

Eva Kloempken

Narrator

Dominique A. Tobbell, Ph.D.

Interviewer

**ACADEMIC HEALTH CENTER
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

ACADEMIC HEALTH CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In 1970, the University of Minnesota's previously autonomous College of Pharmacy and School of Dentistry were reorganized, together with the Schools of Nursing, Medicine, and Public Health, and the University Hospitals, into a centrally organized and administered Academic Health Center (AHC). The university's College of Veterinary Medicine was also closely aligned with the AHC at this time, becoming formally incorporated into the AHC in 1985.

The development of the AHC made possible the coordination and integration of the education and training of the health care professions and was part of a national trend which saw academic health centers emerge as the dominant institution in American health care in the last third of the 20th century. AHCs became not only the primary sites of health care education, but also critical sites of health sciences research and health care delivery.

The University of Minnesota's Academic Health Center Oral History Project preserves the personal stories of key individuals who were involved with the formation of the university's Academic Health Center, served in leadership roles, or have specific insights into the institution's history. By bringing together a representative group of figures in the history of the University of Minnesota's AHC, this project provides compelling documentation of recent developments in the history of American health care education, practice, and policy.

Biographical Sketch

Eva Kloempken was born in 1908. She attended the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota and graduated in 1929. After graduating, she worked as a nurse until her retirement at Northern Pacific Beneficial Association Hospital in St. Paul.

Interview Abstract

Eva Kloempken discusses some of her experiences as a student at the UMN, including descriptions of some of the faculty and her anatomy class. She describes some of her experiences as a nurse, including relations between nurses and doctors, living in dorms at the Northern Pacific Beneficial Association Hospital, some technologies she used, and nursing uniforms. She also discusses why she became a nurse and the changes in nursing that took place during her career.

Interview with Eva Kloempken

Interviewed by Dominique Tobbell, Oral Historian

**Interviewed for the Academic Health Center, University of Minnesota
Oral History Project**

Interviewed at Cedar Crest Estates, Cosmos, Minnesota

Interviewed on November 1, 2010

Eva Kloempken - EK
Mary Silker - MS
Laurel Mallon - LM
Dominique Tobbell - DT

DT: I'll introduce us. It is November 1, 2010. This is Dominique Tobbell here with Mrs. Eva Kloempken and Eva's daughter, Mary Silker. Laura Mallon is also here.

Thank you, Eva, for meeting with us today. I want to ask you about your experiences as a nursing student at the University [of Minnesota]. Can you tell me a little bit about when you were a student nurse?

EK: Well, I enjoyed every bit of it. We had our rules. They were strict, but I enjoyed every bit of it.

DT: Do you remember any of the teachers you had?

EK: Miss Ordahl. She was a *wonderful* person. She was honest and she was strict. You knew her didn't you? She was strict, but very, very fair. She gave me my first job. She knew I was looking for a job, but she never told me. She had already registered me. She gave me my first job. She was a wonderful person.

DT: Where was your first job? Was that at Northern Pacific [Beneficial Association] Hospital [St. Paul, Minnesota]?

EK: Yes. I worked there for many years.

DT: What kind of things were you doing there?

EK: Oh, do you mean like a charge nurse?

DT: Yes.

How would spend your day? What kind of responsibilities did you have?

EK: I don't know.

It's a funny thing, but if you sit and watch some of those young girls now, you think I know what I'd give them. I'd give them a big fat zero. That's true. The things they do! I shouldn't say this, but when they bring a wheelchair up to a table, [Eva simulates being pushed into the table] the poor person hanging [over the edge of the table]. Do you know what I mean?

DT: Yes.

EK: But you notice all those things, you know. Like I said, I would give them a nice big fat zero.

DT: When you were a nurse, if you treated someone in a wheelchair that way, you would have been in trouble?

EK: Well, you would tell somebody about it. Sometimes, you had a meeting and, then, you'd come there and say, "Well, I think we should watch how we approach the patient in a wheelchair, how we take them up to the dining room to eat." You know, kind of wishy-washy.

[laughter]

MS: Ask her about the square corners.

DT: What can you tell me about the square corners?

EK: Oh, square corners. I made square corners for demonstration beds and, then, when it came to when they were going to do it, they did still the old fashioned way with the sheets. We were sitting back there fuming because that wasn't what you taught them. You know they'll hear about it the next time. You know, the next meeting, they heard about it and got a big fat zero.

[laughter]

DT: When you were a charge nurse, you were in charge of some of the students?

EK: Yes. I loved nursing, every bit of it.

DT: What about nursing did you love?

EK: I liked everything about it. Everything. It had to be done. Of course, I had Miss Ordahl for a teacher. That was the starter. Everything had to be just so. So when I was taking up nursing, everything thing had to be just so. No monkey business.

DT: What things did you do with the patients? When you were working at the hospital, and you were working with patients, what kinds of things did you do? You had to make their beds and what else?

EK: Help them with their care, make their beds, and, of course, take them around in wheelchairs, just general things.

DT: Did you have to give them their medicine?

EK: Yes. You were very careful. That's another I've noticed now. [Eva simulates a nurse putting all pills at once down a patient's throat]. I still can't do it. I had to go back to Eva's old way, doing it one pill at a time.

DT: Can you explain that for me?

EK: Well, like you're giving pills, and they put all the things in a little glass and come to the patient and pour them in his mouth. I say, "do you know what you gave him?". But you don't know. You can't do it that way. You have to do it the way you were taught, and not...

DT: One at a time? Is that how you were taught?

EK: Yes. You can't just pour those in some of those old people's mouths. You come along a little while later and you wonder what that is on...and it's their pills. Do you know what I mean?

DT: Yes. How were the physicians that you worked with? Did you have good relations with the physicians that you worked with?

EK: Some of the places were bad. Some were very, very good. I think that Miss Ordahl had a control that was *very* good. Do you remember her?

MS: No, I don't.

EK: Do you?

LM: Never met her.

EK: She was strict, but she was honest and she was fair.

LM: That's important, yes.

EK: That's very important.

DT: So she was strict with the doctors, as well? Were the doctors afraid of her?

EK: Oh, no. No. They all respected her. She was a great person. When I first started out, I was scared to death of her. She and I turned out to be great friends.

DT: Do you remember Katherine Densford? Did you ever meet Katherine Densford when you were a student?

EK: Oh, yes, I knew her, too.

DT: What was she like?

EK: She was a good person. Fair. I think that's very important.

DT: Were there any other teachers that you remember?

EK: I think Miss Ordahl, of course. She was the greatest one. When I started out as a freshman, she was working and I went all through training with her. She was very, very important to me. I respected everything she did or said. Even after I graduated, I never smarted my mouth off to her ever.

DT: Where did you live when you were a nurse and a student? Did you live with the other students?

EK: When we started out, we lived in dorm rooms.

MS: The dorms at North Pacific [Beneficial Association Hospital].

EK: We lived in dorms. The dorms were like classes.

DT: You were telling us a story earlier about when you would sneak out of the dorm.

EK: Oh, yes. Didn't you ever do that?

DT: Tell me, again, how you snuck out.

EK: See this nice yellow pencil?

DT: Yes.

EK: We would put it in the door, way down close to the... You couldn't see it. Then, when you came back at night, you took it out, opened the door, and walked in.

[laughter]

DT: Did you ever get caught? No?

EK: My brother would have skinned me if I had been!

[laughter]

DT: Why did you become a nurse?

EK: I was always interested in it. Of course, that was during the Depression and there wasn't any extra money floating around. So you got a good education and most people couldn't afford it. I loved every bit of it.

DT: Because of the Depression, did you have to send money home to your family when you were working?

EK: No, but I helped pay for things that I knew would help them.

DT: You told me that you got married while you were a student.

EK: [chuckles] My boyfriend was very jealous. He dared me into getting married, eloping, which I did. I was scared to death. At that time, what did I have? About a year and half left of school? I had quite a bit of school left. I got to thinking if my brother ever finds out I was married, then I'll really be in trouble. But he never found out. It couldn't have been more than six months or a year that I was married. But you couldn't get married at the time.

DT: Why was that?

EK: There were no married nurses. It was during the Depression, you know.

DT: Did you eventually tell Miss Ordahl that you were married?

EK: No! Heavens no!

[laughter]

EK: Not even after. After I had graduated and everything, never, she would've killed me! Did you know her?

DT: No.

EK: I can still see her coming down the hall. She was very, very strict. Fair, very fair and honest.

DT: Do you remember anything about your anatomy classes when you were a student?

EK: Anatomy. Well, I enjoyed it.

LM: Ask her about the pencil in the body?

DT: Can you tell me about the pencil in the body?

MS: No. Eva, when you were in anatomy class, you were showing the instructor different parts of the body, and you were using a pencil, and he got mad and said, “No, you’ve got to put your hand in there.”

EK: [The instructor told me to show him different parts of the digestive system. I was wearing no gloves and was not going to touch anything so I was using a pencil to point the parts out. He got mad.] He took the pencil and shoved my hand down in there [into the cadaver]. Oooo.

DT: And you weren’t wearing gloves?

EK: No, we never wore gloves. When I see kids wearing gloves, putting them towards their mouth, tut!. They use thousands and thousands of gloves now. We never did. They were precious.

DT: That must have been an odd experience having a hand in the body.

EK: Yes. You had to get your hand in... Ohh.

DT: What happened when you left anatomy class and you tried to go on the bus home, did anything happen then?

EK: Sometimes, we had the bus to ourselves because everybody crowded to the other end, because we smelled so bad.

[chuckles]

EK: That is true.

DT: How do you think nursing changed during your career? Did you particular changes in nursing while you were a nurse?

EK: I would say changes now in some of these young kids. They’re graduating. Why, like I told my nurse, “You’d get a big fat zero for a mark.” It’s not right. Silly little things... Pushing a patient up to the table to eat. [Pssh – whispered] Just think how it hurts them. That’s just one of the things. I tell them. I don’t care if they are graduating or not graduating, I still tell them different things like that...bringing them over in the wheelchair, and they’re sitting with their legs up to the table. Ohhh. How can they do that? You have seen it though?

MS: Yes.

EK: Wouldn't you like to go and lambast them once?

[laughter]

EK: The thing that has bothered me is how they slam them into the... How would you like to be slammed in here real hard?

DT: Did you use different technologies? Were there specific technologies that you used as a nurse?

EK: Oh, I think so.

DT: Do you remember what kinds?

EK: Not right off hand. [We had the basics—the blood pressure machine, stethoscope, X-ray machine but none of these new-fangled things they have now—no heart monitors, no MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging), no CAT (computerized axial tomography) scans etc. We were mostly just hands-on. Even the medicines were pretty basic. We had a few sulfa drugs, real old-fashioned types.]

DT: Did you have to measure a patient's blood pressure?

EK: Oh, yes. I was trying to think of some of those books we used. I can't think... She maybe would.

MS: They had to do their own dietetics. They had to spend time in the kitchen and make their own dietetics.

DT: Did you listen to the patient's heart with a stethoscope? Did you ever use a stethoscope?

EK: Oh, yes.

DT: Did you draw the patient's blood? Did they have you doing that when you were a student or once you were in practice?

EK: We were taught as we were students, and, then, we would sometimes be called to do it. Yes, but we were taught with a student...I mean the student as a patient. [As student nurses we practiced on each other. Even those of us who were in training to become X-ray technicians used the student nurses as guinea pigs.]

DT: While you were a nurse, did you see different monitors that would be used, like a heart monitor? Did you have to work with those?

EK: I can't remember.

DT: How many nurses did you work with?

EK: Sometimes you had a few and sometimes you didn't have anybody.

DT: Were you working nights, sometimes, and you might be the only one there?

EK: I worked nights. I worked a lot of nights.

DT: Did you prefer that? Or was daytime work better? Did you like working nights?

EK: Not especially, but it was a good change. I didn't mind working nights.

DT: Do you have any other memories about when you were a nurse that you'd like to share?

EK: It's funny how that illness took everything away. If I'd had any sense, I would have jotted some of those things down, which I didn't do.

LM: Did you ask—I didn't hear—how she ended up at the University, how she came to the University of Minnesota.

DT: Why did you go to the University of Minnesota?

EK: My doctor.

LM: Your doctor was there or told you?

EK: He told me that was the place to go.

LM: Smart doctor.

Good.

EK: Yes.

LM: There could have been many other places to go.

EK: Oh, yes. There were a lot of small hospitals. He's the one that advised me to go there. And I enjoyed every minute of it.

LM: Good. It was a good choice.

DT: Eva, over lunch, you were talking about morticians or mortuary school.

EK: My father-in-law was a mortician and his son was one. I don't know if one son or two sons. He wanted me to be one. I kind of hesitated and I never did it.

DT: What kind of training would you have needed as a mortician?

EK: For a mortician, just like any.

DT: You could go to nursing school and, then, for six months more, you could be a mortician?

EK: Yes.

DT: Did many people do that?

EK: I don't think so. They're kind of afraid of us [referring to morticians].

[laughter]

DT: What were your uniforms like as a nurse?

EK: We have pictures here [Eva indicates photos of her as a young nurse]. I wore a special cap after I graduated and a white uniform with a lot of buttons on it. I enjoyed everything, even the uniforms.

DT: Were they difficult to wear sometimes? Were the uniforms a pain to wear?

EK: No.

DT: They were fine.

EK: They were starched, of course. We made our own, like at the [unclear] and different kinds. At first, they were all starched. You could stand them up and they would stand there.

DT: That doesn't sound very comfortable.

EK: You'd get so used to them. You didn't want to have to sit down so they'd get all wrinkled.

DT: Would you be in trouble if they were wrinkled?

EK: No, but somebody would ask us if they were wrinkled, what is the matter that we were so sloppy?

DT: You were in the Red Cross, also?

EK: I can't remember, but it seems like I was for a short time.

DT: We saw your Red Cross pin.

EK: Yes.

DT: But you don't remember anything of...?

EK: I don't remember how long I was in.

DT: You worked until you were sixty-five years old? You were a nurse until you were sixty-five?

EK: Yes.

DT: What made you stop?

EK: Well, I think I kept right on going after I was sixty-five. [chuckles] I worked more.

DT: Oh, you did?

EK: Yes.

DT: You just didn't want to stop.

EK: I enjoyed every bit of it.

DT: Do you have any other stories that you might share?

EK: Mmmm...

MS: What about sneaking out and going on the toboggan and breaking your wrist?

EK: I think that's in there, isn't it?

DT: You haven't told me about it.

MS: You have to tell her so she can hear on here.

EK: We used to sneak out once in a while and get a little excitement.

[laughter]

EK: Anyhow, we were somewhere and got tangled up with somebody, and I broke my wrist, my right wrist. So I didn't dare come to work that night and say, "Well, I think I

broke my wrist tobogganing.” “What were you doing tobogganing?” So I went to work, and I never did tell them how I broke it. I worked that night, and, oh, it was terrible and I was miserable. I think I got a cast put on or something, but I kept right on going to work. I didn’t dare tell them how I got hurt, because in those days, they were so strict.

DT: How did you meet your husband?

EK: I think I met him through you?

MS: No, Eva. You met him when a friend was going with his brother.

EK: Who was she?

MS: A Wick?

EK: Relative of yours?

MS: No. Eva, your friend in Stewart [Minnesota] was going with a Wick and they wanted you to double date with John. Instead, you went with my dad.

EK: I can’t remember that.

MS: They were going out and she met him through this other couple.

DT: While she was as student.

MS: Yes.

DT: I was wondering if you had to sneak out to meet him. John, was that his name?

MS: Dick was his name.

MS: John was his brother.

EK: Yes, I can’t remember. I’ll probably think of it tonight when I’m going to sleep.

[chuckles]

DT: You’ve told me some really interesting stories. Do you have any other memories about the nursing school?

EK: Oh, I liked every bit of it.

LM: Do you remember how much it cost to go to school?

EK: Not very much.

MS: Did you pay for it? Or did your family have to pay for it?

EK: My family paid for it.

I didn't have any parents. My father died when I was two and a half. My mother died when I was ten. My two brothers and a sister, they kept us kids together. We had a big home and a guardian. We lived in this house and the school was right across the street from me. I remember training.

DT: Where did you grow up? In Minneapolis?

EK: Hector [Minnesota].

LM: You grew up in Winthrop [Minnesota].

EK: What surprised me is I went home one day—our school was kitty corner from the church—and the church was gone. What did they do with the church? It was gone.

LM: Are you getting tired?

MS: I'm just curious. How did your parents die? You were so young. Were they ill?

EK: I can't remember how old my father was. My mother had had seven children. They died younger in those days.

LM: Yes.

MS: Her father had pneumonia and her mother died after having all gall bladder surgery.

LM: There must be some good genes somewhere here. I'm just kind of curious. [Laurel is referring to the fact that Eva is 102 years old].

EK: Your mother died when you were very young.

MS: No, my mother is still alive. She's sitting right across from me.

EK: You aren't my child.

MS: Yes, I am. I'm your oldest.

EK: Let me crawl under the table for a while.

LM: No, no, no, no.

[laughter]

MS: She had two older brothers and an older sister. Then, when her father died, her mother remarried. Then, she had two more sons and another daughter.

DT: That's a big family.

MS: Yes. Then she died when that daughter was like about eight months old.

EK: She raised that baby.

MS: My oldest aunt raised the baby

EK: She wasn't very old.

MS: About sixteen or seventeen.

EK: She was about seventeen. They kept that family together in their own home. I remember my brother telling me he didn't want to go on living here [unclear]. Like I was telling one of the doctors the other day, we probably didn't have elegant meals everyday, but on Sunday, we always had a big family dinner. Maybe you had potatoes or something. Do you what I mean? Every Sunday, it was like my mother—she was dead by then—would make... She was a good cook. It didn't brush off on me.

[laughter]

DT: Did your older brothers have to go out to work?

EK: He worked on the section [railroad]. He was a brilliant student, but he couldn't go to school and support us. So, he worked on the section for about seventeen dollars a month or something like that. I shouldn't say that, but it was a small thing amount like that. We always had plenty to eat, no fancy stuff, but good stuff. He would always help me with my school work. If I didn't bring any book home, "Where are your books?" to do homework, you know.

DT: What happened during the war, World War II?

EK: Well, we lived in our house. We always had a big garden. My mother and my sister canned a lot of things. We never starved.

LM: Good. I brought you a pin from our school—I thought you could wear that—the School of Nursing.

EK: Ohhh.

LM: We still use the same graduation pin, but this is one that we just kind of use. I thought we could be it on your sweater.

MS: Yes, and let me get my camera.

DT: Thank you.

[End of the Interview]

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