

**Darien, Illinois
Oral History Project**

Ms. Jeanette Hahn

**interviewed by Deb Barrett
September 10, 2013**

**Indian Prairie Public Library
Darien, Illinois**

Today is Tuesday, September 10, 2013 and I am with Ms. Jeanette Hahn at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Ms. Hahn was born on July 18, 1938, in Chicago, Illinois. She has lived in Darien since 1967. She is here to share her memories about this area.

Life Before Coming to Darien

So Jeanette, when did your family first come to this area? Where were you living and what prompted your move out here.

We were living on the southwest side of Chicago, and we just wanted to buy a house. We looked at established houses and said, no, we wanted to move to an area west of the city so that we'd still have the expressways and transportation back in. So we just started driving around and saw the Weisman Construction Company building houses in Darien. We looked at the models in Darien and thought about it for a while and then we decided to build out here.

So you were married at the time.

Right.

Did you have kids at the time?

No. I was very pregnant!

So you wanted to move out of the city.

Yes.

So you were just a young married couple.

Well, not to young, but early 30's.

So you saw the Weisman Construction in Darien, which was unincorporated.

Yes, it was unincorporated. If you needed the police you'd call DuPage County, and they'd get there eventually.

So you chose one of the houses; one of the models that would work.

Yes, one of the models. And, if I ever find it I know I have the brochure at my house tucked away in a box that listed all the houses and the prices – you wouldn't believe the prices on them. That was 47 years ago. They were very inexpensive.

So how did the house you were choosing compare with the house you were leaving?

We were in an apartment in the city.

So when you started to raise your family you wanted to be out of an apartment and into a home.

Right. My husband was raised in a house. And we were going to be having a family, so we needed a place for the kids to run around and not have anybody upstairs or downstairs who would be bothered by us. So I guess we just wanted to expand.

So when you told your family you were moving out here, what was their reaction?

Oh, they were very excited.

Were they familiar with this area at all?

Nobody was!

What do you remember about moving out here?

It was the Fourth of July weekend, and the movers moved very fast because they wanted to start their holiday. It was just a very warm day.

But we would come out every weekend and watch the construction of the house – digging of the hole for the foundation, the walls as they would go up, making the decisions for the colors and the design; did we want to make any changes? Did you want to change this or that? That was very exciting, and also making all those decisions. But there was enough to choose from and Weisman was very cooperative. You look around at the different houses in what we used to call Hinsbrook and you'll see there's enough variance in them.

Hinsbrook was the subdivision that later incorporated. There were five models – five different floor plans.

About that, yes.

Daily Life in Darien

When you moved into your new house, how was life different, besides the fact that you were in a new town.

Oh, my goodness! I'm a library person. Ever since I was a little girl and could read or walk down the street I could go to the library. I was always in walking distance of the library. And it drove me crazy to not have a library out here close enough. I think Westmont had one, and Hinsdale.

Downers Grove had one.

Right. But we didn't go into Downers Grove very much. But I know we went to Westmont because it was straight up Cass and I wouldn't get lost. Oh. And I also didn't have my own car. I always had to wait for my husband to go on a business trip and then I would have his, or to drive with a friend. Because I didn't drive. When I was living in the city I didn't drive. I didn't have to drive. You could just hop on a bus or walk to wherever you wanted to go. So that was a big difference.

How did you do grocery shopping?

Not conveniently! Was Brookhaven market here?

Yes. It was the IGA.

Right. You could go to the IGA. Or you could drive to the Jewel in Clarendon Hills on 55th and Holmes. I know we went there. And then my friend, Audrey, who lived across the street, had a car and could drive all the time. And we would go to the Jewel on 63rd and Main. And when our Jewel was built on 75th and Cass every body said it was too big – we'd get lost in it. That was funny. It was so big to us at the time, but very convenient.

So you didn't drive. You didn't know how to drive and didn't have a license.

I had a license but I didn't drive. And then, when my husband would go on business trips I had access to a car. So then I used it and got the experience of driving. But I didn't have my own until I started to work. Then I bought my own.

And you also said you went to one of the local churches here.

Yes. We went to St. John's when it was the little white church on the corner where the Taco Bell is now. We went there. Then St. John built across the street and we moved there.

How many families were in St. John's?

I really don't know. It was a very small congregation in the little church. Now when we moved to the big church it became a big congregation.

It's grown a lot.

Oh, yes! Definitely, it has.

And when they tore down the little white church we had the opportunity to buy some of the church pews. And they were beautiful! They were old church pews – ornate with carvings, etcetera. But they tipped over in my house because they weren't anchored to the floor – in church they were; they were anchored to the floor. But I couldn't do that

in my house. So I had these church pews leaning up against the wall in the basement when we finished the basement. When people came over they'd say: "Do we have to pray? Do we have to sing? Why do we have church pews?" And the kids used to get a big kick out of them. I don't know why we moved them out of the finished part of the basement and put them into the unfinished part. They just got dusty and full of spider webs.

About a year ago my furnace guys were over, and the church pews were in the way. I asked them if they knew anybody who'd want them. They got very excited and said, "Oh, yes! My dad refinishes and my mother loves antiques!" So I said if they could get them out of the basement without damaging the walls they were theirs. So they did. And he took them home. His father refinished them and they are now sitting in a restaurant. I think it's in Mokena or someplace like that. But they have a happy home!

You were very pregnant.

When we bought the house. But my daughter was three months old when we moved in.

So you bought the house and she was born in the city. So the doctors, the pediatrician were in the city and you'd go back there?

We'd go back to the city, but then we got tired of doing that and found a pediatrician in Hinsdale where everybody was going. That was about it.

What did you do with the baby as she grew a little bit and was looking for playmates? Where did you find them?

At the time Hinsbrook was full of young families. You never had a problem finding a playmate. In fact, Randy has some friends now; had maintained a friendship with a girl named Karen. They have maintained a friendship from the time they were three and they're both 45, 46 now. They went to the same grade school, the same junior high, same high school and same college. And then when they got married they've lived within driving distance. But they've maintained the friendship. A lot of the kids from Hinsbrook, Eisenhower and Hinsdale South have maintained a friendship.

So she started school in the early '70s.

She was born in 1967, so about 1972.

She went to Hinsbrook School, which was still relatively new.

Right, it was. And very well populated because of all the young families with their kids.

I know I can sit out in front of my house now. There are no children riding their big wheels or bikes, or outside playing ball. And I've commented to some of my friends,

“Remember the old days when we had kids going up and down the street.” And trick-or-treating was like for 200 kids!

So you had a daughter and then a son after.

Yes. There is nine years difference between the two.

That must have been a difference in even the way the schools were running at the time.

Yes. Hinsbrook became Mark DeLay School.

Named after the superintendent.

Right.

And both of your kids went to Hinsdale South.

Yes, they did.

So when you were just starting out in this new home, what did you do for entertainment?

Oh, you always had friends. You had neighbors and you had parties. You'd have bar-b-ques and cookouts back and forth. Hinsbrook Newcomers was a very active group at the time, and there were a lot of interest groups from that.

We had gourmet dinners – there was a gourmet dinner group. I think we met every two months at someone's house. And the ladies would plan the dinners. You'd go through these menus and plan the dinners. It was at yours every six months or so. That was one thing.

There was the pool. When the pool opened, that was very social. Friday night was adult-only night, and that was a party night!

What about shopping for clothes and things like that?

Well, that was before Yorktown. We'd go into Westmont, down Cass Avenue north of the tracks. There were fabric stores, a drapery shop, and a very small department store called “Stephen's.” And for shoes we'd go into Downers Grove to Geische's. Very seldom would we go back; we really didn't go back into Chicago to do shopping.

We had both sets of grandma's and grandpa's living in the city. And we'd go visit them. But my parents just loved to come out here and play with the kids because you could play in the yard, you could go to the park. And we would go out to eat. Friday night was grandma and grandpa's.

Where did you go out to eat?

Westmont Restaurant! We always put it that way, too: Let' go to Westmont Restaurant. It was a causal family place.

And what was the name of that pizza place on 75th? You used to get that real think crust pizza and a big salad bowl. And that was a family style dinner.

I know there was a little Italian place in Brookhaven.

Yes. But this pizza place was on 75th. I think there's a Mexican restaurant there now. But we'd go there quite often. But we liked to go to Westmont Restaurant.

When Yorktown opened – what year was that built?

It was sometime in the '70's.

We'd go to the cafeteria there.

Did you go to movies out here?

What shows were there? Downers Grove – the Tivoli. Yes.

Not many others.

Not that I can remember. The Tivoli, and then Yorktown when they opened. Oh! Hinsdale – there was that theater in Hinsdale and we went there often.

And something else with the Hinsbrook newcomers: we had gardening groups, arts and crafts, knitting and needlework. You could go to a meeting every night. It was very active. Because there were all these young mothers who wanted to get out of the house!

We had a gardening group that I was in and enjoyed very much. And the gourmet dinner group. Arts and crafts. There are very few of us old-timers left.

Did the Welcome Wagon greet you when you came?

Oh, yes!

With all the little gifts you'd get?

Yes. That was a long while ago!

There are very few original owners left. Down my block I think there's maybe two on 71st Street between Richmond and down the hill.

You came from the city. A lot of people who live in Darien came from the southwest side of the city, from Berwyn, from Cicero ...

From near the airport. And they didn't mean O'Hare. They mean Midway.

That's right. Have any of your friends moved out this way?

No. Not to stay. I think there were maybe two families who moved to the western suburbs, but since, they have moved. A lot of it was job transfers at that time. Companies would move the men around. I don't know if they do that so much anymore. But as you climbed up the management ladder you were transferred to different places.

And my husband used to travel rather than move. He lived in Michigan and would come home on weekends. He did that for several months. And then to Tennessee. And another time he was in Haiti.

And you would stay here.

I stayed here and he moved around. We decided we were going to do that instead of transporting the whole family.

And you said at some point you got a job?

I was a teacher.

What grades?

Primary grades. I taught in Evergreen Park and then I got pregnant and we moved out here. Our daughter, Randy, was born and then I stayed home with her until she was in kindergarten. Then I think I first started working as a teacher's aide, part-time, at Gower West. I worked there for a couple of years. Then I tried teaching pre-school over at St. John's. I didn't like that. They were just too little. I was more accustomed to the third grade – I'd been working with that.

Then I worked at Home Economist. Remember that bulk store? It's different owners now, and it's entirely different from what it used to be. We used to have a very elaborate deli and cheese department. It was a very popular and busy store.

Oh, yes. They had all the bulk foods and spices and supplies.

It was quite a fun place to work.

Did you ever think about going back to teaching full time?

No. No, I didn't. With having my family I did not want to be away full time, with the responsibilities of being a teacher and all the work before and after school hours and all that – no.

And with your husband gone and all that.

Right. It was just too hard, too difficult.

Changes in Darien Over Time

What is now the city of Darien has changed a lot.

Oh, yes! Ever since Al Somalia and some other guys sat around in a tavern and decided that we were going to be a city. Oh, yes! I really can't remember all of them.

Sam Kelly?

Was he our first mayor, or was Al?

We had a woman as mayor.

Joyce. And then she left.

I know Sam was an interim mayor at one point. Somebody left and he took their position.

I think that was when Joyce Stahl left.

That must be. Right. Do you remember when that whole discussion was going on?

Yes. And there were a lot of petitions that went around; a lot of coffees and meetings. They had to go to court a lot to settle things.

I remember from that time there was talk of Westmont wanting to annex the area.

Right. And we did not want that.

Right. One of the things that stuck out in my mind were the possible names of the city. They were five subdivisions coming together. And someone suggested Quinto. But Sam Kelly came up with the name of Darien because he had just come back from Darien, Connecticut and he thought that was a good model.

Then that story is true!

It is true. That's how we became Darien – after Darien, Connecticut.

Good! That was quite the time. And all those elections to establish a mayor. I knew Joyce Stahl personally, and the campaigning for her and celebration when she won. And then they moved away.

I'm not involved in politics in Darien anymore. I haven't done any campaigning or taken any petitions around for a long time.

But a lot has changed in the city – not just in the government, but just in the look of the city.

Oh, yes.

What do you remember of the roads and commuting; business that are no longer here that might have been important? Any businesses that you remember patronizing that aren't here anymore?

Well, the hardware stores over in Brookhaven. The True Value is leaving now. Ace left. And then the cleaners on the corner. And the Brookhaven IGA! When they tore that down and built the Walgreen's I joked with the workers: "How many dead Mexicans did you find in the basement?" Because if they had walked in there and yelled "Immigration!" it would have emptied out.

But that was the choice of where you got your stuff at the time.

And I remembered the roadways. Cass Avenue?

Yes. 65 miles an hour. Sure!

And the farms in the area that gradually went over to subdivisions.

What are some of the experiences that stick in your mind and watching as the city grew?

Oh, the people are changing. Like I said, the young families just aren't here. This whole area – well, our subdivision I'm thinking of, and probably over in Brookhaven, too. They were all young families with kids and there was so much going on. I don't see that in my neighborhood anymore. On a summer evening I'll go sit out in front and I don't see kids riding their bicycles up and down and playing, who belong in the houses up and down the street.

Well, the house to the west of me has changed hands three times in the last five years. And I keep looking for some kids to move in, but they don't. I keep asking, "Do you have any kids I can play with?" I want to play ball in the front yard, but they aren't there anymore.

You were mentioning before that the library has always been an important part of your life.

It has.

And you work at the library here, now.

Right.

And when we passed the referendum and had the book bus, I think my son was three or four years old at the time. I was a volunteer on the book bus and had a good time in the bus. We parked – I don't remember if it was in Brookhaven? Well, anyway, I was a volunteer on the book bus.

Then we moved into a storefront over in Brookhaven.

I remember the storefront there.

And when we moved from the storefront in Brookhaven, anyone who had a station wagon and boxes – we didn't have SUV's in those days; everyone had a station wagon. Anyone who had a station wagon and boxes were welcome to come over and help move the library. And we did – from one storefront to the one over here in Willowbrook.

On 75th and Clarendon Hills Road.

Right. And we set it up and it was still run by volunteers. Then, eventually, they got a staff of professional librarians. But always the volunteers. We worked the circulation desk, answered the phones, shelved the books, talked to the patrons.

Then when we got into this big building the volunteers were not used as much. They had a paid staff. They have a few volunteers in the library, but they aren't used as extensively as we were before.

So you've seen a lot of changes over the years. And you've seen all the kids. The homeowners seem to be a little older now and there just doesn't seem to be as many kids out and about.

The young couples aren't having kids like we used to.

Are there any other things you miss that you used to have?

I can't think of anything.

But you really miss the kids.

I miss the kids and that type of thing.

Did your kids move into this area when they grew?

No. My son and his family live in Yorkville. And my daughter and her family live in Plainfield.

My daughter married a young man from Hinsdale South. They met in high school and got married after college graduation. And they live in Plainfield.

And your son lives in Yorkville.

Yes. And when my daughter was over at her dad's and my granddaughter wanted to go to a playground. So she went to one and said it was boring and she wanted to go somewhere else. So I told her I would take her over to the playground at the school where her mommy went. So I took her over to Mark DeLay. I said it was a little different from when her mom went there, but it was where she went.

What I do really appreciate a lot about Darien is that they do care for their taxpayers. If you have a problem and you need a police answer, you get a response quickly. And I do appreciate – being a person who lives in a house by herself; it's just me and the two cats and they don't do a thing! But I feel secure. I feel secure living there. I know we have patrols. And every time I complain about the speeders down 71st Street – I say I live on the 71st Street speedway, you know what I mean – I'll see a patrol car parked there every once in a while. And if I know who's speeding I'll call and they'll go to the house and warn them. I feel secure about that.

I would like to see something happen at 75th and Cass to get that corner fixed – cleaned up. They started, but I don't know what happened. Are we getting too big?

Well, the way the city expanded we were kind of locked in by the other communities. And we never really got a downtown. And that's what they're trying to do with that corner – create a downtown. But there's still discussion about what types of businesses should be there.

I feel very secure, and I like living in Darien. I've seen a lot of changes. I've seen it grow. I have no intentions of leaving.

This is home.

This is home! This is it.

What changes have you seen that you're grateful for?

The library, the schools. I love the library. The schools. My son wants to move back over here. He says whenever I'm ready to sell the house, he wants it so he can raise his family in our schools and our community.

There are a lot of advantages. You do have hospitals. If you're sick and you need an emergency room, you can go. It's close.

There are two big hospitals close.

Yes. And if you need an ambulance, you've got it. And the fire department. I feel very confident.

And when I get my tax bill, I don't feel bad about paying that much. I do have tax bills from previous generations and I think: Oh, my goodness! Have they gone up! But you get what you pay for.

Because prices have gone up so much.

I wish I could find that brochure. Because our house was so inexpensive. But at the time it didn't seem inexpensive.

And I have seen my neighbors improve. We see that in the community – people improve their homes. They are upgrading. And I have seen very good maintenance of

homes. There are a few that you would like to offer some help, but mostly everyone is proud of their community and proud of living here.

Is there anything we haven't talked about that you want to add before we finish?

If I haven't thought of it yet, I'll think of it and I have your phone number!

In that case, thank you!