact with the state just in case.

**Smuts:** And what did you do in a case like that, you and Harold, did you encourage the family to do this?

Crissey: Oh, it depended. We had very few, I think I could count up on one hand the total number of children who were a problem. But the thing was that we were able then to say, "What can we do to help you? Have you discussed this with the school?" Unfortunately the ones that really were problems were the problems of parents and that was very hard.

**Smuts:** The adoptive parents.

Crissey: The adoptive parents. We had at least two really psychotic parents and, you know, you would have had a problem no matter what. But then what we did, Harold kept track of the various tests that had been given and of the children that were involved and when we saw that those who had been placed as infants, there was a kind of cutoff, six months was pretty much it if a child was not placed by the time of six months. We had an epidemic, more than one, of otitis media which is the inflammation of the inner ear and those children were sick and they were sick long, and you have to remember this was before penicillin and before any of those magic drugs and so some of those kids were sick a lot and they could not be placed. So anyway, we kept this chart of who'd been tested, how old they were and when we saw that the ones who had been placed as infants were doing very well it was not just the matter of normal development it was more than that. By that time Beth Wellman had done repeated tests on the nursery school kids, so obviously that was a pattern to follow.

**Smuts:** You are finding the same thing in the nursery school kids.

Crissey: Well, that they had extended attendance at nursery school increased their IQs considerably. Anyway, so we decided that really we ought to recheck on this, after all, these were young children and maybe they didn't hold up. Maybe it was an after effect of the tests and of course people like George Goodenoff and others were being very critical of this early testing. So we said, no problem our relationships with these families is such that all we have to do is say we'd like to follow-up and just as a matter of interest.

**Smuts:** Now how many years would this would have just been maybe, the first test was when the child was maybe eighteen months or two years?

Crissey: Two years.

**Smuts:** And then this test that you are going to do to follow-up would be?

Crissey: It was the following year. It would have been the following year but it varied so it was really more like almost two years because it would then occur, if the original tests were in '34 and '35 this would have been in like '36 and '37.

**Smuts: And these were still mostly preschool children.**

Crissey: Yes, I think there were some that were like five or six but they were still young children and so we had almost from the beginning suggested that it would be nice to see them again. Oh, sure you know after all if you get such a glowing report on your two-year-old you're all for seeing it again at three or four or five. So that was how we got started. It was old home week as far as we were concerned.

**Smuts: Then you found that the tests did hold up.**

Crissey: They held up and then we saw them again when they were about seven and again when they were about fifteen after World War II.

**Smuts: And they continued. I didn't realize you followed up that one, most of them you could test at fifteen?**

Crissey: All the one hundred and saw them again when they were adults and that is my unfinished business.

**Smuts: Oh, Marie, are you doing anything about that now?**

Crissey: Got too busy earning a living I guess.

**Smuts: Have you got the material so that you will leave them with your papers perhaps or leave them --**

Crissey: Well that was what I was going to do after I retired.

**Smuts: But I mean if anything happens to you.**

Crissey: Would you believe I got a phone call last summer from an adult.

**Smuts: Who is now about how old?**

Crissey: 50. These children were born --

**Smuts: They were born around '34, '35.**

Crissey: So they are what now, 60.

**Smuts: That's amazing. I can remember Mary Cover Jones telling me with great pleasure her contact with children she had studied in the Adolescent study.**

Crissey: That has been the real regret of my life that I could not get to.

**Smuts: Could it be analyzed by someone else if you don't get to it is my question?**

Crissey: I don't know. I've got everything pretty well cleaned up in the house now of stuff that I've accumulated over the years except for this one room that has all this stuff in it and that's my next chore.

**Smuts: Well, I certainly hope you do get to analyze that because it would be fascinating.**

Crissey: I did analyze some groups of it.

**Smuts: And published from it?**

Crissey: They're papers that are not in the well-known -- It's kind of hard for me I guess to realize that there are so many of the students and people who are involved in the research now who may not have a feeling for the warmth and the reality that's involved that made it possible to develop the concept of the joint effect of "nature and nurture," because to me there is no argument about the fact that both are involved and to feel that somehow one should be more important than the other is futile.

**Smuts: I think you did bring some of this alive by talking about how you and Harold Skeels talked to the parents and reinforced what they were doing in reading and talking to the children and helping them. I mean that's nurture. They got a child and they were building, to some extent, the native endowment and the interaction of nature/nurturing until the child arrived to them. Do you think your approach helped this problem?**

Crissey: Well, I think, because in many ways Harold and I had both the same feel for things and the same ideas, and the result was that we could communicate some of the developmental aspects of relationships with the child to the parents in a way that maybe had not been done by other researchers. I guess the things that I remember about the contacts with the families and with the children are kind of little stories to tell.

**Smuts: It's one of the purposes of this oral history is to get to some of these little stories, so please tell me some.**

Crissey: For instance I remember very well one young man, the only young man who eventually had some legal problems or conflicts with the law. He was placed with a very rigid Dutch family, farmers.

**Smuts: At what age?**

Crissey: He was an infant, these were all infants. I'll never forget the first time I went to the family, they of course had no idea what I wanted or what I needed so they had him all cleaned up and shined and haircut and everything. He was about two, blond, a nice youngster and they wanted to know if I wanted to have him undressed, what did I want? I said, "Oh just a place to play." I looked around at the house and they had linoleum, carpeting, shined, waxed, beautifully cleaned, everything immaculate and sparkling, he was and they were. He had on freshly starched overalls and, you know, like so many two-year-olds, when he got excited about something he began to drool a little bit, she was just horrified and ran to get a freshly starch handkerchief. Well anyway, eventually they kind of relaxed and decided that this funny lady from the university was just playing with him so it was all right to see him again. In another year or two I saw him when he was about, oh I imagine about four or five. I saw him again when he was about seven and had been in school, how he'd gotten along. Okay, he was very well behaved and I saw him again when he was in his early teens I would imagine, maybe thirteen, fourteen, fifteen and we were visiting. I was a little concerned he was very constrained and very rigid and finally I asked him about -- at that age they were all in 4H -- did he have a 4H animal or something, yes he had a cow, a heifer. So went out and paid a visit to the heifer and he said to me, "You're from the university, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." "Do you come to see everybody who is adopted?" I said, "Not everybody, but I especially come to see people who are adopted. Are you adopted?" He said, "Yes." "I didn't know whether you knew." And I said, "Do your folks know that you know you're adopted?" He said, "They think I don't know." So we talked about that a little bit that maybe it would be good if he had a chance to talk with them and he let me know that that was not going to be possible. That they thought being adopted was very bad and therefore he is very bad.

**Smuts: He concluded that he was very bad. That's a striking story.**

Crissey: So after we got on to other topics and the examination was all over and I tried to kind of suggest that maybe he had something else that he could do so I could talk to the parents and they, of



course, by this time it was time for him to do some chores. I tried to get them to be a little bit more open with him and maybe he might know or suspect that maybe he was different than from other people. Oh no, they had never told anybody and that did I tell him. So anyway, I tried to get them to consider it, so when I saw him, and he would have been about in his mid-30s, the family was still there and they were very glad to see me because they had never had a chance to talk with anybody over the fact that their son who had been brought up in the church and who had been so rigidly disciplined was in trouble with the law. I saw him afterwards, not at his home but where he was living with another, he wasn't in great trouble but he had been in a fight. He was very torn between his loyalty to them for having taken care of him and hating them for the disciplinary act. There are a hundred stories just like that.

**Smuts:** Have they ever published any of the case histories, any of these stories? It would have been wonderful to do. Maybe one of the things you should do, Marie, in your spare time, is tell some of these stories into a tape recorder.

Crissey: I do better writing.

**Smuts:** Well, get them down because that's a fascinating story.

Crissey: There were others.

**Smuts:** It is now past our dinner time so unfortunately we are going to have to stop, but perhaps we could get together to carry on Marie's story, and I thank you very much, Marie.

Crissey: I don't feel that I've done such a wonderful job.

**Smuts:** Well, I think the people will judge differently.